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Tragic Vision and Secular Reconciliation with the Divine in Safiye Erol's *Ülker Fırtınası* (Storm of the Pleiades)

Safiye Erol'un *Ülker Fırtınası*'nda Trajik Tasavvur ve İlahi Olanla Seküler Uzlaşma

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the experience of modernity and the tragic vision in Safiye Erol's novel *Ülker Fırtınası* (Storm of the Pleiades), published in 1944, with particular attention to the protagonist Nuran's existential crisis. It argues that the novel articulates a distinctly 1930s Istanbul-based experience of modernity through a tragic vision. By tragic vision, the article conceptualizes the tragic as an analytical category within the context of the Turkish novel, drawing on both Western and non-Western theoretical frameworks. It explores how Nuran's narrative is structured as an inevitable tragic condition of life through the Christian myth of Judas's betrayal of Jesus. It further analyzes how Nuran's existential crisis culminates in a form of spiritual integration with Republican cultural modernization, presenting the novel's tragic vision as both a worldview and an inescapable outcome of Turkish modernity.

Keywords

Tragic vision, Turkish modernity, Turkish novel, Safiye Erol, mysticism

Öz

Bu makale, Safiye Erol'un 1944 yılında yayımlanan *Ülker Fırtınası* adlı romanında modernlik deneyimi ile trajik tasavvur arasındaki ilişkiyi, bilhassa ana karakter Nuran'ın varoluşsal krizi üzerinden incelemektedir. Makale, romanın 1930'ların İstanbul'unda yaşanan modernlik deneyimini belirgin biçimde trajik bir tasavvur aracılığıyla dile getirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Trajik tasavvur kavramıyla makale, trajik olanı Türk romanı bağlamında analitik bir kategori olarak kavramsallaştırmakta ve bunu hem Batılı hem de Batı dışı kuramsal çerçevelerden yararlanarak gerçekleştirmektedir. Makale Nuran'ın hikâyesinin İsa'nın Yahuda tarafından ihanete uğramasına ilişkin Hristiyan miti aracılığıyla hayatın kaçınılmaz bir trajik koşulu olarak nasıl yapılandırıldığını incelemektedir. Ayrıca, Nuran'ın varoluşsal krizinin Cumhuriyet dönemi kültürel modernleşmesiyle bir tür manevi bütünleşme olarak nasıl sonuçlandığını analiz etmekte, romanın söylemindeki trajik tasavvuru hem bir dünya görüşü hem de Türk modernitesinin kaçınılmaz bir sonucu olarak ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Trajik tasavvur, Türk modernitesi, Türk romanı, Safiye Erol, mistisizm

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Introduction

Safiye Erol (1902–1964) can be considered a neglected author of modern Turkish literature, as her collected works were published only in the early 2000s.[1] Since then, Erol's literary works have attracted modest but growing attention from literary critics and readers.[2] Yet this attention arguably overlooks the novel's narrative features and particularly its radical discourse on modern Turkish women in that period, which challenges many recent opinions on early Republican literature. However, she is still often considered a "conservative" author, especially in the context of Turkey's culture wars since the 2000s. Yet it is hard to define Erol and her literary style as conservative because her work forms a complex body that requires closer examination. With this aim, this article scrutinizes Erol's second novel *Ülker Fırtınası* (*Storm of the Pleiades*), focusing on the relationship between the representation of the modernity experience and the tragic vision employed in the novel. By tragic vision, I conceptualize the tragic as an analytical category, drawing on both Western and non-Western theoretical frameworks. The article then explores how Nuran's narrative is structured as an inevitable yet foreseeable tragic vision that emerges as both a worldview and an outcome of Turkish modernity.

Storm of the Pleiades, first serialized in 1938 and published as a book in 1944, was reprinted in 2001.[3] It consists of two narrative frames. The interval between the frames is a couple of years, which is not clearly indicated in the novel. The first frame is the main story that tells of a young woman's quest for self and meaning in 1930s Istanbul in the third person, written by a fictional author whose identity remains unidentified. The novel centers on the protagonist Nuran's stormy love affair with Sermet, a bohemian Turkish oud player in Istanbul and on the existential complexity it generates. Within this complexity, the narrative raises questions about human existence and ethics, particularly the relationship between sexuality, national identity, and Republican femininity in an unconventional way. The second frame, which is the novel's meta-narrative, consists of Nuran's commentaries before and after she reads her own story written by the unnamed author.

The main narrative recounts the story of the young, well-educated Nuran who moves back to Istanbul after seven years spent in Vienna, where she studied classical music. The story spans three years: it starts with Nuran's arrival in Istanbul in 1933 and covers her love affair and struggle to find meaning in life, culminating in 1936, when she comes to terms with the values of Republican

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1 Erol's works were all published by *Kubbealtı Neşriyatı* since 2000.

2 See Murat Belge, "Safiye Erol'u Tanır Mısınız?" in *Sanat ve Edebiyat Yazıları* (İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 228–31; Murat Belge, "Türkiye'de Kanon" in *Sanat ve Edebiyat*, 81–93. A prominent Turkish novelist Selim İleri also paid attention to Erol's works in his articles. See Selim İleri, "Bir Roman Kapağı," *Cumhuriyet* (6 February 2001); "Defterimde Safiye Erol," *Zaman* (27 February 2010); "Sükût Suikastına Uğrayan Bir Yazar Safiye Erol," *Türk Edebiyatı* 495 (January 2015): 66–68; and *Edebiyatımızda Sevdiğim Romanlar Kılavuzu*, (Everest Yayınları, 2015), 277–79; 318–20.

3 Safiye Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası* (Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2001). All translations into English are mine.

modernity, its secular ethics[4], and attains a sense of inner harmony. The main storyline focuses on Nuran's affair with Sermet and her existential crisis, which generates the tragic vision of the novel. Before her crisis, Nuran pursues self-realization and something transcendental in her life, though she does not know what it is yet. The depiction of Nuran's existential crisis lies between several binary oppositions, such as East–West, Ottoman Classical music–Western Classical music, Western–oriented Turkish woman–Eastern Turkish man, pure love–sex, and fate–agency. These oppositions constitute the primary themes and texture of the narrative.

This article examines how Nuran's existential crisis is represented in 1930s Istanbul, focusing on the interplay between her modernity experience and the tragic vision constructed in the novel through close reading. First, it explores how Nuran's story is narrated as an inevitable condition of life through the Christian myth of Judas's betrayal of Jesus. Second, it examines how Nuran's obsessive love intensifies her inner conflict and her yearning for something transcendental, connecting it to her experience of Turkish modernity.[5] I define Turkish modernity here as a subjective perception of modernization, Westernization, nationalization, and secularization as a whole. More importantly, the article focuses on the representation of the modernity experience rather than treating it as a sociological concept. By modernity experience, I refer to the protagonist's encounter with various contradictions of the dramatic sociocultural transformation in Turkey, particularly in the setting of 1930s Istanbul. In other words, the modernity experience denotes the singularity of this representation in fiction rather than the experience itself in reality. Finally, it investigates how Nuran copes with her existential struggle and how her suffering leads to a form of spiritual integration with Turkey's cultural modernization.

I argue that the narration of Nuran's crisis frames a tragic vision as both a worldview and an inevitability in the novel, linking it to key implications of Turkish modernity. Therefore, I propose to trace the dynamic relationship between the tragic vision and the representation of the modernity experience, showing how this interplay shapes the novel's content, form, and narrative mode. By exploring the construction of the tragic and its essential elements in the novel, I aim to offer insights into the literary, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of Turkish modernity illustrated in the novel. In addition, by scrutinizing the crisis of the Western-oriented, urban female protagonist, I seek to contribute to discussions on why protagonists in many Turkish novels fail to actualize their ideals or desires, which is often loosely and sometimes reductively analyzed in relation to the *Bildungsroman* in Turkish literary scholarship.[6]

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4 Here, "secular ethics" refers to the non-religious set of values and norms established by the discourses and reforms of the Republican modernization project in Turkey beginning in the 1920s and 1930s.

5 I use "Turkish modernity" and "Republican modernity" interchangeably, referring to the modernity process in Turkey beginning in 1923.

6 For some sophisticated examples, see Jale Parla, *Türk Romanında Yazar ve Başkalaşım* (İletişim Yayınları, 2011); Meltem Gürle, "Hermits, Stoics, and Hysterics: Turkish Democracy and the Female Bildungsroman," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 90–107.

With this aim, I examine the representation of individual modernity experience as crisis in the novel, particularly how the crisis is configured as a tragic vision.[7] The analysis explores the tragic vision specific to Turkish modernity and its conditions. The point of reference lies in the established principles of tragedy derived from Western literature and thus draws on theories of the tragic theories of the tragic. However, it does not simply trace the same principles and impose a fixed theory.

Framing the Tragic Vision

Tragedy has been genealogically related to drama as a genre since Aristotle's *Poetics*, including its changing meaning and features in Western literature.[8] However, many literary scholars emphasize that "[t]he word tragedy never possessed any particular precision."[9] In other words, it is used arbitrarily to refer to a character's ethical dilemma, a literary genre, a vision and sense of life, or even a philosophical condition. Yet one can argue, like George Steiner, that "tragedy as a form of drama is not universal" as it derives from Western culture and philosophy.[10] Steiner also posits the invalidity and even the death of tragedy as an idea and a narrative form in the twentieth-century Western literary tradition.[11] A more radical claim argues that there is "no tragic experience" except "theatrical experience."[12] On the other hand, mid-twentieth century writers like Albert Camus and Arthur Miller attempted to establish modern tragedy through plays and essays.[13] According to Max Scheler, the tragic implies "a property which we observe in events, fortunes,

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7 I use the terms "tragic vision," "the tragic," "the idea of the tragic," and "the tragic idea" interchangeably.

8 Aristotle sets the principles of tragedy, defining Greek tragedy. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Kenneth A. Telford (Henry Regnery, 1970). For the changing meanings of tragedy, see Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (Methuen, 1969), 22–23; Andrew Bennett and Nicolas Royle, "The Tragic," in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory*, 5th ed. (Routledge, 2016), 124–25; and Franco Moretti, "The Great Eclipse: The Tragic Form as the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in *Signs Taken*, *for Wonders: Essays In the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fisher, David Forgacs, and David Miller (Verso, 1997), 42–82.

9 Richard H. Palmer, *Tragedy and The Tragic: An Analytical Guide* (Greenwood Press, 1992), 5. See also Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), xiv–xv.

10 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 3.

11 Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 193–95; 284–92. See also Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Tragic Fallacy" in *The Modern Temper* (Harcourt, Brace, 1929), 79–97; Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 369.

12 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. Erik Butler (Routledge, 2016), 3.

13 For Camus's and Miller's essays, see Julian Young, *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 235–53.

characters, and the like and which actually exists in them."[14] Several prominent studies further assert the validity of the tragic or the return of tragedy and its link with modernity.[15]

Despite their stimulating and challenging insights, much of the existing scholarship on the interplay of the tragic and modernity focuses primarily on the Western context. However, the tragic as a condition or sense is a widely shared phenomenon. Indeed, it can arise in different ways and from various contexts. In line with this view, William Storm argues that this "condition itself is timeless and constant."[16] Yet neither tragedy nor the tragic is simply universal or completely the same across cultures and literary traditions. As Peter Szondi underlines, there is a difference between the "poetics of tragedy" as a literary form and the "philosophy of the tragic" within Western culture.[17] Moreover, the idea of the tragic may be formed around different bases, temporalities, and conceptions of individuality and community. As Rowan Williams puts it succinctly, "what most writers, audiences, and critics mean by tragedy is indeed a phenomenon with a particular local history."[18] The tragic vision in a non-Western context may have different grounds as it negotiates with philosophy, history, religion, and local literary traditions, even while substantially engaging with its Western legacy.

This difference does not contradict the validity of the tragic; rather, it implies diverse worldviews and conceptions of life that shape specific tragic visions, depending on sociocultural, religious, ethical, literary, and even ideological factors.[19] Thus, the tragic and its mode of representation can vary, especially in non-Western modernities and different literary traditions.

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14 Max Scheler, "On the Tragic," in *Tragedy Vision and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan, trans. Bernard Stambler (Harper & Row, 1981), 17.

15 See Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Chatto & Windus, 1966); Michel Maffesoli, "The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Society [with Commentary]," trans. Rita Felski, Allan Megill, and Marilyn Gaddis Rose, *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 133–59; Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard, eds., *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Miriam Leonard, *Tragic Modernities* (Harvard University Press, 2015); Terry Eagleton, *Tragedy* (Yale University Press, 2020).

16 William Storm, *After Dionysus: A Theory of the Tragic* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 33. Susan Sontag points out that "tragedy is simply much rarer than has been supposed" in Western literature. See also Susan Sontag, "The Death of Tragedy," in *Against Interpretation* (Vintage, 2001), 133.

17 Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, trans. Paul Fleming (Stanford University Press, 2002), 1. See also John D. Barbour, *Tragedy as a Critique of Virtue: The Novel and Ethical Reflection* (Scholars Press, 1984), 19; Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Tragic Idea* (Gerald Duckworth, 2006), 8; Joshua Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 1–8. For a critique of Szondi's approach, see Simon Critchley, "The Tragical Sublime," in *The Sublime and Its Teleology*, ed. Donald Loose (Brill, 2011), 174.

18 Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 138. For this particularity, see also Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Blackwell, 2003), xvi; Ato Quayson, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 43.

19 For studies on tragedy in non-Western contexts, see Kinya Nishi, *Fate, Nature, and Literary Form: The Politics of the Tragic in Japanese Literature* (Academic Studies, 2020).

The idea of the tragic can therefore gain a particular meaning and different features within a specific culture and literature. This specificity does not overlook the constant reference to the Western notions of the tragic. The tragic vision may appear in various forms and genres, shaped by cultural exchanges between Western and non-Western conceptions of the tragic and by the formal flexibility of the novel as a genre.[20]

Although interrelated, I define the tragic as an unavoidable condition that a character confronts, whether a conflict of values, a failure, or a foreseeable yet inevitable situation defined by specific sociocultural, historical, or external conditions. In other words, it frames "a dialectical mode of experience" derived from the combination of inevitability, contrast, paradox, crisis, and suffering.[21] The article relies on this definition. *Tragedy*, on the other hand, signifies the manifestation of this condition in drama, particularly within Western literature.[22] This article thus uses "tragedy" only to allude to tragic vision.

This distinction bears on the second point: how the tragic vision functions in the Turkish novel, specifically in the novel analyzed here. The concept of the tragic, I argue, can serve as a model for comprehending foreseeable but inevitable crises and/or failures narrated in Turkish novels, rather than a universal phenomenon. I also argue that the close link between representations of the modernity experience and the tragic vision in the Turkish context shows a remarkable contrast with that link in Western culture. When Steiner enunciates the death of tragedy, his claim rests on "the triumph of rationalism and secular metaphysics which marks the point of no return" tied to the rise of the middle class and its emphasis on individual autonomy in Europe, expressed primarily through the novel rather than drama.[23] By contrast, the transformations in Turkey provoked different kinds of individual and collective conflicts, ambiguities, and unresolved paradoxes, which involved the effects and processes of Westernization, modernization, secularization, and later, nationalization of culture—Turkish modernity. One could even speak of a permanent conflict of values at both individual and collective levels. The Turkish novel gives

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20 For tragedy in nineteenth-century novels, see Sidney Zink, "The Novel as a Medium of Modern Tragedy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17, no. 2 (December 1958), 171; Richard B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* (Yale University Press, 1980), 3; Dorothea Krook, *Elements of Tragedy* (Yale University Press, 1969), 177; John Snyder, *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre* (University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 83–84; Jeannette King, *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1–16; Leech, *Tragedy*, 31; Manya Lempert, *Tragedy and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); The medium can be photography and film. See Jennifer Wallace, *Tragedy Since 9/11: Reading World Out of Joint* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 15.

21 Simon Critchley, *Tragedy, The Greeks, and Us* (Profile Books, 2020), 28. Szondi also defines the tragic identically. See Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 55.

22 Greek tragedy is highly specific and reflects a particular understanding of the Greek world. See Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Zone Books, 1990), 29–48.

23 Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 193.

voice to these conflicts of values rather than as functioning an assertion of an autonomous individuality in the sense Steiner attributes to the European novel.[24]

At this juncture, it is worth briefly discussing the notion of the tragic in Turkish literary culture. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar asserts that the lack of tragedy in Turkish literature until the nineteenth century is due to Islam's worldview, which prevents humans from encountering their own fate.[25] Tanpınar's overly-generalized line of thought approvingly invokes Louis Massignon's article, *Les Méthodes de réalisation artistique des peuples de l'Islam* (1921). This article argues for the lack of tragic vision in the Islamic arts. In this controversially essentialist thought, as there is no other entity except God (*Allah*) in Islam, life is reduced to a shadow play, preventing humans from confronting or enduring their destinies.[26] Similarly, Niyazi Akı emphasizes the impact of Islam on Muslim artists and their visions by explaining that they think abstractly, and their imaginations are based on fantasy, while transcending the sacred principles of the Islamic worldview that relies on the life of the ethereal world.[27]

Şerif Mardin also argues that there is no tragedy in Turkish culture in a real sense due to the lack of the idea of the daemon; the "daemon" does not exist as a creative figure because it only refers to the devil in Islamic and Ottoman culture, except in Sufism.[28] *Storm of the Pleaides* seems to create or at least attempts to present such a daemon through Sermet, metaphorically constructing him as Judas and evil. Beşir Ayvazoğlu also states that the tragic idea did not even exist in old Ottoman-Turkish literature as it did in Western culture; Muslim artists self-consciously escaped from this idea and ignored the materiality of the world and the conflict against the divine power. For them, pure love is always spiritual and a way of reaching God so for those who are not in fear

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24 For some studies about the tragic in modern Turkish literary prose, see Tolga Bayındır, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'ın Eserlerinde Ölüm-Hayat Çatışması ve 'Trajik' Olan," *Turkish Studies* 8, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 335–42; Vedi Aşkaroğlu, *Trajik ve Modern: Triolojik Bir Çözümleme; Oğuz Atay–Joseph Conrad–Yusuf Atılgan* (Kültür Ajans, 2016); Asiye Çığrı Yıldırım, *Servet-i Fünûn Romanında Trajik Durum* (Pegem Akademi, 2018); Yasin Sofuoğlu, "Tragic Thought in Oğuz Atay's Tehlikeli Oyunlar: Identity, Culture, and History," (MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2019); Günil Özlem Ayaydın Cebe, "Trajik ve Alegorik Açıdan 'Diyet'te Ulus İnşası" in *Sonsuza Uzanan Ses: Ömer Seyfettin*, ed. Hülya Argunşah, Abdullah Şengül, and Murat Gür (Dergâh Yayınları, 2020), 425–43; Alphan Akgül, *Kim Egemen Olabilir Yazgısına: Türk Romanında Trajedi ve Özgür İrade* (Çolpan Kitap, 2021).

25 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *19 uncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*. 4th ed. (Çağlayan Kitabevi, 1976), 25.

26 Tanpınar, *19 uncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, 24–25. For Massignon's article in Turkish, see Louis Massignon, "İslam Sanatlarının Felsefesi," in *Din ve Sanat*, trans. and ed. Burhan Toprak (Sühulet Kitabevi, 1937), 11–41.

27 Niyazi Akı, *Türk Tiyatro Tarihi I: Başlangıçtan Cumhuriyet Devrine Kadar* (Dergâh Yayınları, 1989), 17.

28 Şerif Mardin, "'Aydınlar' Konusunda Ülgener ve Bir İzah Denemesi," *Toplum ve Bilim* 24 (1984): 9–16. See also Hasan Bülent Kahraman, "Siyasal Romanın Ölümü," *Radikal 2* (19 August 2000), 23; Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kötü Çocuk Türk* (Metis Yayınları, 2016), 66–88.

of death, there is no point to challenge their fate or any power beyond their limited agency.[29] Contrarily, Annemarie Schimmel's study argues for the presence of the daemonic, proving the tragic dimension in Sufism and Islamic literature with illustrative examples.[30] I argue that *Storm of the Pleaides* contradicts these views that claim the absence of tragic vision in Turkish literary culture.

While crucial sociopolitical and cultural changes through Turkish modernity created contradictions, dualities, ambiguities, and conflicts, the newly emerging secular and rationalist mindset raised an essential question about individual agency. This question concerns the perceived tension between the freedom of the subject derived from Western rationalism and the Islamic understanding of fate that limits human agency sharply. This tension reflects two distinct discourses rather than absolute realities.[31] In this context, I identify five main elements that define the tragic vision, which I conceptualize as central to analyzing the novel.

The first element is the protagonist's inner conflict, which produces an existential and/or ethical crisis. This crisis lies in a conflict of values that "represents what goes beyond but does not and cannot transcend."[32] The character's action is significant here, embodying her flaws and a crucial choice. The second element is the protagonist's ideal, desire, or weakness that emerges as flawed action. This flaw entails a combination of guilt and victimhood. While the protagonist's action may make her responsible in one sense, uncontrollable forces make the protagonist a victim of contingency, coincidence, ideology, and external conditions—her fate. This combination regards the complex link between intention, blindness, and insight.[33] The unintentional result may occur due to her action and agency. Thus, the protagonist's responsibility indicates the agency of the subject, while the limits of agency imply the mixture of fate and external aspects. I argue that the question of agency in the novel resembles Hegel's conception of the tragic, implying not doing "what is wrong, but rather what is right."[34] The third element is inevitable necessity, attributed to fate, contingency, disaster, or an external factor beyond the character's agency.[35] The feature conveys "a sense of what is foreseeable but unavoidable."[36] When the idea of necessity enters the

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29 Beşir Ayvazoğlu, *Aşk Estetiği: İslam Sanatlarının Estetiği Üzerine Bir Deneme* (Ötüken Neşriyat, 1993), 146–47. See also A. Turan Oflazoğlu, *Mutlak Avcıları* (Türk Dil Kurumu: 2001), 142, 203.

30 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 187–99.

31 For a discussion on predestination and free will in Islamic theology, see Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 35–36.

32 Lambropoulos, *Tragic Idea*, 10.

33 For intention and its link with guilt, see Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy*, 64.

34 Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 125.

35 For discussion on the necessity, see D. D. Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy* (Indiana University Press, 1960), 25. See also Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. and trans. Douglas W. Stott (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 249–56.

36 Bennett and Royle, "Tragic," 123.

narrative, the protagonist's crisis begins, leading to self-confrontation at the threshold of a choice. The plot structure dictates the moral and existential dimensions of the tragic vision, depicting how the protagonist struggles with an existential crisis and reacts to certain conditions.

Within the crisis, the protagonist's comprehension of flawed action and/or failure involves alienation, sorrow, disillusionment, endurance, and suffering. This aspect forms the fourth element. That is, "the moments of assertion and recognition" gain importance as epiphanies in the plot.[37] The crucial moment determines the subsequent events of self-confrontation, suffering, and the protagonist's final decision or unjust fall. The last element is the process of suffering itself, which "show[s] progression toward value, rather than denial of it, and a relationship between the inner life of the sufferer and the world of values."[38] The protagonist's crisis may culminate in self-knowledge or self-transformation, depending on the circumstances. However, neither self-knowledge nor a happy ending is guaranteed despite self-recognition, endurance, and gained insight. The crucial point is that all this can be in vain despite the "guiltless guilt" and the prolonging agony of its elusiveness.[39] Considering these five elements and the novel's narrative features, my analysis focuses on the "formal elements," "situation," and "ethical direction" that construct the tragic vision, including the "emotional effect" employed in the novel.[40]

The Biblical Construction of Inevitability, Betrayal, and Evil

The equation of Sermet with Judas as evil and his betrayals as inevitable constitute the first dimension of the tragic vision in *Storm of the Pleaides*. At the very beginning of the frame story, Nuran explains that she saw Judas, referring to Sermet, her lover.[41] Thus, Nuran utilizes the story of Judas and his betrayal of Jesus as a metaphorical equivalence to her relationship with Sermet and his betrayals to emphasize inevitable betrayal and suffering in her life, marked by fateful incidents that transcend her agency. As the narrator of the frame narrative, Nuran uses the myth of Judas to depict her existential struggle and profound suffering. The use of Judas's betrayal of Jesus is a salient leitmotif in the novel and underpins Nuran's modernity experience in 1930s Istanbul, including her deception, suffering, and path to spiritual salvation. Repeated descriptions of Sermet as Judas suggest that Nuran may be read as a symbolic counterpart to Jesus in terms of their relationship and loyalty. This biblical myth is repeatedly used throughout the fiction not only as a constitutive motif of the story but also as a tool for constructing the tragic vision.

In the frame story, Nuran describes Sermet as a brown-skinned, handsome man with black eyes and long curly hair like Judas. In the gospels of the New Testament, Judas betrays Jesus for

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37 M. S. Silk, "Tragic Language: The Greek Tragedians and Shakespeare" in *Tragedy and the Tragic Greek: Theatre and Beyond*, ed. M. S. Silk (Clarendon Press, 1996), 488.

38 Sewall, *Vision of Tragedy*, 47–48.

39 Critchley, "Tragical Sublime," 176, 178.

40 Oscar Mandel, *A Definition of Tragedy* (New York University Press, 1961), 10–11.

41 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 17.

money, even though Jesus had told Judas beforehand that he would do it.[42] However, Nuran's interpretation of Judas's betrayal in the novel is different. She claims that Judas had been loyal until the moment Jesus told him that he would betray him before sunrise. This intimation affects Judas, and soon, Judas goes to the town as if he had been given "a hidden order" and betrays Jesus.[43] In this interpretation in the novel, two aspects need explanation: Judas's agency as Sermet's responsibility for Nuran's suffering and his betrayal as an inevitable necessity in the story. These two aspects bear upon the tension between predestination and free will attributed to Nuran in the secular context of Turkey. This tension adds to the tragic vision that the novel offers. *Storm of the Pleiades* thus raises a question about the complex relation between fate, contingency, free will, and agency from the very beginning, relying on a mythic narrative of Christianity. In other words, the novel uses Christian imagery to describe this complex relation, the notion of inevitability, and suffering in Nuran's story.

By involving these essential components of the tragic, Nuran compares her life with Judas's story of betrayal and recounts the time she was a guest at the house of Sermet and his wife, Müzeyyen. In the development of the main story, Sermet convinces Nuran that he does not love his wife. However, later, Nuran witnesses Sermet and his wife having intercourse. As a result, Nuran feels not only betrayed but also anxious, disillusioned, sorrowful, and agonized. In the frame story, she describes her situation in the guest room as akin to Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion "When I lay on my back on the bed, I felt as if I were crucified on a cross."[44] While the powerful imagery of crucifixion reinforces the themes of suffering, endurance, and guiltless redemption, Nuran's prior expression of what happened at the outset demystifies the main story and plot told by the unnamed fictional author.

The key point here is Nuran's encounter with emotional and later spiritual suffering that springs from human relations and the nature of life itself. The novel narrates the source and purpose of her suffering by using Nuran's own words: "I did not know that some humans are also children of darkness, living forever with their faces toward it; suffering emanates from their very existence, and at the same time they attract suffering to themselves like a magnet. Encountering this affliction of nature drove me to despair."[45] The last sentence is crucial as it proves that Nuran's crisis is not just derived from Sermet's betrayal. What is significant is that her way of being in the world itself generates a sense of failure and suffering, according to Nuran, and she feels that she is obliged to endure what comes after and her suffering as an inevitable condition.

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42 For Judas's image in the New Testament, see Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (Free Press, 1992), 22–25, 79. For the interpretations of Judas's story, see Ulrich Simon, *Pity and Terror: Christianity and Tragedy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 42–50; Ben Quash, "Four Biblical Characters: In Search of a Tragedy," in *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory*, ed. Kevin Taylor and Gilles Waller (Routledge, 2011), 25–27, 31–33.

43 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 18.

44 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 19.

45 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 20.

This condition is the second dimension of the tragic vision in the novel, for it refers to the tragic sense of life while Nuran's quest for meaning and self-realization is narrated in relation to her modernity experience in Istanbul. At the outset, the novel portrays Nuran as a willing, energetic, Western-oriented young woman whose primary life goal is still indefinite. I argue that the novel explores the relationship between being and suffering through Nuran's crisis, reflecting the experience of a young urban modern woman in 1930s Istanbul and her struggle for inner harmony. This configuration also includes the question of how she should live in post-imperial Istanbul associated with the ongoing secular nationalist modernization project. The ontological pursuit in Nuran's story is related to the politics and ethics of Republican modernity as she seeks the right way of living and values that correspond to her idealism. Certain moral and behavioral values require an epistemological positioning: Nuran's Western-oriented education and understanding determine her secular worldview and its ethics.

In considering Nuran's retrospective self-reflection in the frame story, the reader recognizes that Nuran's vision of life has changed due to some events in the last few years, particularly her love affair. Two conflicts construct the tragic vision in the fiction: one between Nuran's idealism and reality and another arising from the story of her return to Istanbul, where the imperial culture is being replaced with European culture. While the former is the contrast between her yearning for serene happiness and the harsh actuality of daily life, the latter implies the conflict of values, cultures, and worldviews Nuran has faced. This double conflict leads to her existential crisis and suffering, constructing a strong link between her idealism, her sense of failure, and the idea of inevitability.

Hasret (Longing) as Mystical Yearning Through Love

Nuran's crisis, I argue, is not solely derived from her affair with Sermet. Her failed love triggers her existential crisis, leading her to question her quest for meaning and transcendence. Several aspects of Nuran's life determine her sense of yearning for harmonic, profound happiness, *saâdet* in Turkish. For instance, Nuran's mother dies in her childhood, and her father lives in seclusion after her loss. She grows up at her aunt's house together with her two cousins in Istanbul and later lives alone in Vienna for seven years. Nuran's loneliness and lack of family shape her emotions and personality. There is a certain sense of uprootedness and yearning for something unknown that might fulfill this desire.

Nuran's situation therefore pertains to the sense of *hasret,* meaning "longing" in English, referring to an aspiration for something that either is lost or remains separate.[46] In the novel, it signifies a longing for something transcendental. Nuran's yearning recurs throughout the fiction, but neither she nor the narrator clarifies this strong feeling. The reader cannot fully comprehend whether her *hasret* is for an object, an ideal, or the sense itself. The word appears in varying contexts, such as "a happiness I have long yearned for," "those feelings had already become a

46 See İlhan Ayverdi, *Kubbealtı Lügatı: Misalli Büyük Sözlük* (Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2005), 1215.

happiness that would be longed for throughout the rest of one's life and "this mad longing."[47] Arguably, this strong desire arises from the combination of her loneliness, orphanhood, homesickness, and atavistic impulses. It thus seems to be future-oriented, reflecting her quest for self-fulfillment despite these conditions.

Nuran's affair with Sermet and its sorrowful process catalyze her longing for deeper meaning and even something more sublime than her pure love. The sorrow, pain, and defeat caused by Sermet's betrayals lead Nuran to meditate on the sources of unjust human affliction and its nature in life. Apart from her grief, Nuran senses a loss she cannot name; she is also culturally torn after her return to Istanbul. Her sense of double incompleteness gradually grows, highlighting a quest for something that can fill this void. By recognizing this condition, Nuran goes through a process of self-questioning and suffering. She cuts all her ties with daily life and even music, living in stoic seclusion. Her reclusiveness resembles her father's way of living on the outskirts of Istanbul.

At this point, the narrator focalizes Nuran's cousin Selçuk who observes that her sorrow and suffering stem not only from her failed affair with Sermet but also from an inherent atavism in her grief and wistfulness.[48] This atavism Selçuk mentions indicates "the Eastern side of Nuran."[49] Through Selçuk's explanation, the novel's discourse links this condition to cultural heredity, which is considered inherent and only triggered by Nuran's love affair. Despite her Western-oriented lifestyle and education and years spent in Vienna, Nuran recognizes that she carries her father's blood and the pre-Republican Turkish culture within her soul.

It is significant here to mention the party scene at the beginning of the novel. In this scene, for the first time in many years, Nuran listens to classical Ottoman-Turkish music live. Although she complains about its monotonous sound, she is strangely entranced by it. When Nuran sets eyes on Sermet, a renowned oud player, he is giving an impressive performance, and the beauty of this music generates a strong feeling that Nuran cannot clearly define: a sense of melancholy and sorrow rising within her. She recognizes that: "I felt something strange– like sorrow, like a premonition. So I am not entirely Westerner in spirit after all. Whatever the case, I carry this music in my blood. Atavism!"[50] This moment becomes Nuran's first epiphany in the novel, and her recognition indicates a significant feature of her fate shaped by cultural atavism and its contingent nature. The *alaturka* music at the party awakens indefinable emotions and a spiritual dimension in Nuran.

Nuran has encountered tensions not only between European and Turkish values but also between the old Ottoman imperial culture and the newly emergent Western-oriented values of Turkey, since her return to Istanbul. Therefore, this multi-layered tension and its cultural implications shape Nuran's way of experiencing Turkish modernity as a young composer and piano

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47 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 45, 74, 83. See also page 177.
48 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 89.
49 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 90.
50 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası,* 33.

player who seeks a spiritual place and adopts secular ethics in Turkey. In this sense, Nuran's existential crisis is depicted as an inevitable outcome of her modernity experience, combining this experience with her failed love affair, disillusionment, *hasret,* quest for meaning, and cultural heredity.

This relationality highlights the confluence of predestination and free will and thus poses a question about the link between Nuran's agency, her existential struggle, the matter of coincidence, and ill fortune. Nuran's conflict of cultural values and the pain of love amalgamate in her life. This amalgamation constructs the tragic vision in the novel's discourse, for both crisis states of Nuran are depicted as inevitable and even necessary phases in her life. There exists a complicated interplay between Nuran's sense of incompleteness, that of failure due to her affair with Sermet, and her yearning for something supreme beyond her love. This link points to causation and its relation to the tragic vision. The concept of *kara baht*, literally meaning "black fortune," comes into play here, denoting ill fortune that exceeds human agency, and is frequently referenced in the novel. Nuran goes through a process of suffering and endurance by accepting its unavoidability while searching for meaning in the earthly world.

Narrative Logic and Construction of the Tragic Vision

In this respect, I examine here how Nuran's experiences, prophetic dreams, and reflections construct the tragic vision in *Storm of the Pleiades*, revealing the interplay of fate, agency, and moral consciousness in her existential crisis. After a while, Nuran invites Sermet to her mansion, and this meeting reveals another link with the idea of fate in the novel. Nuran expresses that she knew, from the beginning, that Sermet would leave her. Nuran's expression may seem to reflect her retrospective view told in the main story by the narrator. However, at this phase, the narrative adds another layer to her existential crisis, for Nuran explains that an unknown but fated necessity predetermined Sermet's actions, which can be phrased as either *kara baht* or the elusiveness of life. She says that: "Life, fortune—call it what you will—some inexorable necessity had decided it so, and I knew it."[51] The idea of necessity as divine fate and Nuran's limited agency are underlined in the story.

Accordingly, the novel highlights the inevitability of Sermet's actions through Nuran's voice in the main story. As Kinya Nishi asserts, "every cultural tradition has its own conception of human fate."[52] In the Turkish context, Nuran accepts these actions—Sermet's lies and betrayals from her perspective—as the mixture of her fate and the consequences of her choices. There is indeed an apparent determinism in Nuran's view, and she clarifies that the reason for her deterministic thoughts arises from her prophetic dreaming, a metaphysical ability she speculates she inherited

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51 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 100.

52 Nishi, *Fate*, *Nature, and Literary Form*, 4. Nishi discusses fate concerning the tragic, giving examples of "the Chinese idea of Ming" and the Indian worldview of Karma.

from her father's side. These dreams give hints about the future of her life, and therefore, her ill fortune and particularly Sermet's betrayals.

In the same part of the novel, Nuran describes that she had three dreams. In her first dream occurred before returning to Istanbul, Nuran dreamt of a dark-haired man, which she understands retrospectively to be foretelling of her meeting Sermet. In her second dream, which was right after she met Sermet at the party, a man waits for her on the stairs, but this man stands inside another house, along with his wife and children. This dream encapsulates the current situation in the narrative. In her third dream that she had a short while ago, Sermet's wife was to become pregnant. When Nuran describes this last dream, Sermet opposes its eventuality, saying that he does not even have sexual intercourse with his wife. Nuran, however, emphasizes that it would happen anyway.[53] After a while, Sermet's wife Müzeyyen confesses to Nuran that she had been pregnant but aborted the baby. Nuran's last oracle is then confirmed as the plot progresses; Nuran's first two dreams mentioned in the middle of the novel explain what already happened in the story, and these prophetic dreams serve to legitimate the third one.[54] After her third oracle occurs in the story, Nuran faces yet another betrayal of Sermet. Nuran's dreams thus designate the narrative logic and the plot construction of the tragic vision as they predetermine what happens in the story's progression.

These "reporting dreams"[55] derived from an unknown mystical source, a kind of extraordinary offering a clear hint about the events in the plot development. Nuran's prophecies also forge the idea of inevitability in the novel. What is going to happen in the plot is mentioned and thus known by Nuran, Sermet, and the reader.[56] In other words, what happens in the middle of the story is foreseeable but still unavoidable until the action or event happens. This paradox conveys the idea of "causal determinism" as in the Stoic philosophy that reveals "a corollary of [Stoics'] commitments to the unity and cohesion of the cosmos and to an all-encompassing divine reason controlling that cosmos."[57] Divine fate, ill fortune, Nuran's agency, and free will all become inseparable from each other in the novel's discourse.

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53 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 158.

54 Nuran's dreams function as oracles and resemble those in Greek tragedies, especially in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In his analysis of *Oedipus Rex*, Szondi points out that "the first two oracles prove themselves to be the prefiguration of the decisive third oracle, which Sophocles places in the middle" of it. See Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 63.

55 Zübeyde Şenderin, *Safiye Erol'un Romanlarında Manevi Olgunlaşma Yolunda Aşk ve Sembolik Dil* (Grafiker Yayınları, 2015), 239.

56 Dreams play an important role in Greek tragedies and other tragic dramas. In his study on German mourning plays, Walter Benjamin defines "prophetic dreams" as "an obligatory ingredient of the drama." See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osbourne (Verso, 1998), 134.

57 Michael J. White, "Stoic Natural Philosophy (Physics and Cosmology)" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 139.

In her self-questioning process, Nuran recognizes that her love affair has made her completely blind. The narrator comments on Nuran's attitude, explaining that "she was young, an artist. She longed for life itself to be perfect like a work of art."[58] This self-realization is crucial because she understands that love is not the path to transcending her sense of incompleteness. She expresses that she has put all her life and its meaning on Sermet's presence: "I had surrendered to you so completely: I had thought of you as a 'self' superior to mine."[59] Nuran's expression here is a self-confession that voices her self-awareness and the moment of revelation—her second epiphany. With this confession, Nuran's blindness turns into a "sudden realization, being a transition from ignorance towards full awareness," and this transition indicates "the discovery of [her] identity, or a discovery of an important piece of information about a crucial circumstance" in her existential crisis.[60]

The narrator comments on Nuran's disillusionment and the reason for her sadness, explaining that she wants to relish the material world while searching for a spiritual depth in her existence. Her intention is depicted by the narrator as Nuran's error because she dares to have everything in life and push the limits of her fate: "Nuran hurled herself into a defiance that even the Sun could not dare: she challenged her fate and reached beyond what was destined for her."[61] In other words, Nuran is responsible for her actions. Her gradual self-realization leads her to reflect on her emotional and spiritual defeat. Her defeat shows the limit of her agency despite the divination of her oracular dreams. In this regard, she fails due to her actions and ignorance.

However, there is also an elusive necessity that goes beyond Nuran's agency and will. Here, it is significant to make "a crucial distinction between tragic guilt and moral guilt."[62] Nuran's defeat arises from her tragic guilt that pushes the border between fate and agency. Although her failure does not stem from moral guilt, a moral question arises in her crisis. For instance, on her way to visit Sermet one day, Nuran encounters his oldest child, and their conversation makes Nuran realizes that she has a relationship with a married man. Indeed, her affair is not judged by her close circle, but this awareness adds a moral layer to Nuran's crisis. Her self-inquiry intensifies while she attempts to reconcile her suffering with the ethics of the community. Yet the significant matter here is not necessarily the Turkish societal ethics of "dignity" as defined by matrimony, family honor, and purity of women.[63] Nuran's explicit sexuality and unorthodox affair with Sermet then

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58 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 177.

59 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 102.

60 Jan Maarten Bremer, *Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy* (Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), 8.

61 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 178.

62 Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Anchor Books, 1969), 244. For the same view, see Keith M. May, *Nietzsche and the Spirit of Tragedy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 105.

63 For the tragic and its link with feminism in Turkish fiction, see Pınar Dönmez, *Safiye Erol'un Romanlarındaki Kadınların Simone de Beauvoir'ın Feminist Teorisine Göre İncelenmesi* (MA thesis, Istanbul University, 2019); Ahmed Nuri, "Can the Tragic Also Be Feminist? An Essay on the Poetics of Crisis Narratives in the 1960s and 1970," *Zemin*, 3 (2022), 128–61.

contravenes the prevalent idea of the modern Turkish Republican woman as a desexualized exemplary figure.

A common view in Turkish literary scholarship holds that many novels published until the late 1940s represent urban Turkish women in two modes: either through a moralistic, didactic tone aligned with the values of Republican modernity, or through a plotline of an exemplary fall in which the female character is punished for her actions.[64] *Storm of the Pleiades*, however, overturns not only this common view but also the depiction of Republican women in Turkish literature as role models whose sexuality and femininity are suppressed or ignored.[65] Erol's novel challenges assumptions about the representation of modern Turkish femininity in literature while narrating Nuran's existential crisis and its moral dimensions. Moreover, it conveys a spiritual discourse, explicitly a kind of mysticism, alongside references to Christian mythology. The combination of Islamic mysticism and Christian motifs with overt sexual desire and love in Nuran's story contradicts the Republican worldview in Turkey and its positivist, secularist, and patriarchal discourses. Such themes of the novel are highly unusual in the Turkish literary field of the 1930s and later.[66]

The novel thus offers an unusual representation of urban Turkish femininity in relation to the Republican ideology and its gender discourse, particularly considering that the 1930s in which the novel was first serialized was the heyday of the sociocultural reforms in Turkey. The fiction does not reproduce the limited emancipation of modern Turkish women and its ethical values constructed by the patriarchal mindset of this modernization project, as Nuran's femininity is explicitly sexualized through her acts, desires, and even eroticism depicted in it. Moreover, her sense of failure does not derive from a moral questioning of her sexual affair with Sermet. Nuran's downfall stems not from a sad love affair and lasciviousness but from the lack of self-knowledge and the ignorance of her dreams, and her deviation from her idealism—the primary aim of serving Turkey's Western-oriented cultural modernization.

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64 See Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern on Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity" in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (University of Washington Press, 1997), 125. In 1930s novels, women are predominantly depicted as industrious, patient, sacrificing, devoted, loyal to family, pure, untouched, and modern. See Mehmet Behçet Yazar, *Genç Romancılarımız ve Eserleri* (Ahmet Sait Basımevi, 1937), 42.

65 D. Fatma Türe highlights the desexualization of women and related representations. See D. Fatma Türe, *Facts and Fantasies: Images of Istanbul Women in the 1920s* (Cambridge Scholars, 2015), 125. See also Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case" *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 324.

66 A recent study offers a descriptive analysis of this novel from an appreciative feminist perspective that tends toward essentialist arguments and wishful thinking. See Bilge Ulusman, *Edebi Babanın Reddi: Kadın Yazınında Kurucu Söylem, Türsel İşlev ve Anlatısal Arayışlar (1895–1950)* (Metis Yayınları, 2025), 229–39.

Suffering as Becoming

The way to gain self-knowledge for Nuran, as the novel depicts, is through suffering. Multiple scenes caused by Sermet's lies and betrayals structure her suffering, which also stems from her own actions, fallacies, and choices. Suffering becomes an essential condition in Nuran's modernity experience, revealing her struggle to transcend her sense of incompleteness and her *hasret* (longing) to make sense of her being, particularly in 1930s Istanbul.[67] Her sense of incompleteness arises not only from her oscillation between the Eastern and Western values she encounters in Istanbul but also from the complexity of human existence. It then conveys "the question of existence" and the modern condition: what it means to be a human amid vast sociocultural transformations.[68]

The acceptance of this painful process indicates Nuran's will to be true to herself and pursue meaning and an ethical way of life. In one scene, Sermet plays a melancholic *alaturka* song on his oud. As a result, Nuran feels intense sorrow and sudden spiritual insights into the world. She loses her consciousness and falls. This sudden fall indicates a physical manifestation of her crisis and the intensity of suffering, echoing an earlier scene, in which *alaturka* music evoked her cultural and spiritual roots in an epiphany. Here, the narrator describes Nuran as a wounded bird with broken wings in a desert: "She had never understood so clearly what supreme happiness she sought, nor what dark suffering she encountered along the way."[69] The fallen bird in the desert becomes potent imagery, pointing to Nuran's tenacity and asceticism despite her existential struggle, endurance, despair, and resignation. Implicitly, it evokes the phoenix, symbolizing Nuran's regeneration as the phoenix rises from its ashes. The metaphor highlights Nuran's loneliness, suffering, and sense of incompleteness while she seeks meaning in modernizing Turkey in which Western models encounter the Ottoman-Turkish culture and its imperial legacy.

The fallen phoenix metaphor also evokes rebirth, referencing Jesus Christ's resurrection and Judas's betrayal motifs that appear in the novel. Sermet's promises of fidelity are revealed as hollow. The narrator describes Nuran lying on the bed like the crucified Christ, aligning with rebirth through endurance, suffering, and self-sacrifice. Nuran leaves the house silently, wandering until morning. She calls Sermet "unconscious Judas."[70] According to her, Sermet is not intentionally or purely evil because he simply acts as he is and will be. What makes Sermet Judas from Nuran's perspective is her own deep love for him, despite all her prophetic dreams, signaling his betrayals. "Making sense of the bad, even horrible things in life" becomes central to the tragic vision in Nuran's story, "and resolving how to feel, to think, and to act in the clear knowledge of

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67 For a view claiming seven phases in this process, see Sema Uğurcan, "Safiye Erol'un Romanları," *Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası* 30, no. 3 (2001), 36.

68 For further discussion, see Sewall, *Vision of Tragedy*, 4 and Leonard, *Tragic Modernities,* 12.

69 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 113.

70 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 118.

good and evil" shapes the existential, metaphysical, and narrative trajectory of this vision.[71] Nuran resigns herself to her fate and ill fortune with her limited agency in a somber way after all her attempts to blindly resist her destiny.

When she plays a piece by Bach on her piano one day, Sermet reappears as "a motif of Judas" in her mind.[72] This sudden mental appearance shows music's role in the texture of the novel, and also indicates that Nuran cannot yet overcome her love for him. That is, she cannot yet make an explicit choice between her passionate but sorrowful love and her will to reach something beyond it. Nuran oscillates between her love and her idealism; her sexual desire and her yearning for spiritual depth; her Westernized mindset and her Eastern atavistic feeling; and her predestination and her agency. These oscillations deepen her existential angst, suffering, and downfall, prolonging her crisis.

In the most vulnerable state of her life, Nuran seeks her father's presence and guidance, staying at his home for three weeks. Nuran's wounded pride and sense of defeat gradually heal in peaceful seclusion, influenced by her Sufi father's voluntary detachment from materialistic life. Nuran's stay with her father also indicates her return to her roots, or at least to a spiritual need and serenity offered by a humble lifestyle. In her long walks there, Nuran observes nature and the patterns of its change, comprehending the unity and cohesion of the world. By healing her soul slowly, she decides to engage only in things that are beautiful in life. In this way, her quest for inner harmony begins to gain a mystical dimension.

Nuran comes to the threshold of maturity and reconciliation between herself and the external world. At this threshold, she recognizes her ignorance, blindness, and mistakes. Her existential struggle turns into a mystical journey in which suffering generates self-knowledge, truth for herself, and even metaphysical insights into the world. Nuran's emerging vision guides her way of being and morality, making the reader meditate on both the internal and external reasons for suffering and endurance narrated in the novel, evoking pity and sympathy for Nuran and creating a cathartic effect. Her mystical tendency and self-transformation through suffering oppose Steiner's view on the death of tragedy discussed before. Nuran's crisis reflects her modernity experience in Turkey, in which the tragic vision is valid, specific, and even inherent, depending on personal, ethical, or sociocultural aspects. This is, at least, the novel offers in my reading. I would not argue that this view is symptomatic of Turkish modernity but rather that it is a particular literary representation.

Nuran's re-evaluation of her own existence commences with her suffering. After reading her written life story at the end of the novel, Nuran confirms her self-transformation and major revelations about life.[73] Her self-transformation occurs only through suffering, endurance, and

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71 George W. Harris, *Reason's Grief: An Essay on Tragedy and Value* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

72 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 123.

73 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 215–16.

asceticism, culminating in self-knowledge. However, her self-knowledge does not arrive suddenly in the main story. Even after her father's guidance, she accepts that she still loves Sermet. Nuran then discerns her fallacy and failure, taking responsibility for her will and behaviors consciously. In this process, she accepts the elusive presence of divine fate or what can be called a form of causal determinism that transcends her agency.

The way Nuran perceives the world is not directly religious, but it points to a kind of pantheistic vision though not fully explicit.[74] After recognizing the limit of her agency, Nuran comes to terms with herself, her weaknesses, and her tendencies. Nuran indeed meets Sermet biweekly for sensual pleasure but separates him from everything in her life. This attitude reveals Nuran's will to be true to herself, meaning her mystical vision and its secular ethics involve neither asceticism and conventional Islamic customs nor a moralist didacticism of the Republican gender discourse. Nuran then reconciles her mysticism with her Western-oriented, secular understanding of the world.

The narrator also highlights Nuran's pantheist-like vision at the novel's end. She "progressed all the way to the subtlest and most artistic form of pantheism."[75] This vision reflects spiritual faith in God rather than traditional Islamic practice. The self-awareness of her own weakness and tendencies affirms a harmonic reconciliation between her self-existence and the world without moralizing the Republican gender discourse and its glorified but desexualized image in 1930s Turkey. There is no singular ethical truth in the novel's discourse. Moralism in Nuran's story, as Murat Belge notes, indicates the authenticity of her feelings and her sincerity with herself.[76] The novel thus presents alternative views on the sexuality, morality, and modernness of Turkish women.

The redemptive power of suffering and disenchanted asceticism shows how Nuran finds her way of being with her artistic pantheist-like understanding of the world. Her suffering and endurance lead to her self-recognition "at the moment of self-comprehension."[77] Her devotion to music plays an important role in this understanding. Towards the end, Nuran dedicates her life to music studies and proposes art as the only antidote to suffering in life and thereby invoking Schopenhauer's conception of tragedy "as self-negation of the will."[78] She transforms her downfall

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74 Many indications in the novel imply Islamic mysticism: pure love, self-transformation, suffering, endurance, asceticism, self-sacrifice, and spirituality. For an analysis of this novel based on mysticism, see Sema Noyan, "Türk Romanında Mistisizm (1923–1980)" (PhD Diss., Marmara University, 2013), 337–64. In my view, the novel does not convey Sufism in particular because it involves a pantheist-like approach, which contradicts Islamic mysticism and Sufism, but evokes Indian mysticism. For the differences between Sufism and pantheism, see Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *100 Soruda Tasavvuf*, 2nd ed. (Gerçek Yayınları, 1985), 41.

75 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 211.

76 Belge, "Safiye Erol," 231.

77 Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1990), 97.

78 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 6th ed. (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1886), 3: 212–18; Erol's education in Germany, including her doctoral study, may

into creativity, attaining mystical insights into human nature and her devotion to Republican modernity, particularly the musical reforms establishing *alafranga* music in Turkey. After this phase, the narrator summarizes events and accelerates the story. In a few pages, the main story ends with an explicit emphasis on Nuran's altruism and her self-dedication to Turkey's cultural modernization.

Accordingly, her pursuit of the transcendentally beautiful and spiritual is intertwined with what constitutes a valuable life along with its secular ethics in Turkey's modernization. In the end, Nuran is depicted as an admirer of her country—a good, industrious citizen who sacrifices herself for Turkey's cultural progress. Despite the novel's bold, alternative commentary on female sexuality and eroticism, Nuran's spiritual survival and self-sacrifice reinforce the Republican ideals of self-devotion, in which every citizen needs to contribute to Turkey's modernization. This balanced approach tempers the novel's radical discourse on Republican women, while maintaining its uniqueness in terms of sexuality and eroticism.

The novel ends as it begins. Nuran comments on her written story in the frame narrative after reading it. She emphasizes the unnarratable moments and feelings of her life, questioning whether felicity or calamity can be represented in fiction. She expresses skepticism about representation of reality.[79] She thinks that her story as fiction does not and even cannot represent reality as imitation because it is impossible to narrate the essential aspects of such feelings, suffering, and deep insights. Her view then conveys "the difference between actual suffering in life and the artistic representation of suffering in which we can learn from someone else's pain instead of going through it."[80] The story of Judas recurs again, as Nuran observes that Jesus instigates his own murder by implanting an idea into Judas's mind. Nuran affirms the necessity and inevitability of her experiences as manifestations of causal determinism, while offering a way to confront evil.

Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between modernity experience and the tragic vision in Safiye Erol's *Storm of the Pleiades*, focusing on how the protagonist Nuran's existential crisis unfolds in 1930s Istanbul. I have formulated a tragic vision that captures a mode of foreseen but inevitable crisis, suffering, and failure. In the novel, this vision emerges from the conflict between Nuran and forces beyond her agency in the context of Turkey. Moreover, the narrative construction of the tragic vision is largely shaped by the protagonist's crisis and its mode of representation. The middle-class, Western-oriented, intellectual, urban protagonist of the novel faces multiple conflicts: pursuing self-identity while dealing with moral or intellectual responsibility; searching

have exposed her to Schopenhauer. In 1927, her first articles published in a Turkish newspaper introduced his ideas regarding women and genius. See Safiye Erol, "Kadınlara Dair," "Yine Kadınlara Dair," and "Dehaya Dair" in *Makaleler* (Kubbealtı Neşriyatı, 2021), 25–30, 31–32, 33–37.

79 Erol, *Ülker Fırtınası*, 213.

80 Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy* (Blackwell, 2008), 17.

for self-fulfillment while holding onto the national/reformist ideal; tackling an existential crisis while seeking inner harmony and personal morality in modernizing society. These conflicts lie in tensions between the personal and the social; the internal and the external; the right and the less right (rather than the wrong); and gender and its construction.

The novel problematizes the discourse of the modern Republican woman in 1930s Istanbul. Nuran's overt sexuality, eroticism, and unmarried affair defy the discourse of the modern Turkish woman, which prescribes female asexuality. At the same time, the novel seeks a compromise between spiritual being—a kind of mysticism—and Republican ideology, forming a tragic vision. However, this vision also contains a constructive dimension in relation to Turkish modernity despite the protagonist's suffering and resignation. In this sense, the novel frames suffering and endurance as positive, affirmative, necessary, and insightful. The mystical tendency thus fills the gap left by the loss of an earlier spiritual culture.

Nuran's mystical insight into the world implies neither purely Islamic mysticism nor explicit pantheism. Instead, this metaphysical insight is combined with a secular worldview, a European-like lifestyle, and the Republican sociocultural reforms in 1930s Istanbul. This secular reconciliation with the divine signifies a way of negotiating the cultural differences between the East and the West, though not necessarily as a strict binary, given the conditions of Turkish modernity. This reconciliation leads to both individual artistic creation and self-sacrificing contribution to Turkey's cultural modernization, which can be considered sell-fulfillment and altruism. The idea of inevitability and the tragic vision configured in the novel thus give way to redemption, refined grace, profundity, and also self-sacrifice in the end.

Future studies should examine the relationship between protagonists' existential crises and mystical, metaphysical, and Islamic views in novels or plays by different authors. This focus would provide insights into how the tragic is thematically, narratively, and philosophically depicted in other works, especially Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's canonical novel *Huzur* (*A Mind at Peace*) whose subject, story, and characters resemble Erol's novel and reveal the extent of its association with the subjects and discourses of Turkish modernity.[81] Examining how various reconciliations between secularity, mysticism, agency, and different interpretations of Islam are treated in Turkish fiction would further illuminate the themes of existential crisis, failure, inevitability, fate, and suffering as well as the dimensions of the tragic—an aim this article has pursued through a close reading of a single novel.

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81 For examples of this direction, see Çiğdem Buğdaycı, "Gelenek ve Kanon Dışı: Safiye Erol ve Peyami Safa'da Geleneğin Kullanımı," *MSGSÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2023 no. 28: 115–133; Olcay Akyıldız, "Bu Ne Aşktır, Ne Arkadaşlıktır: Yüzyıllık Bir Yalnızlıktır Olsa Olsa ya da Edebiyat Tarihinin 'Muammalı Bağları,'" *Çatlak Zemin* (10 June 2020), https://catlakzemin.com/bu-ne-asktir-ne-arkadasliktir-yuzyillik-bir-yalnizliktir-olsa-olsa-ya-da-edebiyat-tarihinin-muammali-baglari/

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