RELIGION AND THE OTTOMAN NOVEL:
A READING OF AHMET MIDHAT'S NOVELS

HATİCE NURİLER

İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Cultural Studies.

Examining Committee Members:

Assist. Prof. Mehmet Fatih Uslu
(Thesis Supervisor)

Assist. Prof. Fatih Altuğ

Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Uysal

This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the Graduate School of Social Sciences of İstanbul Şehir University:

Date

06.06.2016

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I here by declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declared that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

First Name, Last Name: Hatice Nuriler

Signature: Hatice

ABSTRACT

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Nuriler, Hatice
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Ahmet Midhat produced most of the novels in the late Ottoman period while he also sought to experiment in this literary genre, exploring the possibilities of crafting an indigenous Ottoman novel. Whilst *adopting* this Western genre, he also *adapted* it; pursuing a discourse which, on one level, promoted an idealized Western model of progress also on another adhered to Islamic ethics and values espoused by his own culture. Being conscious that the novel was a Western genre, Ahmet Midhat sought for a novel discourse which reflected the Islamic ethos and Ottoman *weltanschauung*. However, Ahmet Midhat draws different stances as to religion in different works and I aim to trace a biographical understanding of how religious/secular his discourse manifests itself at different stages of his life. This thesis is an attempt to examine this, to analyze to what extent and how, Ahmet Midhat's novels mirrored Islamic ethics, practices and Western thinking, culture, and balanced the two. To do so I have tried to utilize works which studied the relationship between religion and modern literature. Since the literature had a strong relation to politics at the time, I sought to make sense of the modernizing transformation from a historical perspective as well. I have also visited Bakhtin's theory on the dialogic imagination of the novel given the fact that Ahmet Midhat's novel was a realm wherein he brought together opposing ideas of two diverging cultures, and different ideologies of the time. Not claiming his novel fully fitted the Bakhtinian concept of dialogy, I do see him attempting to represent different voices in his narrative. If Ahmet Midhat's novel was not exactly a *heteroglottic* novel, its representation of differing ideas and voices paved the way towards *heteroglossia* for the Turkish novel. This is most seen in his synthesis of the religious/modern in the novels, i.e. the most controversial dichotomy of the time.

Key words: Religion and literature, the novel, the Ottoman novel, Ahmet Midhat.

ÖZ

OSMANLI ROMANINDA DİN:
AHMET MİDHAT ROMANLARI

Nuriler, Hatice
MA, Kültürel Çalışmalar Bölümü
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Ahmet Midhat, Osmanlı yazarları içinde en fazla sayıda romanın yazarı olarak aynı zamanda bu tarzda denemeler yaparak yerel bir Osmanlı romanı ortaya çıkarmak için çabaladı. Romanın Batı'dan ithaliyle başlayan sürecini, bu edebi türün Osmanlı kültürü ve okuma pratiklerine entegre edilmesine doğru götürdü. Gelişme anlamında Batılı modernleşme yanlısı olan Ahmet Midhat, değerler açısından İslami ve geleneksel değerlerin de savunucusuydu. Romanın Batılı dünya görüşünün bir ürünü olduğunun da farkına vararak, Osmanlı değerlerini yansıtan romanlar yazmaya çalıştı diyebiliriz. Ancak, yazarın farklı romanlarında dini ve modern olana farklı tutum olduğu da görülüyor. Bu tezin amacı Ahmet Midhat romanlarını bu açıdan incelemektir: İslami inanç ve ahlakın Ahmet Midhat romanlarında ne kadar temsil edildiği, Batılı/seküler değerlerin ne derece idealize edildiği ve bu ikisinin nasıl dengelendiği. Bu sorulara cevap bulmak amacıyla, ilk bölümler edebiyat/roman ve din ilişkisini inceleyen teorilerin yanında, Türk Edebiyatı eleştirisinde Osmanlı romanlarına nasıl bakıldığına göz atıyor ve dönemin sekülerleşme reformlarının tarihini özetliyor. Dönemin yoğun değişimler sürecinde, Ahmet Midhat'ın biyografisi incelendiğinde, dini görüşünün hep aynı kalmadığını açıkça görüyoruz. Bu değişimin de romancılığına direkt olarak yansıyacağı varsayımıyla, bu çalışma, yazar için dönüm noktası olan hayat tecrübelerine değinerek romanlarını biyografisi ışığında kronolojik bir sırayla inceleyip, dini inançla ilgili temalar, İslami değerler, retorik ve pratiklerin, modernleşme değerleri karşısında romanlarda hangi seviye ve şekillerde yer bulduğuna bakıyor. Ahmet Midhat'ın farklı medeniyetlerin değerlerini, birbiriyle çatışan fikirleri ve ideolojileri aynı anlatıda biraraya getirmesini okumak için, Bahtin'in roman diyalojik teorisinden yararlandım. Ahmet Midhat romanı Bahtinyen anlamda *çoksesli* roman olarak değerlendirilmese de, çeşitli düşünce ve sesleri

buluşturan söylemiyle, Türk romanının *çoksesliliğine* kapı açmıştır. Bunu da dönemin en tartışmalı ikiliği olan dini/modern olanı sentezlemesinde fazlasıyla görebiliyoruz.

Anahtar kelimeler: Din ve edebiyat, roman, Osmanlı romanı, Ahmet Midhat.

To the memory of Prof. Isma'il R. al-Faruqi
whose legacy still continues to inspire us

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INTRODUCTION

Roman, hem tabii denilen surette yazılan roman, okumaktan maksat yalnız bir adamın sergüzeştini tetebbu değildir. Asıl ahval-i alemi tetebbudur.[1]
Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Müşahedat*

This statement from his novel belongs to Ahmet Midhat Efendi, the first Ottoman novelist, who by writing over thirty novels, facilitated the penetration of the new genre into Turkish literature. Prolific as he was in producing novels, Ahmet Midhat played a leading role in enriching the scope of a new genre in Turkish novels. This thesis comprises a study of his novels and the pivotal question is on religion, asking how did the Ottoman religious ethos, represented by Ahmet Midhat as a popular figure, influence the narrative of the novel, *vis-à-vis* a genre that originated in and was borrowed from the Western culture?

After finishing my BA major in English literature, I had a chance to look at the literature of Turkish culture from a different point of view which I acquired studying a Western literature. Pondering especially on how effective the Western literary theories are in reading early modern Turkish literature, and the emergence of novel genre in the Ottoman scene, the greatest question mark came across being 'religion'. As I was reading the first Ottoman novels, which came under the heading of westernization/secularization, it became clear to me that these novels have to be thought within the entrenched Ottoman cultural worldview, axioms and ethos that grew out of the Islamic religion. Similarly, it already seems outdated to presume a historical point in Turkish history, where secularism starts, and the cultural products assessed either as religious or as secular, dichotomically. Particularly *Tanzimat* period, in this matter, is a blackbox of transition and transformation of thinking, politics, ideology and therefore culture, literature. The utmost need to look at these novels with the question of religion triggered my ambition for this thesis, then I came to know Ahmet Midhat.

[1] My translation: The aim of reading a novel is not for the sole observation of the events of a [individual] man, but for the exploration of the world.

Ahmet Midhat's statement quoted above indicates that he brings a distinct and indigenous approach to the genre, as he interprets its purpose differently from what he sees the Western novel does, as the exploration of not only the life of an individual, but also the exploration of '*alem*' at large. The vital factor that defines Ahmet Midhat's narrative, I claim, is the entrenched Islamic ethos in the Ottoman culture; thus, what he does with his novels is not to import it as it is but to construe an Ottoman novel that is authentic to its culture. He took on the duty to explore the possibility of an Ottoman novel. To that end, he experimented most vigorously to produce several examples of novels that grew out of and fit in the Ottoman reality; he portrayed the challenges and the spirit of the late nineteenth century in more than thirty novels. However, Ahmet Midhat's unique discourse in his novels does not come about as soon as he starts producing work in this genre; rather, it developed from his journey as a novelist to create different outcomes, one of which includes experimentation with the genre. The themes he discusses and the discourse he creates as a novelist display very distinct characteristics from novel to novel, even to an extent that he is thought to contradict himself. Although some of this author's first novels seem to be under more influence of the Western novel in certain aspects, in time, he eventually composes a more indigenous dialogism in his novels - to borrow Bakhtin's term. I believe what conditioned his composition of an Ottoman novel and what distinguished it from a Western novel was primarily religion and an Islamic worldview that he holds onto, despite the defeating exposure to the Western hegemony in the intellectual arena. Though I borrow Bakhtin's term, it is also necessary to frame to what extent Ahmet Midhat's (and other two novelists') novel narratives fit in Bakhtinian conception of novel, and how it does not.

The novel arrived in the Ottoman life through translations of French novels in the second half of the nineteenth century enjoying quick popularity. This was followed by the presentation of Ottoman novels that were written by different writers, whereas Okay and Kahraman regard Ahmet Midhat's *Letaif-i Rivayat*, a collection of novellas, as the first examples of the trend in Ottoman. *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* by Şemsettin Sami comes in 1872 while Namık Kemal's *Intibah* in 1876 (161). Besides the initial examples by the aforementioned writers, it was Ahmet Midhat Efendi who invested the greatest effort towards the development of this genre. Besides his contribution to literature as a novelist, playwright and travel-writer, he had a lot of duties in different parts of social life, such as journalism and publishing. He also wrote encyclopedias and books on history and Western culture. His character as a public figure was that of a teacher, for which he was granted the title, *hace-i evvel*, the first teacher. Ahmet Midhat strove to convey knowledge, ideas, and set ideal examples for the Ottoman readers through his fiction to foster the reformation period of the Ottoman identity while the State was undergoing a series of reforms and the society was exposed to several different influences originating from Europe. For this purpose, he mostly utilized the novel genre; it served as the perfect medium for it combined morals with entertainment. As a narrator who was able to converse with the readers, he would create a space where he involves the reader/narrate in the discussion in the novels. In addition to that, the novel was a perfect means to explore the world and illustrate his thought as it offered a literary realm wherein a diverse orchestra of meanings, ideas and speeches can be accommodated to communicate, which Bakhtin describes with his term *heteroglossia*. Though it is difficult to say Ahmet Midhat's novels were heteroglossic, his works took very first and infant steps towards such diversity of representation in Turkish novel.

In order to study and comprehend Ahmet Midhat's narrative effectively, it is vital to understand the political/cultural atmosphere of the era, wherein he grew as a literary writer. The late nineteenth century marks the blustery intellectual and cultural period of Ottoman life in the face of a dominating West whose growing influence imposed a series of reforms. Şerif Mardin points the beginning as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century which started with the Ottomans' encounter with military weakening before the West and the need for catching up with the new technological developments. This was followed by the introduction of press technology (9-10) to pave the way for newspapers and journals to become popular. The *Tanzimat* (Reformations) Edict, dated 1839, is seen as a cornerstone as it accelerated the modernizing processes. It ordered legal changes that were in accordance with the Western legal system, like the equal treatment of non-Muslims, which had been determined through the traditional Ottoman legal system. Afterwards, the reforms gained pace and reached a peak, bringing about the related crises as well.

The penetration of different forms of knowledge and trends from a different Western civilization, created disturbance and discontent for the Ottoman society, especially with a need to orient oneself in a changing worldview. As the most influential figures during the Ottoman modernization were the intelligentsia, some also acting as bureaucrats, the intellectual unrest became stuck between ancient traditions and the modern Western model. The Ottoman Empire was synonymous with the Islamic civilization and, until then, the Christian West had been an antagonistic force. Yet, the increasing domination of the West through scientific and modern developments changed the scenery and the balance of power globally, lending the Ottoman Empire to intellectual and cultural defeat.

Selim Deringil expresses this as “late Ottoman state in the context of world changes”, and quotes from Said Pasha Abdulhamid II’s vizier who stated that the Ottomans felt stuck among Christian princedoms and states (2). The collision with the now-empowered Western culture affected the integrity of the state and society leaving a sense of defeat and falling behind. Although Europe was namely a Christian authority, in the intellectual level the battle was against its Christendom, but its secularism, positivist and materialist though. This, in other words, was the competition of the modern and the progressed vis-à-vis the traditional that was regarded as backwards.

Classical Ottoman culture, in general, was not to be defined without reference to the religion of Islam. In simplest terms, Islam served and functioned as the ground on which the Ottoman culture was fostered; the cultural narratives and literature, too, derived from/with Islamic elements. However, this is not to say there is ‘one Islam’ lived homogeneously. Rather, in Richard Tapper’s words: “Islam in the Ottoman Empire was not a unified, monolithic set of beliefs and practices; it was complex, heterogeneous and changing, and its different manifestations were related to different aspects of Ottoman society (6). However, it is not wrong to generalize that the Ottoman Empire, its culture and ethos, fundamentally grew out of an Islamic basis, holding the caliphate status, sustaining a legal system as sharia, and promoted Islamic values and discourse in the society; however, only until this was deeply shaken by the changing paradigms in the cultural interactions with the modern West.

Cultural domination of the secular West was influential in literature too, which gradually dislocated the traditional literature. The translations of Western novels by the French-speaking Ottoman writers played an effective role in this regard. Ahmet Midhat who was both a translator of some Western novels and later the author of the most Ottoman novels produced in the era, should be seen in this light. Enchanted by the Western scientific developments, Western literature and philosophy which he was able to read, he would become a life-long promoter of certain Western assets that he appreciated; for this he is accurately seen as a progressivist. Yet, this is not a classification to describe Ahmet Midhat in the full sense as he was also a devout Muslim figure who usually served to protect and foster the Islamic tenets, values and morals. One needs to be aware of this dual –even a multi-dimensional- characteristic of Ahmet Midhat in approaching his works.

According to Okay and Kahraman, the early trend in the Turkish novel displayed considerable traces of traditional narrative forms like folk stories and the classical poetry, *divan* (161). Robert P. Finn, on the other hand, describes the early Turkish novel as essentially in line with the Islamic religion, completely rooted in religion (12). Jale Parla's criticizes the Ottoman novel, though, is based on the traditional and religious thinking of the writers: She argues the epistemological boundaries deriving from the omnipresence of an "absolute text" rendered the early Turkish novel lame, because the authors could not internalize the Western values that made the Western model (12-15). This view derives from the dichotomous postulation as East-West, the former left behind in the progress of modernity and the latter as the ideal civilization, for which to strive. This approach has dominated how we looked at our history thus far, yet was also challenged by some critics. Findley describes this as the greatest flaw in dealing with the history of the Ottoman state "which was their teleological vision of an upward march from an Islamic Empire to a secular republic" (1), and Hanioğlu as "the attempt to frame late Ottoman history in a narrative of imperial collapse to the relentless drumbeat of the march of the progress –usually associated with Westernization, … and secularization- prevents a clear understanding of the developments in question (2). The same thinking is also reflected in Turkish literary criticism, which Nurdan Gürbilek names "the criticism of lack" which is overshadowed by the Western ideal, which analyze literary works on a scale of comparison to the Western literary paradigm and in terms of what it lacks vis-a-vis the Western culture (599).

In an attempt to disengage from the criticism of an existing lack, I wanted to give voice to Ahmet Midhat in regards to the genre, as an Ottoman figure. His unique efforts deserve a genuine look in terms of his contribution to the Turkish novel, rather than what he lacked or was deficient in. In approaching the late Ottoman history, Hanioglu mentions the dimension through which the late Ottomans should be approached: "the key challenge of forging an *Ottoman response* to modernity" (3). I find this phrasing significant in approaching Ahmet Midhat as well. Ahmet Midhat overtly declared emulation of Western novels as seen in his forewords to his early novels. In later years, he seems more in control and authority of the genre, and he more freely moves construing it with his own views and ethics. In a sense, he responds to the genre in his Ottoman way, as seen in the above statement declaring the different purpose of the novel for him in one of his famous novels, *Müşahedat*.

All this said, given that Ahmet Midhat is a dynamic figure whose position changes, and who develops and transform as a an author. I realized that the generalized, sweeping and skin-deep arguments did not provide answers when one queried the role of religion in his novels. This rendered the question of religion-novel relation more intriguing for me. In order to discuss religion and his novel, it is vital to keep in mind that the nineteenth century marks a dramatic period of transition between tradition and modern(ity-ization); yet, the deep-seated Islamic belief still plays a key role in responding to these challenges. According to İsmail Kara, "in the Islamic world, the modern has, in a sense, become religious too (14). The question, then, is not how much Ahmet Midhat 'scored' on the way to westernization, but it *is* how and in what authentic ways challenges of modernity are treated, coped with. Therefore, a literary trend that is a product of modern times, i.e. the novel, offers the most fruitful analysis of the intricate relation between religion and literary narrative. Given this, this thesis will study the interrelation between the religious worldview of Ottoman culture and the novel discourse that flourished out of it. The discursive elements of Ahmet Midhat's novels, being the focus of this study, will be analysed to deconstruct those deriving from the indigenous religiosity on one hand and the secular inclinations arising from Western trends on the other. I aim to inquire what kind of a eclectic discourse of novel Ahmet Midhat produced, with his face turned both to his tradition and Western progressivism, paving the way for the Turkish novel, and what role religion played in this amalgam of different paradigms.

The first chapter will offer a theoretical background surveying how the connection between religion and literature, the novel in particular, is dealt with in Western literary theory. Harold Fisch, in his book titled *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel* detects "the powerful formative presence of the Bible in the English and American novel genre" (19). Fisch puts forward that novels of different cultures show distinct kinship to the Biblical scripture, and that the novel as a genre was heavily based on the Biblical text, speaking of the English American. Fisch's theory provides a parallel line for this study to discuss the Islamic legacy and the novels that were written in Muslim cultures. Besides Fisch's views, this chapter will look at other major theoretical discussions of the sacred and secular texts, and the novel's eligibility for religious narrative. This will be followed by the discussion of some Turkish literary critics' view on the first Ottoman novels, with the role of religion in question.

The second chapter will consist of a brief summary of the political history of the period to give a glimpse of the atmosphere of 'modernization' focusing on the secular reforms. The last part of the chapter will provide a brief biography of Ahmet Midhat to make a sense of his dynamic character as a person and writer where I will seek to find connections between his life experiences and his literary discourse. His encounters as a young man, exile as a writer and his relationship with the royal palace afterwards gives us material to make sense of his changing character, in terms of his devotion to religion as well.

The following chapter will start with analyzing two early Ottoman novels written by other *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fıtnat* by Şemseddin Sami, *Intibah* by Namık Kemal in which I aim to found a comparative basis to Ahmet Midhat's. *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* will be the first novel by Ahmet Midhat to be discussed. Analysis of three other novels of his early period will follow, *Felsefe-i Zenan*, *Hasan Mellah* and *Hüseyin Fellah,* respectively. In all novels the religious construction in characterization, plot, structure and the narrative discourse will be analyzed.

The fourth chapter will, then, deal with the examples found in the later phase of Ahmet Midhat, which is a more transitional period, for him, bearing distinct discourses in relation to the religious and secular. The novels of this chapter are *Hayal ve Hakikat*, *Esrar-ı Cinayat*, and *Müşahedat*. Each of these will be studied in their own textual autonomy, to infer the religious and other aspects of narration.

The fifth chapter will focus on one of the latest novels of our writer, named *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad*, which is an intense novel both in narration and ideological emphasis, composing a more politicized religious discourse. Ahmet Metin is an exclusive character that accounts late Ahmet Midhat's literary personality and ideological stance as a novelist.

As already hinted, this thesis attempts to give a voice to Ahmet Midhat, as a dynamic novelist, not independent from what was going on in his country and society. On the contrary, he is a key figure in 'forging an Ottoman response to modernity, in the literature. Through surveying the religious undergirding in his novel narrative, with its congruencies and contradictions, I aim to appreciate his contribution to integrating the genre with Turkish literature and also the challenges he faced to that end. I find it useful to point to his –oftentimes- confused state of mind and contradictions and his changing ideological stances to understand various dimensions he contributed with to Turkish novel. I conducted my research as a journey during which I did not set previous arguments, but allowed each novel to channel the discussion in its own right. By studying each novelistic world he created through each piece of work, I expected to better understand Ahmet Midhat's own journey as a novelist, My experience with this journey affirmed to me that Ahmet Midhat's vast collection of novels had every answer, interwoven with his dynamic and multi-faceted character, once each novel is given a voice to, separately. This also enables one to appreciate his unique contribution to modern Turkish literature.

CHAPTER 1
RELIGION AND THE NOVEL

The novel, as a genre originating from the West, is commonly accepted as a secular one. However, given the open-ended flexibility of form, one needs to ponder on whether there is any form of connection between religion and the genre. The history of literatures will show that it is beliefs and religion from which literatures largely emanated. Parallel to the transformation of religio-cultures in global history were the ways religion was conditioned and the changes that religious practices manifested. Modern times, though, introduced the phenomenon of 'secular', and the literary forms, which appeared in modern times, commonly fell under the categorization of secular.

In this starting chapter, I will survey the theoretical links between the novel and religion focusing on the theories, which challenge the view of the novel as a secular genre. I agree with the view that the novel has narrative links and similarities to sacred texts and in the novel we can find elements that pertain to religion and faith as much as they represent the novelists' worldview and the society they live in. I will also discuss how Islam sees literature with its similarities to the Biblical text and its differences in approaching literature. In doing this, I will also try to find answers as to whether the novel in an Islamic context is feasible and welcome.

1.1. Religion, Literature and the Novel in Literary Theory

And let my cry come unto Thee[2]

Before I start with surveying the Western literary theory in terms of religion in literature, I must note my aim is to lay out the debates and opposing ideas in the field of literature in general and the novel, in particular, in order to show how the interrelation of religion and literature is viewed in the thoughts of several literary theorists. It is inevitable to mention the Western theories of literature as the novel originated in the European literaturesas a genre. However, to date, Mikhail Bakhtin's acclaimed theory attained a most comprehensive theory of the genre which will be

[2] *Ash Wednesday*, poem by T.S. Eliot

utilized in my thesis. Relying theoretically on foreign theories and examples, I aim to discuss the Ottoman novel, as the nineteenth century Ottoman literary space was coming closer with that of the Western by drawing in their literary forms. After all, all the modernization narrative that Ottomans appealed to was that of the European model.

"However much the theory of secularization has been critiqued—and the notion of the secular itself differently defined—the concept of a rational secularized culture as a key signifier of modernity has remained a constant" (Owen 10). General accounts like this one reflected in literature mostly presumes that the modern literary forms shifted its paradigm to secularity. What distinguished literature of modern times over classical times has mainly been its inclination towards realism, temporality, anthropocentrism, and from mythology and celestial references to secular realism.

The closure of the medieval era was marked by a shift from a religious outlook to that of humanism. With the coming of Renaissance, European philosophy, arts -the changes in the conception of aesthetics-, as well as literature, became centered on mankind and human nature, and his life, starting with a modulated return to classical arts. Theological expression in the form of the Protestant Reformation - despite the fact that it *was* a theological movement - focused on "individual expression and exploration of the unknown physical world" (Papazian 13). "Although supernatural and spiritual continued as a backdrop against which to explore mankind and the natural world, the world of man rather than the world of the divine became England's intellectual and creative focus, both independent of, and in relationship to the sacred" (*Ibid*). As an illustration of this, Matthew Martin notes the shift in Renaissance Drama through the representation of pain in Marlowe's play *Edward II* and cites Marbeck who contrasts the representation of 'pain' in medieval and Renaissance arts. He shows that the medieval aesthetics centered on the suffering of the body of Christ whereas the Renaissance aesthetics focused on pain in the human body, which he refers to, as a separation from the Renaissance Christocentrism. This change, he finds, is spectacular (qtd. in 103). This is a stunning indication of how transformation in one culture's conception and attitude towards religion is reflected in the aesthetical representations of literature.

Such a shift did not only take place in literature, but in every aspect of sciences and thought. Cartesian philosophy and the Enlightenment thinkers extended this to a larger extent, promoting ration and empiricism, which Ian Watt suggests, grounded the formal realism of the genre, the novel, which he considers to be secular (10-1).

To put very broadly, the novel is in the dictionary defined as “a prose narrative about characters and their actions in what was recognizably everyday life and usually in the present” (“Novel”). Ian Watt suggests the full usage of the term was established by the end of the eighteenth century and what distinguished it from earlier works was its stylistic purpose as formal realism (10). Georg Lukacs, in his *Theory of Novel*, poetically portrays the nature of the novel as “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God” (94). One of the most widely referenced works in Ian Watt’s thesis in *The Rise of the Novel,* he explains the emergence of novel out of social context in the era of a secularized thinking and a rising middle class. “The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation” (13). And this realism sought to “differ from the more flattering pictures of humanity presented by many established ethical, social and literary codes, it was merely because they were the product of a more dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of life than had ever been attempted before” (10-11). The debates in the definitions of realism and the suggestion of the scientific ideal bear a lot further discussion but what Watt refers to here is important for this study. The issue lies under that of the problem of the correspondence between literary work and the reality which it imitates which is “essentially an epistemological problem”. Explaining realism in a philosophical sense, Watt suggests its roots lie in Cartesian and Enlightenment thought which is secular by nature (11).

The discussion so far shows that, in the dichotomy of secular vs. religious, the novel falls under the former. However, this way of classification does not suffice to fully picture the nature of the genre. Northrop Frye’s approach is provoking in this sense: “‘secular scripture’ is only a literary form of the much more widespread social and cultural process by which religious ideas are modulated by the processes of secularization, not eliminated by them” (ctd. in Knight and Woodman). In the light of this significant statement, I will refer to those modern theorists and literary writers, who regard the modern novel in an epistemological and discursive interaction with religion and belief.

The twentieth century French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, examines the theory of narratives whereby he also touches on narrative fictions. He spots the analogy of all narratives, one of them being Biblical narratives: “Narratives, in virtue of their form, are all fictions. And yet through these fictions [i.e. narrative fictions], that we give a narrative form to our experience, be it individual or communal.” (Ricoeur 145-146)

That is to say that narratives have the power to set or modulate the nature of human experience. Ricoeur reminds the biblical narratives of Abraham, David and Jesus, [all of which are present in the Qur'an as well], stating that "the act of reading should be seen as the meeting point of the itineraries of meaning brought about by the reader seeking 'to apply' the text to life". Ricoeur adds that the narrative itself in its structure offers an 'intersection' between text and life and through this intersection emerges the imagination in accordance with the Bible's (146).

This extends also to a social level which the editors of the Religion and Literature book note, that not only poetry but also narrative fiction intertwines in interception with religion:

> In liturgy (that is formal worship), the drama, or the reciting of sagas, ballads, and stories, and finally confrontation between the reader and the text, we learn that process of interaction from which narratives begin to develop. From these communities begin to form, in turn appropriating the narratives – as we see, for example in the earliest stories of the Bible or in the Gospels – and it is within these living communities that we realize ourselves and our identities. (Detweiler, Jasper iv).

Ricoeur's remark on the dynamic interaction of sacred texts and literature, fictional narratives should be read from the point of view of novel's narrative as well. Prior to delving into the discussion of the novel and sacred scriptures, the poetry, which has a longer history than that the novel, will be visited in terms of its relation to religion.

An initial reference to the relation between poetry, and religion can be found in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) of Wordsworth and Coleridge, which marked the Romanticist manifesto in English writing. As Wordsworth states: "...Poetry is most just to its divine origin when it administers the comforts and breathes the spirit of religion" (3) to an extent that he sees the origin of the two as the same. The Romantic revolution drew attention to this co-existence of divine origin and literature. The famous twentieth century poet and literary critic, T. S. Eliot, on the other hand, wrote to trigger an interest in the interwoven study of religion and literature. He wrote considerably on the issue with even his quip in *A Dialogue* "Our literature is a substitute for our religion, and so is our religion" (44) which tells a lot on its own. After his conversion to Anglicanism, Eliot's poetry became imbued with a highly religious spirit in style, and in his theoretical essays he proposes that theological standards should be applied to poetry. In his short essay "Religion and Literature" wherein he discusses this issue, Eliot observes: "It is our business, as readers of literature, to know what we like. It is our business, as Christians, as well as readers of literature, to know what we ought to like" (11). He simply suggests that literature is not merely an instrument for entertainment and needs to be encompassed by spirituality. This echoes to me how Ahmet Midhat approached writing fiction - always with a moral objective (which will be explored in the following chapters).

When it finally comes to the novel's relationship to religion, Harold Fisch broadly unfolds this issue in his book titled *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel,* whereby he refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's preliminary theory of the novel, yet its failure to address the biblical roots of the genre. While Bakhtin views some Russian novels in relation to the Bible as mere usages of the Biblical quotations for underpinning satire and parody, Fisch criticizes him for failing to point at "the powerful formative presence of the Bible in the English and American novel genre"(19). From Fisch's argumentation, it is inferred that, as the two religio-cultures (European and Russian) differ historically, their relationship to the Biblical scriptures is naturally distinct from each other. Therefore, how their novel interacts with the Biblical influence is distinct as well. Speaking of the English novel, this genre was based a lot on the Biblical text, Fisch adds (19). This is to epitomize that novels of every culture will mirror its religious understanding and the discourse will demonstrate a relation to the holy texts accordingly – which is as well to say that each literature should be evaluated in its own cultural actualities and in its stance towards religion and secularity.

Fisch further states the Biblical religion regulates the novel through: "authorizing moral code by which the characters are perceived and judged, and undergirding the plot structure, and as the model for a particular kind of narrative realism..." which is followed by vigorous examples of these from different American and English novels (19). Besides the direct criticism of Bakhtin's exclusion of the Bible pertaining to the origins of the novel, we can see Fisch's debate in opposition to what Lukacs or Watt said of the genre, categorizing it as nothing else but secular.

In addition, Mark Knight and Thomas Woodman's work also contributes to this debate. In their introduction to *Biblical Religion and the Novel,* the two authors point to different aspects of the definition of religion stating that it "must be noted that the word 'religion' in common usage refers to both institutional and organized religion and to the much more widespread religious impulse in human beings, the spiritual dimension, the desire for a meaning that goes beyond the confines of their own individual lives" (2). What they, simply but significantly, suggest is to not miss the distinction between the two dimensions of religion. Hence a 'secular' work of art, i.e. a novel, representing human life in his environment might come across as devoid of the presence of institutionalized religion; yet, this does not mean that the 'religious impulse', as an intrinsic part of the human nature in search for transcendental meaning of life will not find representation in this narrative fiction.

Margaret Doody's study, *The True Story of the Novel* also builds on a reverted history of novel, challenging Watt's idea that the novel hardly has links to romance. (It is also important to relate here that in his *Ahbar-ı Asara Tamim-i Enzar* Ahmet Midhat is talking about the history of the novel, dating the genre back to the ancient Greek civilization, i.e. *Odyssey*). She argues that the novel originated from an ancient form of novel, which is romance and myth. According to Doody, the ancient novel is talking of human nature, and gods and goddesses sets the relationship of man to the divine (161-162). She, moreover, challenges the general tendency to view religious elements found in novels as draining the pleasure of novel-reading. She argues, instead, "Our suspicion of a religious 'meaning' or philosophical implication in a novel may increase our appreciation of its possible depths, but does not erase the surface or unweave the texture" (164). Of course, it is important to specify, once more, what we mean by religion and religious meaning. In this sense, she explains the religion of the novel as not a set of rules but rather the understanding of a life lived hermeneutically, that is as something with meaning for individuals." (171). The search for meaning in human life finds different forms and manifestations in the quest of an individual that are religious, spiritual, ethical aspects which are very readily subject matters of the novel. Thus, the novel cannot be discussed without this interrelation.

All in all, essentialist approaches with dichotomous classification of secular-religious prove wrong for the novel. Those fall reductionist vis-à-vis the vast realm of the genre accommodating the representation of life in all dimensions. In order to pave the ground for the Islamic context in discussing the genre, I would like to briefly introduce an Islamic view of literature in the following.

1.2. Islam and Literature, and the Muslim Novel

At first sight, one might think that Islam is not welcoming of poetry as there is a chapter in the Qur'an named *Al Shuara* (The Poets), as the following verses of which state:

> [And] shall I tell you upon whom it is that those evil spirits descend? They descend upon all sinful self-deceivers who readily lend ear [to every falsehood], and most of whom lie to others as well. And as for the poets [they, too, are prone to deceive themselves: and so, only] those who are lost in grievous error would follow them. Art thou not aware that they roam confusedly through all the valleys [of words and thoughts], and that they [so often] say what they do not do [or feel]? [Most of them are of this kind] save those who have attained to faith, and do righteous deeds, and remember God unceasingly, and defend themselves [only] after having been wronged, and [trust in God's promise that] those who are bent on wrongdoing will in time come to know how evil a turn their destinies are bound to take! (*The Qur'an* Al Shuaraa 26:221-227).

These verses frankly announce poets as deceivers. With reference to this verse, some Muslims tend to regard poetry as prohibited altogether. However, a close look at the next verse is necessary to grasp this phenomenon better. The activity of 'roaming confusedly' is explained by Muhammad Asad, one of the most significant interpreters of *the Qur'an* to English language, as:

> The idiomatic phrase *ohama fi widyan* (lit. "he wandered" or "roamed" through valleys) is used … to describe a confused or aimless – and often self-contradictory – play with words and thoughts. In this context it is meant to stress the difference between the precision of the Qur'an, which is free from all inner contradictions, and the vagueness often inherent in poetry (641: note 100)

Seyyid Hussein Nasr, et. al, on the hand, gives a more profound elaboration, on the aforementioned verse, explaining what poetry meant in the Arabic socio-cultural context of the Arabs at the time that is referred to as The Age of Ignorance:

> The Quran distances itself from *shi'ir*, usually rendered poetry and from the accusation that the Prophet was a poet (21:5; 36:69; 37:36; 52:30; 69:41). In pre-Islamic Arabia a poet (*sha'ir*) was not merely a person who composed verse, but rather one who was part of a spectrum of supernaturally affected individuals that included soothsayers (sing. *kahin*) and those who were possessed or mad (sing. *majnun*), as described in 52:29-30: *So remind, for thou art not, by the Blessing of thy Lord, a soothsayer or one possessed. Or do they say, let us await the vagaries of fate for him.* Soothsayers claimed openly and directly to have contact with jinn or satans and typically served an oracular function predicated on their ability to communicate with unseen forces who could convey information from the unseen world (*ghayb*). Poets did not serve this function, but their

> imaginative powers were often associated with inspiration from the same kind of otherworldly or magical source. That is to say, it was the widely accepted source and function of poetry in the Age of Ignorance (*al-jahiliyyah*) that was the point of contention between the Prophet and the idolaters who accused him of being a poet. When the Quran distances itself from poetry, it is not to deny that the Quran has identifiable formal beauty, as many of its sections reflect the highest poetic eloquence, or that it employs allegory and symbolism and so has much overlap with what anyone would call poetry. It is rather to say that in the context of the Arabia in which the Quran was revealed, calling someone a *sha'ir* or calling some text *shi'ir* suggested a source other than God or the *Trustworthy Spirit* mentioned in v. 193. That is to say that *sha'ir* and *shi'ir* as used at the time of the Quranic revelation do not correspond exactly to poet and poetry as those words are used in English today.

Nasr et. Al continue:

> At another level, poets were also associated with vulgarity and with many of the worst aspects of tribal culture, such as vainglory, intemperance, lust, and combativeness. Al-Razi reflects upon this passage by noting that the poets would fashion words in praise of someone one day and then say the opposite the next day to a different audience. They would rhetorically savage a person for the smallest fault of an ancestor, while committing all manner of sin themselves. Al-Quraubi points out that in the tradition poetry is considered a special kind of speech, which can be either good or bad, beautiful or ugly, but he notes that pre-Islamic Arab poets would versify for money to whatever purpose the customer wished, whether true or false. There were exceptions, such as the pre-Islamic poet Labid, some of whose poems the Prophet praised. Some say that *the errant* refers to the aforementioned satans (v. 221) or the rhapsodists, individuals whose function it was to memorize and transmit the compositions of poets. Other opinions say they are idolaters or misguided people in general (323).

Firstly, during the time of Prophet Muhammad the artistic quality of the text would strike the unbelievers when he began to convey messages of the Qur'an. In their rejection of Muhammad's prophethood, they denied the divine origin of the Qur'an claiming it to be poetry by Muhammad, whom they slandered as insane. These verses are an allusion to and a condemnation of their deceptive claims. In addition, this explanation is significant in another sense. It sums up the essential stance of the Qur'an and, therefore, Islam towards poetry. The difference is that the word of God is precise, coherent and unchanging whilst poetry is susceptible to illusions, contradictions and the fallacy of men. Therefore, the distinction is clear, *the Qur'an* is far above any piece of literature. Besides, for a literature to be named Islamic, Qur'anic principles are a prerequisite.

The second essential source after the holy Qur'an on which Islamic ethics is built is the Hadith, the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad which have survived through narration. Like quoted from Nasr et. al. above, Prophet Muhammad liked and prasied the poems of Labid who wrote nice poetry about his prophethood.. Hence it is not literature, i.e. poetry, in particular that is reproachable, but the ethical backdrop behind the literary production. As long as it does not ‘roam confusedly in the valley of delusions’ with a blindness to the oneness of God, but emanates from the right ethos, it is praised. Indeed, there is an established culture of *Mevlit* amongst Muslims, a long biographical poem of the Prophet’s life, which is a central part of widespread communal celebratory ceremonies. Another example which Gafaiti points to is the text of *Al-Isra wa al-miraj* which is considered to be written by Ibn’ Abbas. Gafaiti links this work to the Qur’anic verse on Miraj, the Prophet’s ascension to the Heavens:

> Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [,at Jerusalem] - the environs of which We had blessed - so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing. (*The Qur’an* Al Israa 17:1)

This is the only verse referring to a miracle in the Qur’an which inspired the above mentioned literary piece on eschatology (48). This is an example, as in the case of the Bible, that the Qur’an set an origin for a literary paradigm. Gafaiti argues that the Qur’an in regard to literature is significant for it is the first text “fixing the Arabic language in a textual form” (46). In that sense, it wouldn’t be wrong to say it is revolutionary and formative for literature in Arabic. However, Islam’s cautious approach to poetry, for its dangers of deception and illusion, suggests a clear-cut distinction of man-made literature in relation to the Qur’an. Besides, to talk of any intertextuality with reference to the Qur’an the Islamic ideal would require submission of the superiority of the word of God, as it cannot be questioned. Gafaiti sums this up as “the sacred text cannot be considered a cultural and literary phenomenon or a set of semi-mythical expressions produced in a particular socio-historical context in the sense that Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silbermann interpret the Biblical epic in *The Bible Unearthed*” (47). The stances of *the Bible* and *the Qur’an* are obviously different by nature, and as Islamic thinking emphasizes the superiority and inimitability of the word of God, the Qur’an is always placed above the words of men. Therefore, there seems to be a larger gap between the holy text and literature in the Islamic understanding of man-made literature in terms of imitability, than that of the Biblical narrative legacy and its successors. However, there is also a need to remind oneself of the similarity that was cited in the case of the Biblical narrations. Ricoeur suggests that all the divine narratives have the potential to shape human experience by setting paradigms of experience in narrative. In all holy texts, the stories of prophets and other significant figures are related. Therefore, both the Biblical texts and *the Holy Qur'an* make use of narratives to relate the life stories of the prophets. Thus, both texts set a preliminary paradigm for the succeeding cultural narrations as well which eventually evolved towards the genre, novel. In other words, the novel cannot be comprehended without the holy scripts of revelation that had set an authorial narrative paradigm for fictional narrative of religio-cultures.

This evolution of narrative fiction in Islamic literatures, generally, has shown one unchanging objective and was judged by one essential feature that was its intent. It is the fundamental principle of Islamic teachings of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil as found in this verse: "You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong" (*The Qur'an* Al Imran 3:110). This intent as the backdrop has set the main paradigm in the production of fictions, like in the *sufi* literature of *masnawis*, or folk stories with morals.

The narratives of prophets' lives or other figures like Pharaoh present lessons for Muslims. Also, the uses of metaphors and similes in Qur'anic verses are usually followed by a verse explaining the objective behind the use of these figures of speech: "Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for those who can read the signs" (*The Qur'an* 15:75). Such uses figures of speech are always followed with a clarifying message to provoke thinking and reasoning. The principle behind these usages and the general objective of messages can be viewed in sum in the following verse of *Surah al-Yusuf* which relates the story of the Prophet Yusuf (Joseph):

> Indeed, in the stories of these men there is a lesson for those who are endowed with insight. [As for this revelation,] it could not possibly be a discourse invented [by man]: nay indeed, it is [a divine writ] confirming the truth of whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations], clearly spelling out everything, and [offering] guidance and grace unto people who will believe. (*The Qur'an* 12:111)

Asad appends a note explaining the 'everything' here as meaning "everything that man may need for his spiritual welfare" (397, note 111). We can clearly deduct a similar pattern in the literature that springs from the Qur'anic culture and Muslim societies. In that, the literature is an instrument to continue or generate from the

Qur'anic tenet – a call to what is right and prohibiting what is evil as well as inviting to spiritual enhancement - is conveyed and yet it is also wherein also an endeavor to build on the narrative legacy.

Imagining such a literary convention, the novel that is produced with an Islamic Weltanschauung is conceivably to interpret the genre with such an ethical perspective. I suggest there is no harm in envisioning a novel written in a Muslim discourse with religious concerns outweighing artistic ones. In this sense, Islamic legacy has shown that literature is a space where theology can be reflected, and the example of *Hayy Ibn Yakdhan* shows even theosophy can be discussed in a form similar to novels.

The twelfth century Islamic philosophers like Ibn Tufail and Ibn-i Sina (Aben Tofail and Avicenna) who had great influence on both Islamic and the Western civilizations wrote a piece of philosophical fiction, which in English is called *The Improvement of Human Reason: Exhibited in the life of Hayy Ibn Yakdhan*. In this novel-like fiction, an infant finds himself being raised by a deer on a wild island. The story tells of his exploration of the physical world around him with wild animals as well as nature. However, the essential part of the story is how he yearns to understand his own nature as he distinguishes himself from the animals, by his reasoning. He questions what makes him alive, what supports life and the nature to live on, and what created it in the first place. He eventually finds his God, the omnipotent Creator and establishes his faithful connection with the God. Evan Goodman suggests that Hayy's question revolves around the essence of human existence and he figures out that the essence is not a material one (192). His answers are given in a detailed narrative of his experience on the island on his own. His reason speaks to him and the narrative of the stoy is based on the philosophical and theosophical discussion that Hayy goes through. This piece of philosophical narration may have a great influence on Western philosophy, Enlightenment thinking and even the novel. If we consider Hayy bin Yakdhan as an early novel, as some suggest, it is evidence of how the pliable genre novel is compatible with religious thought and themes as Islamic literature is towards the genre novel. The example of *Hayy* foreshadows that the novel is a genre adaptable to different religio-cultures, not exclusively to the Western industrial society and Enlightenment philosophy but a universal genre construed with different formations.

In that sense, novels of distinct cultures and times should be read in their own right, not essentially with a single set of paradigms determined by one culture and its monolithic epistemology. Given this, in the following, I will attempt to debate major criticism on the first novels of Turkish literature, namely Jale Parla's, one of the primary references of early modern Turkish literary criticism. I argue, alternative approaches with a broader horizon to the novels – of Ahmet Midhat's in particular- will help us better comprehend these novels, especially through drawing from the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin.

1.3. The Novel in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Context

In Turkish literary history and criticism, the first Turkish novels from an Ottoman context are generally referred to as 'imperfect'[3] since they are a Western import which did not organically grow in/from the social developments like those in the West. The socio-cultural conditions in the West cultivated the ground for the typical novel, while Turkish novels are regarded as immature attempts of imitations since they lack the same social conditions. Approaches like this one dominate Turkish literary criticism, according to Nurdan Gürbilek's words, which she terms a criticism of lack:

> …an impasse in our reading practices. Criticism in Turkey—not only social and cultural criticism but also literary criticism—is mostly the criticism of a lack, a critique devoted to demonstrating what Turkish society, culture, or literature lacks. Thus statements of lack (''We don't have a novel of our own'' or similarly ''We don't have a tragedy, a criticism, a philosophy, or an individual of our own'') are typical of a critical stance that positions itself from the very start as a comparative one, presuming that it becomes convincing only when it talks about something the ''other'' has but ''we'' don't have, pointing out to the persistent lack, the irremovable deficiency, the unyielding inadequacy of its object: Turkish culture (599).

This 'impasse' in our approach to Turkish literature gets darkest in our criticism of the early modern Turkish literature, particularly the Ottoman novel, which, under the discussion of Westernization presumes nothing but the ideal Western paradigm which the Ottoman intelligentsia strived towards, yet insufficiently. This attitude overshadows the object of study at hand: the Ottoman novel.

Some of Jale Parla's arguments in her book *Fathers and Sons: The Epistemological Foundations of Tanzimat Novel* take a similar stance to what Gürbilek calls criticism of lack/deficiency. Parla's beautifully crafted metaphor of fatherless

[3] See "Novel" *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire.* Eds. Agoston, Gabor. Masters, Bruce. New York: Facts on File, 2009.

sons of the declining Ottoman Empire detects a pattern of the *Tanzimat* protagonists who are deprived of the fatherly authority that had been omnipresent until the *Tanzimat*, through the bright years of the Empire. The intelligentsia, by writing novels, take their pains to 'father' the Ottoman society which is in a state of intellectual orphanhood under the effects of Westernization by the bombarding influence of a 'progressed' and fancy, temporal culture. Yet, Parla's arguments are not limited to the father role of the intellectuals/writers; she discusses the intellectual deficiency of those, the epistemological boundaries, "even the most modernists of all did not acquire the spirit of the scientific revolution" (40). While raising this argument, it is obvious that Parla has the Western paradigm of epistemology as the ideal in mind that is positivist and empiricist, therefore thoroughly secular. Parla summarizes the Ottoman mindset as constructed by scholastic thinking, which does not accommodate philosophy at all and the attempts are doomed to be under the control of 'the absolute text' (27-8). By the absolute text, she apparently means *the Qur'an*; while, in her argumentation she refers to the sharia principles that seemed to govern the modernization processes. She quotes Ahmet Midhat's view of sharia found in *Müşahedat*: "*Shariah* regulation has designed the law for and duties of everyone, in accordance with reason, wisdom and affairs". From this approach, we inevitably infer what Parla's point that Ahmet Midhat and others did not fully appreciate the Western sciences and the ways of progress, thus they did not achieve the ideal state of modernization, as reflected in the examples of the genre they produced.

Şeyda Başlı, in her *Osmanlı Romanının İmkanları Üzerine* [On the Possibilities of the Ottoman Novel] gives an account of different approaches in critiquing the Ottoman novel. According to her classification, one of them is the view which regards the Ottoman novel as imitating the Western novel, whereas the other one puts forward that the novels were utilized as political instruments rather than being artistic productions. Başlı states that the two dominating approaches tend to diminish the value of the Ottoman novel in itself (8), a critique similar to what Gürbilek termed as criticism of lack. Başlı also observes that the over-emphasis on the 'belatedness, insufficiency' of the Ottoman novel, together with its historically 'foreign' origin, does not perfectly fit the Republican discourse of the process of a secular nation-state building in Turkey. It endeavored to find a balanced synthesis of East-West, therefore Islam and secularity, whereby it was Islamic culture on which the content was based. This did not go hand in hand with the emphasis on a modern and secular state and because of this the Ottoman novel was distanced from the Republican discourse (19-20).

All in all, the criticism seems to be dominated by the presence of a Western paradigm for the genre which does not help unfold the indigenous story of Ottoman novel. The discussion of the early novels entails an understanding of its own socio-cultural history and its due realities of the time it was born in. This comes across as a bias which ignores how peculiarly the Ottoman writers handled the genre in their native social reality in general. Besides, the Ottoman intelligentsia who produced examples of the genre had different political and ideological orientations. Those, namely, Namık Kemal, Şemsettin Sami, Ahmet Midhat, Recaizade Ekrem, and Mizancı Murad have produced one or more novels with distinct concerns and purposes and followed different paradigms in literary formation. Accounting all their works as though from a single, monolithic and rigid mindset with the same agenda does not uncover the individual contribution and approach of every writer. This is, rather, a sweeping generalization. However, given the rapidly changing political/intellectual/cultural atmosphere of the turbulent era, each man of literature coped with the Ottoman reality and challenges in his own way and from differing perspectives, thus, formulating different answers regarding encounter with the West. In addition, it is unfair to not distinguish Ahmet Midhat, who generated over thirty novels, from all the others who wrote only one or a couple of works in the genre. Ahmet Midhat made exclusive effort for the novel, towards setting a model for the upcoming literary generation, with all quantity of his production as well as his experimentations with the genre.

The main question that would be raised at this point is whether these novels were the products of a settled epistemology that had been retained from the previous ages. Or, we are talking about a Zeitgeist constituting from paradigmatic and epistemological changes, an age of transformation facing external influences; in other words, a era of crisis and transition. The transitional period in a changing world marked the quests for making sense of the newly presented challenges rather than unwavering continuation of the tradition.

Ahmet Midhat's pace in his production of both non-fictional writing and numerous novels one after another, is in parallel with the pace of change in every aspect of life in this era. His scale of themes and issues that he covered, also, illustrate the variety of challenges of the time. Given the multiplicity of representations and formal variety in his literary expression, I will utilize Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel to apprehend the scope of Ahmet Midhat's novel discourse and his unique adaptation of the genre into Ottoman.

Ahmet Midhat's personality is best described with the versatility he sustained his life as an author, as well his novel. For this fact, his novel entails an approach which will elaborate on his versatility rather than accentuating what the novels lacked. To that end, Bakhtin's theory will be instrumental with his emphasis on the vast dialogic potential of the genre in accommodating distinct voices and discourses.

In his book *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin says:

> The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making: it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world an in total affinity with it (7).

In this statement, the key phrase is "a new world still in the making". From *Tanzimat* to the late nineteenth century is especially the time that was 'a new world' in the making. It should not be a coincidence that the novel entered the Ottoman sphere out of a demand for new forms of literary expression. Bakhtin's passage refers to the general account of modernity from which the novel is the literary outcome as a genre. Considering this statement in a more specific sense, novels of different languages are also products of different cultures, in their unique contexts. It is inferable from Bakhtin that each novel carries the nature of the encounter with modernity of the particular culture wherein it is written. Thus each indigenous novel is the product of a distinct story regarding modernity that is reflected in and made the novel, like in the case of the nineteenth century Turkish novel. The Ottoman encounter with modernity has different layers; at the international level, it is the confrontation with the West that was expanding imperially and growing fast industrially challenging the Ottoman in terms of power, politics, and economy. At an internal level, the wavering power status of the Ottomans resulted in intellectual crisis, not only due to the intensifying Western Orientalist discourse -which colonizes in an intellectual sense, but also a sense of defeat having lost the status of a great power. Just as the Western novels cannot be placed without reference to the rise of the middle class or Charles Dickens' novels cannot be truly appreciated without knowing the facts of the industrial revolution, the Ottoman novel cannot be appropriated unless its lived reality is taken into account.

Bakhtin also notes that the literary critics attempt to recognize the novel as a completed genre with fixed standards, like other genres, which, he argues, fail to draw a comprehensive picture of its nature (*Ibid*). This is a breakthrough refuting those, which see the novel as monolithic and fixed with criteria such as in the classical sense of literary theory, such as drama. Bakhtin's theory has broadened the scope which literary critics handle the novel. He puts forward the open-ended story of the novel as a genre:

> The process of the novel's development has not yet come to an end. It is currently entering a new phase. For our area is characterized by an extraordinary complexity and a deepening in our perception of the world; there is an unusual growth in demands on human discernment, on mature objectivity and the critical faculty. These are the features that will shape the further development of the novel as well (40).

Here, he views the novel as an incomplete genre without fixed, closed-ended standards like other genres. This view renders the attempts to critique novels assuming fixed standards unhelpful. In other words, given the dynamic open-endedness of the genre, the novels are the products of different cultural contexts. Given this, they should be approached within their indigenous complexities and realities, by which I refer to the nineteenth century Ottoman complexities in all aspects of life. The novel critique of the works that emerged based on the cosmic realities of the nineteenth century's chaotic Ottoman society should bear the unique approach towards the goal of understanding this particular period of the genre in its history of development and each writer, according to his own personal and ideological accounts.

Bakhtin's term *heteroglossia* is one of his significant contributions to the theory of the novel, with which Ahmet Midhat's novels become more meaningful. He sets this as one of the distinguishing features of the novel which he describes as:

> The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, language of the authorities of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of

objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. (263)

Dialogism is the main aspect that Bakhtin's ascribes to the novel, which is described as the epistemological mode wherein everything is a constituent of a greater whole and wherein meaning is interactive with other meanings conditioning one another (426). In a sense, dialogism and the dialogic imagination disables any presumed fixity and monolithic perspective in criticism.

In his *Ahbar-ı Asara Tamim-i Enzar*, Ahmet Midhat detected the purpose of the genre as to set the certain time and space and portray the people of that time with their inclinations and customs (66-7). It is apparent that the novelist did so representing the diversity of people and trends in his time. Fatih Altuğ on Ahmet Midhat's collection of stories, *Letaif-i Rivayat* says that presenting it is one of the functional milieus of *Letaif-i Rivayat* to present the social context of the story whereby it is produced (51). In light of this, the novel becomes a platform where the new challenges and phenomena find a place for utterance, those related to the Western encounter, be it social, cultural, intellectual or epistemological. For instance, in his endeavor to formulate between his tradition and the modern challenges, Ahmet Midhat confronted different meanings i.e. traditional Islamic vs. modern European (which will be discussed in the next chapter). He seems to have – arguably- reconciled the two different discursive inclinations, i.e. on one side the traditional and moralist discourse, on the other the Western progressivist, thus seemingly secular. This resulted in him being referred to as searching for the right blend of Western and Ottoman values. Inasmuch as it is disputable if such a blend was possible or Ahmet Midhat accomplished it, it is evident that the genre is capable of accommodating varying discourses. Each of Ahmet Midhat's novels demonstrate the transitional discourses, quests for novice answers, the ideological tides of through the decades as he writes on. Jale Parla argues:

> The need for agreement, the urge for a coming to a concluding judgment renders Ahmet Midhat's dialogue one step behind a Bakhtinian dialogism; his purpose is to edify, instruct, unite and guide. Language is a means for communication to him. He is sure of the communicative power and the representative role of the language. He pursues his dialogue with an open mind; he makes sure he concludes it with a final statement, not at a point where that statement is not, or cannot be made (*Don Kişot* 79-80).

Although Ahmet Midhat's essential characteristic is his guiding authorial tone, in addition to giving his reader closed-ended formulation in regard to what is good and what is wrong, it should also be noted that he himself as an author sought answers and conclusions which vary from one novel to other. In that sense, his collection looked at in its totality offers a *heteroglossia* of moral statements varying from one context to the other in different contexts offered in the novelistic realm. All in all, Ahmet Midhat's novel deserves what Bakhtin suggests in the following: "In any objective stylistic study of novels from distant epochs it is necessary to take this process continually into consideration, and to rigorously coordinate the style under consideration with the background of heteroglossia, appropriate to the era, that dialogizes it" (422). Though Parla's detection that Ahmet Midhat's representation of distinct speeches and utterances is very restricted or inverted, Bakhtin's statement here is also notable, that novels from distant epochs should be approached through the possibilities of *heteroglossia* that the literary era allowed the novelists to be performed. In this light, I see Ahmet Midhat's endevour as an introduction of heteroglossic representations into the Turkish novel. It is true that he does not leave any conclusion open-ended, rather gives especially moral opinions and imposes them to the reader, but nevertheless his representation of different voices and viewpoints in the same narrative is very meaningful for the evolution of the Turkish novel. In other words, Ahmet Midhat's novels are not dialogic in the thorough sense of Bakhtin's, yet, it is the accommodating nature of the genre that made Ahmet Midhat choose to perform his eclectic discourse. He always concluded with one single voice which is usually didactic for the reader but he also showed the possibility of giving voice to different ideas, characters and ways of thought.

Speaking of Ahmet Midhat's versatility, it is important to keep in mind that he produced novels over a period of time that exceeds two decades. Even though Ahmet Midhat maintained certain aspects as an author the whole time, he does not remain static to changes stances, ideas and even ideologies. Noting what Bakhtin pointed out: "language of the authorities of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even the hour" (425). I attempt to assess Ahmet Midhat in three biographical phases as to his approach to religious matters. This is for the purpose of tracing the changes and re-accentuations[4] in his

[4] For Bakhtin's term re-accentuation see *The Dialogic Imagination*, 423.

discourse, the transformation of style, content in the novels and how conducive religion is in discourse. In doing so, it is also possible to view how differently he stands to the matter of religion, ethics and ideology. The phases will be elaborated in detail in the following chapter in light of some biographical synopsis through which I aim to make more sense of the transitional facets of his discourse.

There is another handicap in the criticism of Ottoman literature: the presumed proximity of the fictional and non-fictional works of the Ottoman intelligentsia. Relying on the fact that nineteenth century intellectuals used literature as instrumental in disseminating their ideological and political thought, critics count on the non-literary books/articles of the writers as a back-up while critiquing their literary works. Though this is oftentimes useful, it can also deflect the aim of literary criticism. For instance, in discussing the epistemology of novels, Parla makes several references to the non-literary works of both Namık Kemal and Ahmet Midhat. They wrote books in defense of Islam as a counter discourse to those written in the West attacking Islam. *Niza-ı İlm ü Din* by Ahmet Midhat or *Renan Müdafaanamesi* by Namık Kemal are two of these examples. Although these are beneficial to get the gist of the authors' ideological orientation, they can be misleading in understanding them as novelists. The novel is able to accommodate different voices and speeches dialogically, therefore its analysis should enquire what the genre has enabled them with, compared to the non-literary works, to comprehend better the purpose of their novel-writing and the discourse employed. In so doing, the history of novel will also reveal itself as to why a need emerged for the use the genre in the Ottoman context, as an ideological or an epistemological breakpoint.

Lastly, as was attempted to draw an epitome of the relation between religion and literature, and the novel in particular, the discussion in this study presumes the inevitable interaction between religious narrative, narratives of sacred texts and the novel genre. Parla thought of this interaction for the Ottoman novel in the pejorative sense due to, what she called, the control of the "absolute text" and because of the epistemological obstacles that its presence withheld in terms of the novelists writing the ideal novels. I argue the relation between the sacred and literary texts should be taken from a wider horizon in order for us as readers to be able to discuss dialectically how faith and religion was represented in an intertextuality. The religious legacy is certainly at work to shape the literary discourse, the imagination and the moral stance of the novels, like Fisch pointed out. To backtrack Ricoeur's views on the linkage of sacred and fictional narratives, he says in the heuristic nature of all narrative fictions, there is a passage from narrative to paradigm and from paradigm to life (146), which, therefore, suggests an incessant exchange.

To conclude, the novel as genre is to be understood in its terms of being a vast literary space which interacts and accommodates with multiple discursive formation, narrative forms and ideas, in exchange with the social reality of modernity in which it grows. The nineteenth century Ottoman atmosphere was a scenery where elements of the deep-seated tradition, which mostly derived from/with an Islamic frame, was colliding with the challenge of modernity, vis-à-vis a now-penetrating Western culture. The novel became a literary podium where this collision was displayed and also wherein it took place. The main paradigm dividing Ahmet Midhat from a Western novelist was the Weltanschauung that was Muslim by nature. Therefore, it was mainly the Islamic ethos that distinguished his novelistic discourse. However, this is not to sweepingly say that all his novels showed an Islamic framework. Rather, he is seen to incline towards a more secular formation in some novels, dealing with certain issues, while in others he is seen more Islamically-oriented and promoting of its teachings. Thus my aim is to examine each novel in terms of the representation of religion, the formative role of faith and the Qur'anic tenets in his works. Those examples which carry a more temporal-secular discursive framework will also be discussed so to lay out his versatility in his dialogic imagination. Prior to analyzing the novels in the light of this theoretical background, the next chapter is a brief survey of history of political and other transformation taking in the place in order to provide a historical sense of the social realities. A core biography of Ahmet Midhat will take place to trace certain phases of his life through which I looked at his approach as a novelist.

CHAPTER 2
RELIGION VS. MODERNIZATION IN LATE OTTOMAN HISTORY

The history of modernization for the Ottoman Empire is a complex subject for it brings controversial terms in its wake. The very usage of term "modernization" has been disputed for its presumption of a modern ideal on one hand, and a backward one on the other. Almost all alternate terms, i.e. Westernization, progress, *çağdaşlaşma* in Turkish (the word used commonly to translate modernization) views the Ottoman history as an endeavor towards reaching an ideal modern, namely Western one, innately suggesting the Western paradigm as ideal. Somel pointed out that the discrediting of terms, such as modern, modernization, and modernity derives from its presumed dichotomy of backward versus civilized. However, he suggests using these terms in his book on late Ottoman reforms because these were the exact meaning of the notions used by the Ottoman figures of the age (1). In this debate, Hanioğlu also emphasizes the futility of dichotomous thinking in historiography: "the simplistic picture of an uncompromising hostility to modernity confronting enthusiastic support for its wholesale adoption across an unbridgeable divide is to a large extent fiction" (4). The preference of one over the other is taking a "partisan position". Findley adds (2). The duality of East-West is certainly present in the reforms taking place in the nineteenth century; one side facing the West as the ideal model of power and progress and the other turned at the deep-seated Ottoman tradition which underpinned the Empire as the main Eastern power. It is nonetheless useful to remark how the dichotomy created between religious and secular is misleading, in light of İsmail Kara's following words: "In general, 'the modern' is, in one sense, opposite of 'the religious' … [w]e say, in one sense, because, in the Islamic world 'the modern' has become 'religious' too" (*Din ile Modernleşme* 14). In order to elaborate on this, I find Ismail Ragi al Faruqi's explication of Islam as a religion compared to Christianity useful: "Religion, itself … is not an act (the act of faith, or encounter with God, or of participation) but a dimension of every act. It is not a thing; but a perspective with which every thing is invested" ("History of religions" 37). In light of this definition, what Ismail Kara says becomes more meaningful; in the Islamic context, the tendency is that the modernization itself becomes a process governed by Islamic principles, rather than readily accepting of secular concepts and trends. However, this is not to say the modernization is a smooth process fitting the Islamic context; rather, it brings about paradigmatic and epistemological gaps, ethical clashes, and confusion.

One of the Ottoman bureaucrats sums the reformist endeavor up in this statement: “Islam was, for centuries, in its environment, a wonderful instrument of progress. Today it is a clock that is behind time and must be set” (qtd in *Turkey, Islam* Findley 76). This is an analogy demonstrating the seriousness of the paradigmatic crisis at stake. The West has become the model according to which ‘the clock’ had to be set. Talking about the experience of societies with a mentality rooted in Tradition, Daryush Shayegan describes the confrontation with modernity as “living through a time of different blocks of knowledge” and “trapped in a fault-line between incompatible worlds, worlds that mutually repel and deform one another” (vii). Like Fuat Paşa who said it was Islam is a clock behind, most of Ottoman statesmen and intelligentsia found themselves in this fault-line of two conflicting worlds and felt theirs was eroding.

The term Shayegan uses to refer to the phenomenal clash is ‘grafting’ “an – often unconscious - operation to bring together two unconnected worlds and integrate them into the coherent whole of a body of knowledge “… reconcile two different paradigms, old and new”. This grafting can work in two opposite ways as in the cases of Westernization and Islamization (76-7). I argue this grafting works in two ways in late Ottoman Empire especially under Abdulhamit II’s rule when both an acute transformation within the agenda of modernization took place, while Islamic political discourse intensified. This can be read as the counter discourse towards the secular, legitimizing the change associated with the West.

Hanioğlu argues that late Ottoman history should be comprehended with its twofold nature of changes, one in terms of modernization through adjusting to the Western model and the other terms of religious/traditional challenges to this modernity. In using the terms, modern, modernity and modernization vs. traditional, Islamic, traditional, I try to follow İsmail Kara’s approach which suggests that the two lines are present in our history and experience, and that they belong to this experience and should be taken into consideration. For without the prior experience, i.e. the tradition, the new/modern encounter cannot be fully comprehended (13).

2.1. Islam and in the Late Ottoman Period

The nineteenth century is figuratively called the longest century of the empire being the most turbulent period of the Ottoman State. The transformation in all aspects of life, such as political, socio-cultural, economic, ideological all signify a change in religious outlook. Altogether, this transformation is referred to as modernization, by some as secularization, which suggests an adjustment to the Western standards, i.e. Western Europe. It was the rising European powers which set the ideal for the contemporary in political, military, technological and cultural realm, whose expansion left the Empire behind on global arena of powers. The set of modernizing processes, according to Niyazi Berkes, started mostly by the beginning of the eighteenth century reaching a confused peak in the nineteenth century (*Çağdaşlaşma* 41, 244-8). Since the novels appeared mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century, the historical survey here will focus on this. This is to draw a framework of the era as to the discussion of religion/secularity as well as the cultural atmosphere out of which the novel arose.

Firstly, it is important to note that to summarize the history of 'modernization' of the Empire satisfactorily is next to impossible given the complexity of the issue. What I selectively try to do here is to look at certain major works discussing late Ottoman history with its relation to the transformation in religion as a concept and institution with the emergence of secularization. However, this is a complex job as Hanioğlu suggests: "Historical developments in the late Ottoman period did not stem from simple economic, social or cultural reasons, but were affected by all three" (3). I would like to draw attention to the constituent role of Islam in the Empire historically before it confronted "the secular" as a concept.

Niyazi Berkes's *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* which, despite the several criticisms it receives regarding historiography, is still the most comprehensive work on modernization of the late Ottoman period. To start with, Berkes comes up with a useful comparison between secularization in the context of a Christian society and that of a non-Christian society. According to him, the process of secularization in the latter entails "the conflict is often between the forces of tradition and the forces of change" (6). Secularization (or modernization to refer to the same thing, in this case), is to modify society or societal order with phenomena that is new to the tradition and in traditional societies which is by nature radical and most of the time unwelcome. The vision and function of the classical Ottoman state had long based itself on a tradition that was mostly based on or derived from Islamic principles. The tradition also required its people to abide by this tradition that is synonymous with one's faith. Another comparison by Berkes suggests the conceptions of the state in Christian and Islamic countries is that the Church and the state are separate forces, whereas Islam is the force intrinsically present in the formation and function of the state (7). Islam developed as a religio-political movement in which religion was integral to state and society (Esposito 3) - an aspect that was referred to in Faruqi's definition quoted above. In the traditional Ottoman discourse, the state is always referred to with religion, it is *din ü devlet (*state, religion) together. This conception proposes what is good for one's religion is good for the state, obedience or service to the state is service to the state, and vice-versa; they are existentially interconnected. This connection brings about a difficulty in discussing the role of religion; Berkes notes that 'tradition' and 'religion' are often confused and that what comes from tradition is usually regarded as religious and unquestionable. This is the underlying reason behind regarding Islam as an obstacle before reform, despite the fact that it was tradition which, by definition resists change (10). This makes it impossible to separate the two concepts in any discussion.

For the Middle Ages and on, the greatest dynamic of the Ottoman Sultanate was its geographical expansion which was attained through military power. Evidently, throughout the Middle Ages and even early modern to an extent, military expansion was the global measure of power. With the development of technology in weaponry and new military strategies, the Ottoman power started to fall behind and lost several battles throughout the eighteenth century. The twenty-eighth sultan of the Empire, Selim III was the first significant ruler to initiate military reform. The need arose as a priority due to consecutive defeats on the battlefields. An Ottoman officer, Hanioğlu, quotes, "although I have spent my life in the battlefield, the Christian skills at manufacturing weaponry and devising superior strategies are beyond my power" (43-4). This is an illustration of the extent to which the Ottomans experienced defeat when it started to lose on the battlefield. The sense of defeat rapidly interpenetrated other aspects including an intellectual sense of defeat that was felt at all levels including thought (Kara 20-1). Selim brought up a series of reforms named *Nizam-ı Cedid* (the New Order) which mostly launched military reforms, which would later lead to the dismissal of the Janissaries (44). As the first attempt, Selim III established Royal College of Naval Engineering where French instructors were appointed and the language of instruction was French. He launched structural changes, as well, under which he also formed a new ministry called Trained Infantry Troops to monitor reform processes. When the New Order produced better outcomes, and improved the failing situation, it was a confirmation for the upcoming reforms (Hanioğlu 45).

The reform processes permeated different aspects such as the state, legislation and education through which influence on society augmented. Shaw and Çetinsaya sum up the schema of reforms in the following: "an administrative centralization process began along with military modernization. Military modernization in turn gave way to bureaucratic, administrative and legal modernization, and the state underwent a period of Westernization in political, social, economic, and cultural fields throughout the nineteenth century" ("Ottoman Empire"). It is useful at this point to look at how certain terms, conceptions, and statuses altered under the influence of transformations.

The Ottoman Sultan was, besides being the head of the Empire, the caliph, the religious head of the rest of the Islamic world. The caliphate is the religious status that the Ottoman sultans attained and maintained throughout the Empire which is another indication of the twofold nature of the state, *din ü devlet*. The caliphate as a rank was taken by the Ottoman sultan in the sixteenth century (Karpat 241). This served the Empire's objective of expansion broadening its legitimacy outside its borders towards other Muslim lands, and augmenting its power in the perception of the Christian world as well. The caliphate granted the state an abiding power that was to the advantage of the Empire's longstanding power, especially for the times it was politically weakened during the reign of some impotent sultans, as Berkes points out (146). This shows religious authority was underpinning the Empire's global power. The Caliphate would increase the Empire's merit outside the borders, as the Caliph was a figure the Western powers also recognized; Berkes quotes Comte who is questioning why the Empire is still holding despite 'the most shaking throne'. The answer is the power of the caliphate (146-147). Although many sultans used the caliphate as a rank, it was Abdulhamid II who built an exclusive tradition around it. He himself called it "The Shelter of the Caliphate" (Hanioğlu 128). Karpat explains Abdulhamid's objective was to "to turn the caliphate into a *de jure* universal Muslim institution (241). In Abdulhamid's case, who used religious discourse more overtly, the caliphate is not only a sultanate phenomenon but also a means towards his pan-Islamist ideology that expands beyond the Ottoman territory that he ruled. The second powerful figure after the Sultan-caliph was the *Şeyhülislam*, a religious authority actively involved in state politics.

Şeyhülislam (shaikh al-Islam) was the administrative authority who represented the *shariah*, i.e. jurisdiction, and was responsible of solving state and societal issues relating to Islamic law which granted him a judicial power. İlber Ortaylı states *şeyhülislam* gained its important position in administration starting from the sixteenth century onwards. Prior to that, they would not engage in state-related issues or law, whereas in the sixteenth century the *Şeyhülislam* was asked to solve legal and social cases. It was until the nineteenth century, Ortaylı continues, that this authority continued to increase "religious pressure", when *şeyhülislam* lost this large power, the second coming after the Sultan's (139). During Mahmut II's reign, this changed: his significant authority was limited by Mahmud. It was modified into a position as the religious official of the Muslim *millet* (religious community), resembling the religious leader of the other non-Muslim religious *millet*s. Berkes argues that this is the point where the split between the state and religion started. This separation was pregnant with the dichotomy of religious and secular that was to emerge (175).

Speaking of legal modernization, the classical Ottoman law abode by *sharia* and it also allowed space for non-Muslims to follow their own law. Nevertheless, non-Muslims were not equal before the state law which created unease among non-Muslim millets especially after their contact started with the West. The *Ulama* was a class which was supposed to address religious issues according to Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*. At the turn of the nineteenth century, as they failed to accommodate solutions for even simple issues, they started losing their repute (Hanioğlu 19). The years following these changes, along with reforms in the legal system, a separation between the notions as *shariah* and justice emerged, which is another dichotomy parallel to the religious and secular. A novice notion of equality rose that concerned all subjects' equality before the law regardless of their religion, and sects which was different from the *shariah* law which gave the Muslim subject a privileged status. This was seen as an secular concept of justice, which led to a separate conception of justice from the traditional one. This Berkes sees as the *main* starting point of secularization (175), though it is debatable.

These were attempts and processes of reforms mostly actualized within the first half of the nineteenth century, widely referred to as the *Tanzimat*, after the *Tanzimat* Edict that was declared in 1839. Hanioğlu, who describes the Edict as the first of its kind by then, sums up the innovations it brought in the following: "[it] promised new laws guaranteeing life and property rights, prohibiting bribery, and regulating the levying of taxes and the conscription and tenure of soldiers" (72), starting a period whereby the duality of old and modern, religious and secular became bolder. The edict, which was a hasty move towards a modern state, also left many issues vague, Berkes remarks. For instance, even though the Edict shows features like a constitution, it is not a thorough constitution (214). And Hanioğlu draws attention to its preamble where the main cause of the problems is declared to be "not following the Quran and *shariah"* (72). Abadan, on the other hand, detects that the initial decree which was presented with this preamble in a ceremony showed little references to religious issues; however, its final version had a lot more of those. He interprets these to be cosmetic additions in order to avoid *ulama* declaring the edict as an infidel imitation (qtd in Hanioğlu 73). This is another illustration of the oscillation between the duality, which makes it impossible to describe the edict coherently with a single characteristic.

Berkes classifies the complications which the *Tanzimat* secular and religious institutions had as follows:

> there was no autonomous development in the religious institution, (b) the secularization of the state took place in the form of a duality, or dichotomy, within the cultural institutions not in the form of a state and church duality, and (c) the state became increasingly devoid of a national substratum, hence of a popular basis. Remove from its traditional foundations, the state remained baseless in a constitutional sense and rootless in a national sense (159).

Very visibly, this sense of rootlessness was a threat for the unity and integrity of the Empire, echoing what Shayegan pointed out as: "bringing together two unconnected worlds and integrate them". The classical tradition had built itself on a religious-Islamic formation, however a wavering move towards modernization through Westernization, i.e. the infidel Christian, presumably created unease on a religious level. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Western penetrated all aspects of life, education, social and cultural, which Şerif Mardin describes as excessive Westernization. However, at the same time, religion was so deep-rooted in the culture and religious affiliation had been the essential constituent of identity; because of that it is not entirely true to use the term excessive Westernization synonymously with secularization.

Speaking of identity, the rise to nationalism globally reflected on the Empire too, rising among the Ottoman *millet*s that had lived together, Christians, Jews, Muslims of the ethnicities other than the Ottoman Turks and Sunni sect. Through the course of reform processes, the Muslim-Turk *millet*, the main *millet*, was appalled with the failures – especially economic - and the weak status of the Empire before the European countries, and the slow loss of independency. Besides, upon the exposure to the Western economic developments, a bourgeois class arose in the Greek and Armenian communities. Had the same happen in the Muslim-Turk community as well, this would work as a communicative means between the people and the ruling class, yet this was not happening under their circumstances (Berkes 246).

Finally, in 1876, Abdulhamid II came to the throne, to some extent pulling things together for the regime with a more religious outlook. İsmail Kara puts *İttihad-ı İslam* (The Union of Islam) politics released the international tension and augmented the power of the State during the Hamidian reign (26). These politics deepened the dichotomic formulation of the religious-secular while at the same time reforms continued.

In fact, Findley summarized his image very effectively: “No Ottoman ruler left a more controversial legacy. [He] was a bloodthirsty tyrant to some, to others the most legitimate, prestigious Muslim sovereign of his day” (133). He came to the throne raising hopes for the bureaucrats like Mithat Paşa as a sultan who would fulfill the dream of a constitutional regime. Midhat Paşa was disappointed as a short-term attempt for constitutionalism ended up in autocracy and centralization of power went to the sultanate. We should note that the essence of constitutionalism depended on who uses it towards what purpose. For instance, as Hanioğlu accounts:

> The *ulema* viewed constitutionalism principally as a means of regaining political power. Symbolic of the growing influence of the *ulema* on the movement as a whole was the shift from the initial secular depiction of *nizam-ı serbestane* (free order) to the more Islamic *usul-i meşveret* (system of consultation) paying tribute to the Islamic concept of *mashwarah* (consultation) (113).

Thus even the enterprises that were initially secular in nature were given an Islamic outlook by *ulema* or religious bureaucrats. This we cannot call conservatism, yet more an endeavor to Islamize the reform processes so that it does not look as an infidel practice In that sense, besides Abdulhamid’s label as an Islamist sultan, his was also an era when modernization in all aspects was accomplished, and which Stanford Shaw calls the culmination of *Tanzimat* (172).

Şerif Mardin describes Abdulhamid II’s adherence to Islamic ideas in two motives: first Islam would work as a ‘flag’ under which his public can be gathered; second, he can offer Islam by non-Ottoman Muslims around it to fight imperialism (14 ds). Deringil analyzes Abdulhamid's symbols of power in his acclaimed book *The Well Protected Domains* which are symbols used to strengthen and sustain his ideology throughout the Empire. He categorizes these into four, three of which are apparently utilizing religious elements:

> [first] the symbols relating to the *sacrality* of the person of the sultan/*caliph*, such as coats of arms on public buildings, such as coats of arms on public buildings, official music, ceremonies ... [second] the more specific and personal manifestations of imperial munificence such as decorations, specially donated copies of the *Quran*, third ... religiously symbolic items acquired by the palace such as calligraphy purported to belong to Islamic great men... (21)

The Hamidian regime which acquired systematic use of Islam as an ideology, i.e. Islamism, is when we start to talk about religion as an ideology. One of the explanations for this would be the rising nationalism which gave an ideological form even to those identities which are based on religion. Besides, Abdulhamid II came at a time when the Empire was trying hard to survive its European rivals, he rose to power as the 'savior' of the country. The greatest umbrella under which to gather people to that end was Islam. It was the empowering for the State, an indispensably sacred cause to unite for, for the Muslims. Likewise, the religion ideally had the potential to expand beyond the borders uniting with other – non-Ottoman- Muslims. In Findley's words, he was the authority figure for Muslims who would put into effect such Quranic tenets as "Obey God and His Prophet and those in authority among you", a verse that decorated the Military Academy flag during the Hamidian reign (148). This is apparently an example of symbols of power that was embellished by religious ingredients that Deringil referred to. Findley also lists what Abdülhamid adhered to as the imperatives of survival of the state: 'Islam, the dynasty, Istanbul as the capital, and the Holy Cities of Mecca-Medina' (149) two of which are overtly religious: Islam and the holy cities. The other two had to also stay linked to the sacredness of religion; the head of the dynasty should maintain the caliphate and the capital Istanbul should serve as a capital to all Muslims towards the Pan-Islamist cause. For that purpose, Abdulhamid pursues the Hijaz Railway project which connects Istanbul with those holy cities which would facilitate the pilgrimage path for the Ottoman Muslims as well as other Muslims. Georgeon describes this 'holy railway' as the most explicit sign of progress: "such a symbol: train whistles merging with azan sound in the station of Mecca" (413) which is dramatically brought the state and the religion together.

All these religiously-imbued objectives and symbols rendered Abdulhamid an Islamist sultan. However, this intensity in religious discourse, especially in an age of modern progress makes the line between religion and politics very blurred. It is historically evident in the Ottoman context that the two were already organically blended. According to Mardin, the Hamidian era was when Western thinking started spreading wide for Abdulhamid took the West as his model. The young generation in this period appreciated and admired the West for the power it carried due to its progress in positive sciences. Power was the most important quality for this youth, and religion was important, only as long as it provided a national power (15). This is another argument pointing to a shift in the view of religion along with reformations. Modernization and nationalist trends rising globally and the survival policy of the sultan gave religion, a more political outlook underpinning the state's power. Interestingly enough, Hanioğlu reports that in spite of this Islamist outlook, Islamist intellectuals underwent oppression and censorship under the Hamidian regime. He restricted many *ulema* in fear of them legitimizing opposition to his regime. Religious debates were, too, restricted.

As previously mentioned, education was the essential and crucial area where reforms and the implementations and the change was to be traced. It is the social instrument through which the changes in the ideology was promulgated to its people. In that sense, it would not be wrong to say the reform interpenetrated the Empire with changes in schooling and curricula. This process intensified under Abdulhamit II's rule.

The high council report on education explained the importance of education in 1845 and emphasized the role of religion: "It is required for every human being first to learn his religion and then learn those beneficial sciences and arts to free him of dependence on others" (ctd. in Berkes 230). Berkes notes that back in 1838 a similar report did not include an emphasis on religion which makes this difference more interesting. Somel, who has done a comprehensive research on modernization of education from 1839-1908, concludes that reforming education was an integral part of the modernization process through the Westernization of schools. Revival in the education system "aimed at social disciplining, in other words raising hard-working subjects loyal to the state and the sultan by inculcating in students certain religious and authoritarian values. The stress was put on the sacredness of the sultan as the caliph of all Muslims, as well as on loyalty to the state as the protector of the Sunni Muslims"

(271). Evident in both works, primary education was the biggest challenge because the settled system of Quran schools, *subyan mektebleri,* prevailed over the new *ibtidais,* as the latter were limited in number and popularity. Until 1908, modernization of primary schools was not very successful (Ibid 272). Berkes, on the other hand, calls the best achievement of *Tanzimat* as due to secondary school doors opening for girls and the establishment of schools where female teachers were trained.

In higher education, *Mühendishane* (engineering) *Harbiye* (military), and *Tıbbiye* (medicine) schools were developed and their graduates were sent to European countries (231). *Tıbbiye*s deserve more attention in terms of secularization of education. These were the institutions where Western works of positivist sciences and materialism came as influx and they were internalized by most of their students. Berkes quotes MacFarlane who pays a visit to these schools to find a big collection of books related to materialism to his surprise: "A young Turk, sitting and reading the handbook of atheism *Systeme de la nature* (by Baron d'Holbach)" (232). And Berkes says rather than raising doctors, these *Tıbbiye*s raised the first modern-educated figures in the fields of thought on science and administration (234). In *Tıbbiyes*, Şerif Mardin also confirms that in their opposition against Abdulhamid II, in the 1890s, Young Turks "jumped into positivism … with their both feet" and that positive science was underpinning their political arguments (135). Secular-educated would fit better, here, as *Tıbbiyes* stood out among other institutions with their highly secular affiliations. That was why these schools were reprehended for disseminating ideas on materialism and posing a danger of atheism. Orhan Okay also points that there are strong "indications" to show us that through the influx of Western books, in higher-level education, the youth were exposed to and influenced by Western thought and schools, consciously or unconsciously, which gave rise to skepticism and pessimism in the Ottoman mind. That meant rational faculty gained importance questioning religious conventions so far as religious faith itself (56), and it was through educational changes that Westernization on the social level penetrated the mindset.

I would also like to take a closer look at the functions of Ottoman society, which will also enable us to elaborate on the conception of society in the Islamic sense. Historically, Ottoman society consisted of two main layers, center and periphery with a wide distance between them - these being the ruling class in the urban and rural class living in the provinces. The society was in peace in the sense that significant uprisings took place except that of *ayans,* and that one was not very effective. In other words, the ground that paved the way for the rise to the middle class, like in the West, did not emerge (Mardin 28). In culture, this is reflected in the distinction between high culture and low culture, which Mardin illustrates with *Divan* literature and folk culture (*Ibid* 22). High culture belonged to the educated upper class who spoke an elevated version of Ottoman language with a lot of Arabic-Persian vocabulary, whereas the rural class spoke a more basic version of the Turkish language. Both had their own literature. However, with the arrival of a new means of transportation and communication, this distinction was supposed to be challenged, Mardin argues. However, in Ottoman society this progress worked in two opposite ways: the border between the cultures deepened and faded at the same time. It became bolder because the upper class, nonetheless, distinguished itself through adoption of Western culture and standards in a hasty emulation, while the rural society did not do so as fast. It also faded to an extent because through communication means, like newspapers, the border was difficult to keep any longer (27).

The most significant change during modernization brought upon the Ottoman society demonstrates itself in the terminology used to refer to it. The Ottoman subjects were named as *reaya* which etymologically meant ‘flock’, a term that echoes full submission to the ruler. It turned out to be *tebaa* in the later centuries that is close to mean ‘citizen’ (Mardin 30).

In relation to autocratic monarchies of Muslim societies, Karpat gives an aggregating story; the fate of their encounter with modernity:

> Simply put, the concept of a divine and immutable social order was invoked by practically all ruling Muslim elites in order to perpetuate their own economic and political supremacy, using Islam to legitimize it. But then, foreign occupation, however undesirable, freed the Muslim masses from the “tutelage” of their own state elites and helped the rise of a new, modern sense of community. This was a self-defense reaction that unintentionally generated new modes of thought that induced Muslims to look to their past and seek rationally the causes of their plight and then to look for remedies that might be found in their own spiritual and mental resources. Foreign occupation, thus unwittingly helped revive the Muslim community’s memory of the past golden age- *devr-i saadet* (happy age) - at the same time as it revealed the state’s political and military inability to protect the faith, and undermined its legitimacy as the unquestionable authority over the community (7).

İsmail Kara more specifically lists the issues related to a religious outlook that created uneasiness about the practice of Islam for the nineteenth century Ottoman people:

a) A distorted congregation of beliefs with superstitions, myths and *israiliyat*
b) An authoritarian/totalitarian/despotic regime; a submissive, voiceless people in return
c) An otiose, insensitive structure of community, and social relations [that is obsessed with] the afterlife
d) A social life of political, legal unequality between genders, Muslims, non-Muslims, free people and slaves
e) A lifestyle that promotes passive reliance [on God] with resignation, patience, fatalism, modesty rather than endeavor, judicial opinion (*ijtihad),* and free will
f) An understanding of knowledge – whose scholary thought has stopped in the seventeenth century - that is imitative, full of memorizations, endorsements, postscripts; a backward education incapable of regenerating knowledge, to deal with contemporary issues (*Din ile Modernleşme* 35-6).

Each traditional society has figured out its own unique way of coping with modernity or dealing with ongoing autocracies. In the case of Turkish society, it has imported and been exposed to a series of modernizing processes, in the footsteps of Western models, in terms of political administration, legal system and education and culture, for it was affected by the problems and deficiencies that Kara overtly listed. The encounter with Western way of modernity, as much as it means a perspectival shift to secularism, it is a process of reforming the religious understanding of the society. Given that modernity is received with distinct paradigms by different Weltanschauungs, it is necessary to visit some scholarly views that compare the two religions, i.e. Christianity and Islam, as to their conception of society to appreciate the distinctions.

The social order in basic Islamic understanding is principally centered on the concept of *ummet*, a collective entity to which all Muslims belong regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status or any other categorization. The main principle ordained for social welfare can be viewed in the following verse, which is a recurring theme in the Quran for the community life: “As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer withal - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did.” (16:97).

In Muslim societies, Mardin suggests, the role of religion is more of a ‘social guide’, as well as more instructive than in Western societies. The secular ideologies of the bourgeois, he remarks, and their mythos which protect their interests, do get in conflict with religious ideas in one way or another, like in the case of Enlightenment thinking, (75) which is not typical in Muslim society.

In Islamic societies, the individual is entitled to the *ümmet* which is naturally organized to regulate the community and whereby the individual is drawn to the main Islamic principle: To enjoin what is good, to forbid what is wrong, (Mardin 77). To continue with Mardin's comparative views on Western religion and that of Islam, he suggests that instead of 'values' which have a significant function in Western societies, "norms" play the main role in a Muslim society. That means the choices are not made on an individual level; rather, they are social in their concern. In a sense, accountability is not towards one's own conscience but instead, primarily towards social norms (*ibid* 78). These remarks can be further and deeper connected to an ethical and theological comparison of Christianity and Islam in the work of Ismail Ragi al-Faruqi, who wrote a book on Christian ethics, an extensive, theosophical analysis of the history of Christendom. In his comparison of the ethics of Jesus and Islam, he describes the former as a *personalist* and the latter as a *societist* ethic (which is similar to what Mardin refers to). Christianity mostly bases its ethics around the individual, whereas Islamic ethics adds the societal emphasis to the individual's existence. This is not to say, Faruqi reminds, that Christianity is a religion not concerned with society, rather its ethics is constructed upon the self-transformation which requires close affiliation of the individual to God and insistence on the closeness of the will of God and that of the individual; thus, contemplating honestly as a moral act is a sufficient ethical achievement. However, Islam brought, Faruqi continues, a second ethical criterion, in which reflecting on a moral worth is not yet sufficient but is to be taken to its final step, that is that the moral subject "must actually enter the world of real space and time, disturb its flow and equilibrium and bring about the real content of the act" (252). This is also to show us that different ethics have different conceptions of individuality and the individual.

What makes this contrast exceptionally significant for my discussion is that as the conceptions and Weltanschauungs are not identical, the development of a genre, i.e. novel, will differ, especially since we know the novel is the genre that is the narration of to the individual(s life). At this point, I would like recall the distinction Ahmet Midhat made regarding the purpose of the novel: "The aim of reading a novel is not for the sole observation of the events of a man, but for the exploration of the world.*"* The shift in paradigm from the individual to the *alem* (the Arabic word that stems for meanings like, the world, all which is created, etc.) is based on the Islamic ethics of order, in a deliberate choice that Ahmet Midhat chose to explore further. The following heading will be spared to Ahmet Midhat's biography, to view where he stood in all the bluster of changes in the nineteenth century of colliding realities and in the duality of secular vs. religious, and as a novelist and how he projected the "new world still in the making", in Bakhtin's words.

2.2. Ahmet Midhat Efendi: Biography of a Late Ottoman Author

Ahmet was born in 1844 in Istanbul to an Anatolian merchant father and a Caucasian mother. He started working in the Spice Bazaar at an early age where he also learned to read and write. After his father's death, he moved to Vidin to live with his senior brother. He went back to Istanbul for a year at *sıbyan* school, returning back to live with his brother again to complete his education at *rüşdiye.* During Ahmet's time in Vidin, Midhat Paşa was the Mayor of Niš, and Ahmet caught the Mayor's attention by his smartness and ardency for reading, who supported Ahmet's education and also gave him his second name, Midhat. Ahmet Midhat learned French while pursuing his *medrese* education.

He started his early career as a writer in *Tuna* newspaper. In 1869, Midhat Paşa was appointed as the mayor of Baghdad and Ahmet Midhat joined his official team. He was assigned the duty to publish a newspaper named *Zevra*, when in the meantime he also started writing his first short stories, *Kıssadan Hisse, Letaif-i Rivayat*. Passionate to pursue his profession as a writer, in 1870, he left his job and returned to Istanbul. Upon working for a couple of newspapers, he established his own printing house. He started two magazines *Devir, Bedir* which were closed down due to censorship. Another magazine, *Dağarcık*, was being issued at a time when he also started political engagements which included getting to know Namık Kemal. The two were sentenced to exile for which Ahmet Midhat was appalled. He was accused of publicizing atheist ideas through *Dağarcık.*

While in exile, he continued to spend most of his time writing. He starting to write his novels as well, including *Hasan Mellah* and *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*. The conviction turns out to be a key experience for his life as he withdraws from political activity altogether after his return in 1876. He maintains, though, a good relationship with the Hamidian regime. Along with pursuing to write his novels, he publishes one of the most important newspapers, *Tercuman-ı Hakikat*. During Abdulhamid II's reign, he had other official jobs; in 1889, he was sent as the Ottoman representative to the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists, Stockholm when he also had an opportunity to tour in Europe, the world he had imagined and written about through readings. At the turn of the nineteenth century, he had a period of remission in terms of novel-writing as he wrote only one novel in 1910. While working as a teacher at Darüşşafaka, he had a heart attack which ended his life (*Menfa*, Ahmet Midhat Efendi). He left a vast collection of works behind, including stories, novels, plays, newspaper articles and a travelogue. For these, he was labelled a "writing machine".

Ahmet Midhat cannot be described without reference to two major passions which he pursued throughout his life - knowledge and writing. His early life, as mentioned in his autobiographical work *Menfa* is characterized by an endless yearning for knowledge and reading. As a young man, he started by translating French works and by the end of his career, he had written in all the fields his scope of knowledge could cover: history, philosophy, religion, pedagogy and several others related to social issues. He is unquestionably one of the most significant figures in Turkish literature from the second half of the nineteenth century.

Like every aspect of cultural life, literature was entering a new era and Ahmet Midhat being part of this period applied himself to be an integral component of this transformative period, increasing the volume of new literature by producing fiction, spreading the habit of reading among people. Findley describes him as a literary jack-of-all-trades and 'as a man of humble origins who rose by his talents', and also views Ahmet Midhat's stance amidst the nineteenth century atmosphere as 'not easily branded a conservative yet he had progressive traits'. Besides, he is the *hace-i evvel* (the first teacher) whose overarching purpose is to instruct his people, invite them to progress yet deter them from going astray. On the other hand, branding him a conservative does not at all reflect the truth as he borrowed a great deal from the West in constructing especially his literary discourse.

In his works, Ahmet Midhat offers readers a space in the fictional world he creates whereby the narrator exchanges conversation with the narratee. An essential part of his narration is based on this dialogue with the narratee/reader, which serves as a platform whereby the author and the imagined reader come together to discuss the logics, ethics and the characters in the novel. In the same conversational mechanism, he usually offers readers the ideal Ottoman man/woman, one he would like to see - in face of modernization/westernization, and provides alternative responses to the subjected challenges. To this end, Esen suggests that the extent of his popularity was similar to that of Charles Dickens in England which makes this author and his ideas a very key figure for the Ottoman society.

In addition to Ahmet Midhat's contribution to cultural life, his literary persona cannot be examined without reference to political terms, at the early stage of his career. Right after his release, he affiliated himself with the Sultan Abdulhamid II, and produced a book on political history to the favor of the sultan. He assures loyalty to Abdulhamid in exchange for permission to fabricate his literature. Where he stands among all the intellectually and politically chaotic dynamics of the era can be summed up in Findley's words:

> [his ideas] are essential for understanding his period, and they have lasting value. The [debatably] only major Ottoman thinker of the pre-1908 period who sought to achieve a balanced blend of East and West, "matter" and "spirit" he as Occidentalist clearly showed how an Ottoman thinker could creatively engage with Europe and yet resist its cultural power, a power that – if omnipresent-was not omnipotent (49).

While it is next to impossible to thoroughly understand the character of Ahmet Midhat, this statement sums up his stance against the Western challenge. Niyazi Berkes explains his position as an intellectual for society in comparison to Namık Kemal and argues that he was realistic and symbolized the meaninglessness of revolutionism in the pursuit of freedom and progress. Therefore he became close with the regime and sought to educate the people. He knew that change did not come overnight but as a process through education. And "he found the secret to reach out to most of the reader" (272).

As a literary critic, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar describes Ahmet Midhat by stating that his life and works are tightly related and that "to enter his literary work through his life" is highly useful to understand his fiction (437). To study his early life, the best source to utilize is *Menfa* (place of exile), which he wrote on his return from exile in Rhodes in 1876. *Menfa* is the first autobiography written in the Ottoman context (Esen 54), yet it was left incomplete. In this piece, he familiarizes readers with the story of his early life and also relates his public ambitions by which he aims at readers' sympathy exculpating the charges of 'harmful publications' which took him to exile.

As already mentioned, his exile is viewed as a significant turn in his life in this study for he was accused of disseminating ideas that are against Islam, i.e. materialistic ideas. An article in his journal *Dağarcık*, "Duvardan Bir Sada" contemplates materialistic ideas and reincarnation, very likely under the influence of texts of Western philosophy which he loved reading. He was sent along with the New Ottomanists, such as Namık Kemal and Ebuzziya Tevfik, and as he relates in his *Menfa* he did not know what the charges were for the punishment. When he discovers that he has been accused of popularizing atheist ideas, he is terrified and - one assumes - regretted having written such pieces without self-censoring. According to Okay, Ahmet Midhat produces about seventeen works which vindicates Islam against atheism (313) and remarkably *Menfa* is his first work which talks against atheism that was written right after his return. Regarding these works, Orhan Okay notes that his tone against atheism is not aggressive, but rather defensive (283).

The exile seems to be a transformative experience on Ahmet Midhat as a writer and thinker in that it molded his character to be more cautious and sensitive about positioning himself politically. In his later works, he avoided such philosophically avant-garde experimentalism, as he did with *Dağarcık* articles, and made sure he did not overtly contradict the traditional/religious thinking of his society. Compared to his *Ben Neyim- Materyalizm'e Reddiye (What am I: Rebuttal to Materialism,* 1890), (which Esen says he wrote after having discussions with Europeans on human existence during his trip to Europe for the Eight Congress of Orientalist in Stockholm-79), the article "Duvardan Bir Sada" does not take a position against materialism; rather, it contemplates some materialist thought.

It is also important to note that the change of regime affected the direction of the writer's life vastly. Therefore it is very likely that it was a determining condition for his politico-literary stance, too. He was punished for harmful publication under Abdulaziz's regime, and was released after Murat V. He started writing *Menfa* presumably to clear himself of the stain of exile and yet for some reason left it in complete. Under the Hamidian regime, he initially wrote *Üss-i Inkilap*, confidently, to Abdulhamid's applause. Despite the fact that he was viewed as one of the dull conservatives, most probably due to his affiliation with the Hamidian regime, he always maintained his progressive objectives and the idea of progress for the Ottomans. Towards the end of his literary life, we see his assertiveness directed towards nationalistic views; in other words, he articulates with the dominant Islamist-nationalistic discourse of the Hamidian regime.

Nevertheless, his ideals were to a great extent shaped by his acceptance, even admiration of, modern aspects of Western civilization. In other words, the Western thinking, to which he was exposed through his readings in French, is what construed a significant part of Ahmet Midhat’s thinking. His ideas were born, bred and transformed always under the shadow of the Western model of civilization. He mentions those who safeguarded him and encouraged him to study, such as Midhat Paşa and Şakir bey and also those like Hamdi Bey, a renowned painter, who gave him insight into European culture and philosophy.

As helpful as *Menfa* is in understanding this inclination, there is more emphasis on faith-related and religious contemplation, along with the aforementioned reaction to atheism. His ideas regarding philosophy along with belief and religion were apparently influenced to a great extent by Can Muattar, an Iranian figure well-learned in philosophy, religion and cultures. He relates his encounter with him in detail after briefly mentioning his philosophical journey through different religions. He names him a “walking library” having read all texts of revelation and philosophers. He provides an account of his journey through religions in the following:

> He belonged to the Shia sect yet had strong doubts regarding the *Caferi* sect. None of them he could solve with Shia ‘*alim*s’ and he inclined towards the Protestant missionaries who had then spread all around the world [including Iran]. As soon as he started interacting with them, he converted to their religion as he recognized they had deeper knowledge of religion. He traveled all the way to India in order to deepen himself on the path of Jesus. He left upon completing his training in a missionary school. However, he developed greater doubts about Christianity as well and found out it was based on Judaism and became a Jew. After rising to the status of a Rabbi, he shifted and even dealt with Zoroastrianism. He was left in a void as none of these belief systems satisfied him thoroughly. Wandering idly in a wretchedness of mind, he headed to Saudi Arabia. There he started reading the Qur’an again... Finally he concluded that to enlighten mankind, what lies in the essences of the Quran is adequate (38-40).He sums up his encounter with him in these words, which are noteworthy: “There is indeed that one facet [of what I have learned from him] which is priceless. That is the verity to express that the sole truth lies in the Quran and even when there are truths in other ideas, those shall not be to the extent that they satisfy the mind” (41).

Sparing pages to relate this encounter with Can Muattar and to recount his story in detail in an articulate language is significant in that it sheds light on a strong religious vein in his character. As he devours the different literature of other religions and schools of thought, I imagine he underwent a similar tumultuous journey with regard to different worldviews, a reflective version of Muattar’s journey - similar, yet less dramatic – which is why he identifies himself with Muattar’ story. What makes this figure very strong before his eyes, aside from his intellectual prowess and prodigious reading, is the very fact that following an incredibly intense spiritual adventure, both finally bow to the utmost truth in Islam and the wisdom of the Quran.

On the other hand, a side of his mind is always faced Westward as he recognizes Europe as the source of knowledge and progress. Add to this the sense of defeat the Ottoman mind suffered, it is no wonder that at some points he seems to have been dazzled by the great features of the European intellectual, cultural and industrial civilization. Yet, despite this, we usually find him returning to his identity as a Muslim, often praising the greatness of his own religion and culture, its great morals, appreciating the beauty of Islam and Islamic civilization, and above all the wisdom of *the Quran*.

As to the question of how he represented his personal views on religion and belief, Orhan Okay writes, neither in his novels nor in other writings did he take a "fanatically religious" stance. He never tended to solely preach through the characters and instances he penned, referring to Islamic issues; nonetheless, his idealized characters are naturally good Turk-Ottoman-Muslim representations (235). In saying this, whilst Okay's aim is to display a general view of Ahmet Midhat, in some novels Midhat himself deviates from this description. For instance, in *Hasan Mellah*, the protagonist of the novel with the same name, speaks quite similarly to a preacher (which will be visited in the next chapter in detail).

In his vision of civilization, Okay argues religion and civilization are two faces of the same coin, even denoting the same thing (*Batı Medeniyeti* 289). However, given his intimacy with works in Western philosophy, that of ancient Greeks or his French contemporaries, we find him becoming influenced by their thinking. Particularly in his early phase as a writer, when he seems to emulate them in some cases to such a degree that we barely see a hint of Islamic thinking in these works, i.e. *Felsefe-i Zenan* or *Hayal ve Hakikat*. In other words, this reflects the same thinking he infused into "Duvardan Bir Sada", the result of his absorption of philosophy with a purely Western materialistic slant.

Nevertheless, it is also impossible to brand him as a Westernized figure precisely because despite this love affair he maintains a critical stance against European culture which he finds to be low in morals, and reasserts his sense of devotion to Islam. In this regard, it is therefore also useless to label him a secularist, or as a traditionalist, because being devoted to Islam, his heart does not desire a secular way of life. He is not a traditionalist either as he is critical towards the bigotry of society, i.e. the degraded status of women, lack of education, and lack of technological/intellectual progress. He makes sure he refers to the superiority of Islam in his discourse; yet, he does not take an Islamic philosophical position to discuss this in-depth. Rather, he comes up with an eclectic 'grafting' that promotes Islamic ethics while when it comes to scientific and intellectual achievement and progress, he leans towards Western culture. He retains his social character as a father who is concerned about his children's faith and morals, as well as their education, and more widely with the development of culture and progress, so that he is the most encompassing of all his contemporaries. He is after the ideal synthesis that the new age necessitates with the firm objective in mind, i.e. the good of his society. Despite being firstly a teacher, most of his life, he is a learner as well. Ahmet Midhat was hasty in producing different types of novels which is not only the records of how he wanted to teach his reader but also what changed during his learning processes to form this instruction. Also how he strived for a balance between the western, progressive and the traditional. All this aside, he leaves us with a remarkable personal confession, in a letter he wrote to Fatma Aliye in 1894: "I have been on the path of the God for four-five years now" (386).

In regard to his novels, the complexity *Felatun Bey* and *Rakım Efendi* offers is that of the ideal Ottoman gentleman bearing the balanced qualities of two civilizations, but focusing on more material issues, and facing more westward. In *Müşahedat*, for instance, encountering non-Muslims, he forms a religious discourse which despises the European way of life as being low in morality creating detrimental outcomes for society. In *Hayal ve Hakikat*, on the other hand, he looks more despising the old traditions of the Ottoman civilization taking a more positivistic standpoint. In *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad*, though, he offers a synthesis of all main ideologies of the political atmosphere while they are conflicting. Ahmet Midhat aspires for a great Ottoman civilization which will be able to compete with that of the West. His novels provide him a platform to realize and promote his ideals on a fictional level which must be why he was so keen on novel-writing.

Therefore, although general statements have already been made, it is useful to shed a biographical light to examine his novels in order to trace why he employed different discourses and formulations so to understand his dynamic journey as a novelist which was never static, always open to change, transformational and even illustrating contradictions. With this and his consistent progressivism in mind, I would suggest three different stages to understanding Ahmet Midhat which shaped the discourse regarding religion and belief in his novel-writing.

- Pre-exile, early works in which he devours and becomes intensely influenced by Western French philosophers and novelists.
- Post-exile when the deprived experience of exile and the weight of atheist charges hit him, and he makes sure to demonstrate and employ a religious discourse; yet, since this is a transitional period for him, there are differing examples.
- Compromise: Here he is seen to find peace in compromise, receives compliments of the Hamidian regime. He is more politicized, articulates the ideologies in his narrative discourse, and his understanding of religion is influenced by the political movements.

The following chapters will analyse the novels drawing on what has so far been founded as to theoretical and historical backgrounds; the set of changes with modernization and the sense of defeat in front of a growing West; and Ahmet Midhat’s biographical phases among all these as an Ottoman writer, to trace the discursive diversity in terms of the role of religion in his discourse as a novelist.

The next chapter will discuss the early novels written in late *Tanzimat* period. In order to provide a comprative framework for the analysis of his novels, two other popular early novels of the century by Namık Kemal and Şemseddin Sami will be visited with regards to their interrelation of novelistic discourse and religion. *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* and *Felsefe-i Zenan* will be the first Ahmet Midhat novels to be analyzed within this chapter, which were written in his early phase of authorship, showing a more secular tone as a novelist.

CHAPTER 3
FIRST NOVELS AND AHMET MIDHAT'S EARLY PHASE

This chapter, being the longest one, will give a thorough analysis of five different novels each of which display differences in content, plot, and theme discussions. This is to document what kind of approaches were found in the novels to the phenomenon of religion and also cultivate the ground to observe the later evolution of Ahmet Midhat's discourse as a novelist, in terms of religion. By giving place to one novel by Namık Kemal and Şemseddin Sami, I aim to offer a comparative perspective to the main novelist I talk about, whereas, by starting his early novels, I start tracing his biographical metamorphosis as to his stance towards religion.

In his article on the reflections on the crisis of belief in poetry during the early phase of Turkish modernization, Orhan Okay highlights that the reformation of thought in the century was not carried out by scholars of philosophy but by men of literature, who were influenced to a considerable extent by Western thinking and literature. Though their works uncover this influence, the way they adopt Western thought seems "incidental and eclectic" rather than systematically following certain schools (56). In other words, Okay confirms that in the nineteenth century literature, one can note a collision with Western thought, the deep-seated tradition as well as observe a weakening of belief. Positivism stood to take root, which followed that rationalism put religious conventions, in particular religious faith itself (*Ibid*) to question. He traces this in the poetry; the main poets questioned the existence of God by seeking rational explanations: "My mind needs to bear witness the unity of Allah", another one "The creation of the eternal creator is [must be] beheld without the book" by Şinasi. (56-7).

İsmail Kara, on the other hand, points at the verse by Ziya Paşa in elaborating on the problem of the modern Turkish thought, describes the experience of Turkish thinkers of the loss of self-sufficiency which manifested itself as the enforcement of defining oneself by the criteria set by the West. Kara puts Ziya Paşa's lines as the most hyperbolic expression of this status before the West, found in poetry: "Wandered in the land of the infidel, I have observed [beautiful] towns and palaces / I have wandered the land of Islam to see but all in ruins" (*Diyar-ı küfrü gezdim beldeler kaşaneler gördüm/ Dolaştım mülk-i İslamı bütün viraneler gördüm.*) ("Şemseddin Sami" 263).

These examples are to illustrate that the novel came about at the time of such influx of new models of knowledge and thinking, in one sense, arrived as part of this influx, in the other, as a platform where one would seek remedy for the intellectual crisis. In my readings of *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fıtnat*, *İntibah* and *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*, this collision is demonstrated, while the novels seem to attempt a more modern discourse in terms of content and style (whereas the later Ahmet Midhat novels will attain a more indigenous discourse that is more overtly religious). Nevertheless, a modernized discourse preference also indicates that there is a transition in the conception of religion and the analysis of these early novels is very important for my discussion, too. I have chosen to start with these novels as they comprise the most referenced novels of the Tanzimat novel criticism; this is due to the fact that they pioneered a novel discourse for the Ottoman literature. Secondly, Şerif Mardin suggests that the two main themes of the novel genre for this era is the status of women in the society, and the second one is the criticism of upper class men's excessive Westernization ("Aşırı Batılılaşma" 30). The former issue is an omnipresent theme for *Taaşşuk*, while the latter constitutes the main themes of *Felatun Bey*. *İntibah* is significant mainly for the author, Namık Kemal, as a strongly political figure and also for the eclectic narration style it attains. These render the three novels significant and to be discussed in terms of the representation of the stance towards religion. The dates these novels were published are very close, *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fıtnat*, 1875, *İntibah*, 1876, *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi* 1875, and as the early attempts of the novel discourse, they will be analyzed respectively in this chapter asking the particular question of where religion stands in narration, plot and rhetoric.

3.1. *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fıtnat*

Briefly, Taaşşuk is the love story of a young boy, Talat, who falls in love with Fıtnat, the adopted daughter of Hacı Baba, a tobacco salesman. Fıtnat falls in love with Talat, too, seeing him from behind the balcony fences, beyond which she cannot go because her father would not let her. Talat disguises himself as a girl in order to get through to Fıtnat's home, introducing himself as Ragıbe, Talat's sister, when he finds out she loves him back. However, the father and Fıtnat's tutor Şerife arrange a marriage for Fıtnat to an older and rich man, Ali Bey. After hearing this terrible news befalling on the couple, Talat reveals his identity to Fıtnat and the two decide to commit suicide in case Fıtnat is forced into this marriage. Although she never gives consent, Fıtnat is deceived into a wedding and on the night of the wedding she attempts to kill herself. Ali Bey finds out that she is his long-lost daughter when the amulet on her necklace falls down. It is too late for him to save Fıtnat, though; she dies. Talat finding her in blood dies of striking grief. Ali Bey, too, passes away after six months out of grief.

Firstly, the fundamental themes of the novel address criticism at the traditions of the society, i.e. arranged marriage and the status of women. Because Fıtnat as a girl is not allowed to go out, she cannot meet her lover, and what is more, she cannot choose the man she wants to marry. The main reason behind the tragedy of the ending is that she is not willing to submit to an arranged marriage. Moran notes when it was published in the newspaper it was promoted as "a cautionary story about forced marriage and morality" (40). The improved status of women was an indicator of a progressed society. The confinement of women to the domestic realm and the restriction of male-female relations in tradition are overtly criticized here, along with enforcement of marriages both on young men and women.

As to the characters, we can group the main characters as the young couple protagonists, and the elderly Hacı Baba, and Şerife Kadın who play a role in the plot. The latter two are the antagonistic characters whose forced marriage lead the couple to misfortune. The two, and their much older age, represent the tradition which has no communication of what is going on in the love story of the couple. Hacı Baba is a character whose name meaning 'pilgrim' has a religious connotation and whose prayer mat is always in its place. He is depicted as religious as well as over-conservative for not allowing Fıtnat to go out.

Arap Dadı, a minor character housekeeping in Talat's house, utters the following words: "Thank, thank God, though I am now fifty. What shall we do, may Allah grant us with faith so that we go to the grave faithful, the afterlife is eternal yet we happen to forget in this world about the *münker-nekir* [the angels with assigned the duty of testing the faith of the deceased in Islamic eschatology] how shall we render account for [our deeds] to you!" (10) This is an utterance consisting of purely pious cries by Dadı in the middle of a conversation with Talat's mother. She spontaneously utters, one after another, statements pertaining to death, angels, the afterlife and the responsibility towards one's God. However, these do not come to be discussed in the flow of conversation. In other words, these sentences automatically appear without deeper concern about them. Kemal Timur notes that these kinds of utterances that we hear from Arap Dadı do not necessarily demonstrate a discussion of faith or understanding of religion but are rather verbal habits which are spat out unconsciously (28).

A remarkable point is to be made regarding superstition; a superstitious element, an amulet (*muska*), plays a key role in the plot. The amulet is the necklace Fıtnat is wearing on the night of marriage by which her father recognizes her. The amulet comes as a representation of the superstition in tradition of society, which prevents an adversity, i.e. incest. However, the tragedy is nevertheless to happen.

In the characterization the aforementioned characters, religion belongs to the realm of the tradition for it is the elderly characters practicing religion and speaking with religious references. We do not observe religious references in the characterization of the young couple. We learn that Fıtnat has read the whole Quran several times; however, this seems to be due to Hacı Baba who has control over Fıtnat's life and in-home education. These show us that religion is present at a symbolic level; Şemseddin Sami turns the face of the novel's discourse towards modernization in which religion acts on a symbolic level as a rhetorical element and it does not have an active part in what he is suggesting as morality.

İsmail Kara provides an account showing Şemseddin Sami comparing the Islamic and the European civilizations in his articles on civilization and viewing the Islamic civilization as a perished, damaged and old civilization. He debates by giving evidence that it is the European civilization that is valid and to be favored (17). In this light, the message his novel carries is that whatever belongs to the old tradition is damaging, and change is crucial. Again, in what he suggested in his articles, therefore, the change has to reflect the European model. His formative suggestions in his novel carry far less Islamic teachings than Ahmet Midhat's, if none at all.

3.2. *Intibah*

Intibah is a more comprehensive experiment on novel-writing compared to *Taaşşuk*, according to Güzin Dino; it is the first and only "real" novel of Namık Kemal which attempts to pave a way to representing the inner world of an individual coping with psychic features of the human, such as emotions, passion, regrets, in other words psychological complexities (25). This Dino finds is revolutionary for the Turkish literature which makes it closer to the Western novel, which she views as its ideal end, like other critics. Nevertheless, Dino catches the stylistic similarities with classical Turkish literature, which she discusses in detail in *Türk Romanının Doğuşu*. In a way, Namık Kemal's narrator employs different voices, one pertaining to the classical Turkish high-brow poetry, the other resembling the Western novels which talks about the common man and his life. This is echoing *heteroglossia*; distinct utterances that essentially clash with one another exist in the novel together to form the novel narration. In the following, I will try to analyze Namık Kemal's narration in terms of narrative differences coexisting.

Each chapter division in *İntibah* begins with a verse in the style of classical poetry, and the author also makes use of literary conventions of the same in tone, for instance, in depicting the nature or the good female character Dilaşub. These, Dino suggests, proves that Kemal was seeking a new genre in his narration and also a continuity of classical literature legacy in the genre being presented to the Turkish scene. Dino describes Namık Kemal's use of Divan elements in his writing as a "transition mechanism" (57). In addition, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar detects that his preface (*girizgah*) to the novel is identical to "*nesib*"s of *kaside* in *masnawi* poetry. He reads Namık Kemal's objective behind this as "Namık Kemal seeks a more or less new way of expressing the old imagination" (399). In comparison to Sami's novel, this becomes more remarkable for Sami's formulation which seems to be distancing itself from the tradition. Even though he used certain elements from the traditional story-telling such as the use of coincidences, he did not use a traditional tone in style, like Kemal does celebratorily in *İntibah*.

At first sight, Namık Kemal's novel's first chapter opens with a Divan couplet like in the rest of the chapters. At the end of this chapter, Namık Kemal makes an interesting remark; he apologizes to the reader for diverting from the topic and not getting to the story, expressing that:

> It seems we have digressed from the story a little. Our purpose was to find a preamble of descriptions of the spring season in Çamlıca. Yet, like the one, who is keenly anticipating the promised union of the summer, cannot help himself pick some flowers on the way, we could not omit a few fresh dreams rising from the imagination (5).

This apologetic remark at the end of the chapter shows the narrator's hesitation about how the reader would take this prolonged opening; nevertheless, he does not avoid it. What he puts in this part is worthy of attention also because he mentions these are "some fresh dreams" he came across in "his imagination" which he could not help but share. Seyda Başlı, in her analysis of *İntibah*, detects dualities used in the novel: the imagined-the real, sleep-awakened; in this, the beauty that he describes with the old imagination corresponds to an imagined, unreal beauty that puts one to sleep. Başlı reads this as a political reference to the days the Ottoman Empire was extremely powerful; yet, those days are bygone and unreal (267-9). This is to say, the literary elements from the classical are employed not for the sake of a loyal continuation, but on the contrary for criticism. The meaning of the novel title, which means awakening might also be considered as supporting Başlı's argument.

The question, then, arises as to the stance he takes towards religion and the religious. Orhan Okay comments that Namık Kemal does not handle religion in his literary productions despite the fact that he is one of the first Islamist writers who wrote *Renan Müdafaanamesi* which is written in defense of the supremacy of Islam against Renan who had attacked it (239), or "İttihad-ı İslam" an article promoting a pan-İslamist ideology which he wrote in 1872. This contradiction is also remarkable as to the discussion of continuation that Dino suggested. Even though a continuation of the conventional imagination is maintained, the same continuation does not take place in epistemological aspect.

Considering the fact that religion and the conception of God was integral to classical poetry, Namık Kemal's classical imagination raises an expectation for religious elements represented in his narration, at least, in the parts where he uses the classical imagination. However, his approach to nature turns out not to display much of that. Nature is personified and presented as an animate body in itself; its elements are personified as well which echoes the Romanticist view of a pantheist view of nature. Besides, the narrator rather produces a new view and narration of nature according to Dino; he makes use of concrete images which at first sight seem to be very classical metaphors; yet, Kemal gives them a more tangibly visual quality. Dino adds, Namık Kemal does this also when depicting the woman figure, Mehpeyker. This is an innovation in Turkish literary narration, since images of women would not be explicitly drawn, due to Islamic restrictions (195). If Namık Kemal seems to have liberated himself from this "Islamic" restriction in the way he forms his narration eclectically as he is very much influenced by the Western writers such as Chateaubriand, Lamartine and especially Hugo, he thus attains a style that gets closer to the Western model. Dino concludes this eclectic "formation is much deeper and more organic than merely 'Western influence'... although he resists the traditional patterns, he creates the new images using the traditional forms of narration" (197). These notes are important for they make an analysis of what different elements dwelling in Namık Kemal's imagination and narration dialogically to form an eclectic unity.

At some points, the narrator makes odd parenthetical explanations in the first chapter which show his intricate nature of imagination, with one of them starting as: "Should it be due to the mutuality with the oriental imagination (*hayalat-şarkiye*). I cannot but forget the nightingale whenever I think of the rose" (2). He seems to have distanced himself from the oriental: he mentions as though he is not one from the orient but is under the effect of the oriental imagination - the nightingale-rose metaphor of love - appertaining to an orient from which he borrows. Since we are talking about borrowings from the Western realist literary imagination, Namık Kemal puts the orient also from which he borrows. He presents himself neither Eastern nor as Western, which makes his dialogism more interesting and complicated.

Speaking of Western influence, as a novice genre, the novel claimed to represent the real, through its realism. Rationalist, positivist thought that flourished in the West underpinned the novel discourse, for which the Ottoman writers also celebrated the genre. Namık Kemal's narration in this novel also accommodates positivistic inspiration. Güzin Dino, in her analysis, several times notes that Kemal makes sure "rational" explanations exist in his novel to satisfy himself and the reader in terms of rational faculty (76). However, he gives great attention to coincidences in his plot which he feels the need to explain with fate (*felek*) which Dino argues might be originating from the religious belief in fate (38). "Once the destiny wills to bring a misfortune, it procures the causes quickly" (118). The overuse of coincidence might seem to be an intrusion to his rational, realistic style; nevertheless, he does not give it up.

The moment when Ali Bey and Mehpeyker come together to consummate their love which the writer narrates passionately, he gives another parenthetical explanation that is worth attention: "probably because of the sensitivity of the nerves on the skin of the lips" (72). Why this medical explanation in the middle of a scene of passion which depicts Ali Bey's sexual pleasure, one may ask! As the narrator provides greater description of passion with his intense depictions of Ali Bey's pleasure, in the middle of it he puts this scientific explanation which seems almost funny, disregarding its general associations with emotions in a very emotional scene. It inevitably reminds of the *Tıbbiye* influence mentioned before; a similar approach with Ahmet Midhat's accounts on hysteria, in his novel *Hayal ve Hakikat* (which will be analyzed in the next chapter). The rising popularity of medical science in the French model apparently influences him as well to an extent that he gives a neural explanation of the pleasure of a lover's kiss. This example shows that positivist thought started to influence as writers attempt to write realistic novels that are supported with scientific knowledge within the background.

In *Intibah*, the reader witnesses Ali Bey's story of falling in love and the personal transformation the love incident causes through his hesitations and changing behaviors. Even though Ali Bey is described with his purity of heart and innocent morality (saffet-i kalp and masumiyet-i ahlak) he displays a vague sense of right and wrong. Apparently, his powerful passion for Mehpeyker prevails over his innocent morality; he behaves immorally. He experiences a frustration with himself upon lying to his mother about his late-coming. He is appalled with his situation that in a couple of days he finds himself in three "oddities": chasing after a woman, lying to his mother and observing greed in his mother. No matter how unhappy he is with the position in which he fell, he is still driven by his emotions towards his lover. He does not uncover his lie, continues seeing her and his morally/religiously wrong series of acts extends to becoming a killer. Although Ali has some regretful moments, he does not experience remorse until the end, which the narrator calls the 'the last remorse' which does not save (169).

The understanding of morality is another significant point for discussion. There is an authoritarian society in the novel which imposes its morality on Ali Bey. Characters surrounding Ali Bey find him faulty when Ali Bey dares to marry Mehpeyker who is of socially/morally low status, while sexual adventure with her is fine. While religion prohibits all kinds of sexuality outside of marriage, it is socially acceptable to the extent that it is conducted with those women who are not respected by the society's order.

Ali Bey's sense of guilt is aroused by other men's condemnation of his relationship with a prostitute of which the character Mesut is an example. He triggers a conflict with Ali Bey by making a pass at Mehpeyker; then he exposes Mehpeyker's identity to Ali Bey to his outrage. The philanderer Mesut who flirts with prostitutes and seems to know all such women of Istanbul, turns out to be a 'guard of honor' when he learns Ali Bey has the intention to marry Mehpeyker; he accuses him of not protecting his honour (*namus*). Mesut Efendi's involvement with prostitutes is not a matter in the argument of the social code whereas Ali Bey's intention is, because it is acceptable for men to hang out with women of low status as long as they do not attempt to marry them (see 51-3). Ali Bey's 'sin' and 'dishonour' is the intent to get married while it is obviously in compliance with the Islamic rules. The use and formation of the religious term 'sin' is a social construct, not religious. The conclusion that can – though debatably - be derived is that the concepts of right and wrong are generated by a social order which at times can contradict the religious rules. This is another remarkable point that is represented in the dialogism of Kemal's novel.

I have meticulously looked for the instances where Ali Bey feels regret for his acts which could be seen as sins, or his total change from a naive young man to a killer, where he turns to God asking for forgiveness. The intensity of remorseful feeling reaches a climax when Dilaşub dies because of Ali Bey. He cries: "Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Your mercy is a hundred thousand time greater no matter how big my crime is. I concede for my punishment due in hereafter. Take my life at this moment yet do not make me face this calamity of which I am too fearful!" (168). In this emotionally intense pleading, we witness the voice of a remorseful Ali Bey addressing God and begging for things to change. This is a communicative cry that addresses God to which Ali Bey does not apply before this calamity. Rather, this sounds and is depicted as a last cry which goes in parallel with the plot which is at an irreversible point for Ali Bey and the cry only remains as a mourning rather than a prayer. The narrator comments on this irreversibility of wrongdoing with the final line: "A late repentance does not save" echoing in the readers' ear (168). He has to pay for his sins! In doing this, the ending is given a different voice, with an overarching understanding of the God as the authority over the lives of men and the hereafter which was not reflected much in the rest of the narrative. It adds another dimension to the stylistic diversity of the novel, with a religious tone, which comes very late.

The nuances in *Intibah* discourseare significant to show such a transitional viewpoint on religion. On one hand, there is an overt effort to imitating a secular discourse whereas on the other hand the religious tone, at certain points, unfolds itself.

I realize *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*, by Ahmet Midhat has a similar effort/or an unconscious reflex as I find it to have a more Western tone in discourse and even less religious references than *Intibah* has.

3.3. *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*

Ahmet Midhat's first novel to be discussed is *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*, as one of the most distinguished of his all novels. This is the first novel which starts a long-lasting tradition in Turkish novel (Moran 48), the binary opposition of the superficially Westernized snob character vs. the ideal man who is a demonstration of the desired blend of modern and the traditional Ottoman characteristics. Mardin finds it no surprise that Ahmet Midhat was the first to create such a tradition since he comes from a merchant background; according to Mardin, Ahmet Midhat constructed a personal link with Western civilization, whereas he was against the aristocrat values of his time and represented the values of the merchant class ("Aşırı Batılılaşma" 45). In effect, the novel is mostly about hard work, economic progress, thriftiness and accumulation of wealth.

In brief, Felatun is the son of Mustafa Meraki whose interest is merely appearances and amusement. He brings up his son like himself with no education other than French classes. He leaves his son with good fortune who spends it on womanizing, entertainment and collecting books. Felatun, who is named after the ancient philosopher Plato, reads none of the books in his big library of Western books although he engraves his initials on each of them. Exhausting all the wealth he has, and jobless as he is, he has no choice but to leave Istanbul in shame. Rakım Efendi, on the other hand, is an orphan who is raised by a nanny in economic deprivation. However, as smart as Rakım is to become, he starts working at an early age with diligence and he seeks more opportunities for making money every day. He speaks both Western and Eastern languages well and finds jobs as a tutor. Catching the attention of an English man living in Istanbul, he becomes a tutor to his daughter. One of the girls falls in love with him, while he is in love with the maid in his own home, Canan whom he eventually marries. In essence, in Rakım, Ahmet Midhat illustrates an ideal character which will lead a happy life, while, in Felatun, the ridiculed character with an obsession for luxury and a pretentious life imitating Westerners, is doomed to fail.

From the introductory chapters where the two male characters are introduced, emphasis is on the economic aspect of their lives, rich and poor backgrounds. The central values to the narration seem to be in relation to capital, how much one has and/or how one deals with money. For example, in the first chapter, Felatun is described in detail by his father's obsession with luxury, the same thing inherited by Felatun. Felatun is an example of an excessively superficial man who is mimicking Western trends like in the example of books. He does not work, he overspends his father's wealth and engages in interest-based relations. Rakım on the other hand is the earnest orphan who rises to become a self-sufficient man to everybody's respect and appreciation around him. The characters other than the two are mostly non-Muslims, as a certain part of the setting is the house of an English person who employs Rakım. Ahmet Midhat in those novels where he forms an ideal Ottoman character, likes to have the Western characters admire his ideal character. For instance, Jozefino keeps praising the certain local customs she does not find in European culture, like hospitability (122) – a pattern he will pursue in *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad* as well. His students, Can and Margrit, show an ardent favor for Ottoman classical poetry, i.e. Persian, to the extent that they give up English and French as they do not find these as passionate, and Rakım recites poetry from Hafiz (78-80). Assured as he is by his idealism, Ahmet Midhat' narrator likes to be confirmed by Western points of view, which are his own characters in the novel.

As Rakım Efendi grows, the emphasis on his economic development augments, in other words, his growing up process is narrated based on his work life and his material achievements. The narrator gives an account of how he spends his day, divided by different tasks and jobs to start making his living. Finn says he is an illustration of calculation and carefulness (20) and Wishnitzer adds this carefulness is reflected in his minutely-organized way that he manages his time and finances (386). Tanpınar calls this a kind of moralism or an opportunist moralism in that Rakım knows how to make himself loved and admired and others around himself satisfied (450), and even the social circles he engages with are related to the job opportunities they provide: "Rakım started making more Western friends. This paved a way for him to start getting work as a clerk and interpreter…" (25). The narrator also gives a detailed account of the money he makes and accumulates in describing his life, almost like with an attentiveness of an accountant. For instance, even in dialogues value prices and economic details are given. When Rakım and Jozefino meet and he offers her to teach

Canan to play the piano, she asks for an ‘eight hundred-frang’ piano, not a lesser one, in order for her to start teaching. Thus the narrator gives an account of where they go and how much they pay and in what installments (37-8).

The overemphasis on the financial matters result in less reference to other kinds of values like personal morality and relations. Rakım is ideally depicted; yet, this idealism is based around monolithic aspects: professional skills and financial achievement. In doing so, it is inferable that Ahmet Midhat feels a need for economic development; on this, Mardin succinctly comments that he identified a problem in the development of the aristocratic class and he sought to enlighten the majority (i.e. the lowbrow tradition) and to represent their issues (45). His formulation towards illuminating the mass – in the case of *Felatun Bey* – was how to be thrifty, organized and earn more to accumulate. Evidently, after the military downfall in the eighteenth century, the major power leak was economics. Rakım provides example for how to attain economic independence and self-sufficiency, like Ahmet Midhat did in his life. This is through learning languages and working hard in different businesses, for the merchant class – which will also turn out for the good of the society, through the economic improvement of the majority.

An ideal Ottoman man as he is, piety does not seem to be a manifest dimension of Rakım’s characterization. As already pointed out, the narrative discourse that is grounded on material success is one reason. One of the Western figures Ahmet Midhat read was Adam Smith whose influence might presumably have given him a central concern for this novel. All in all, it is very likely to agree with Mardin who likens the ethics in Felatun Bey to that of Protestant ethics (“Aşırı Batılılaşma” 45), while Başlı agrees with him, highlighting that Ahmet Midhat’s values resemble the Protestant ethics which gave rise to capitalism (207). Altogether, these demonstrate that early novels showed an inclination towards Western ethics in discourse.

There are few utterances that point to God, like in the scene when he responds to Jozefino’s compliments about him while on a boat trip: “Allah creates the morning, this sea, this platform we are sitting on. The civilization progress of humans makes this boat for such a trip.”(124). Here Rakım calls attention to God’s capacity as the main creator followed by humans’ capacity as such. Underlying this greatness of God’s creation, Ahmet Midhat shows the Islamic belief in God, complementing Rakım’s idealism with a religious utterance. However, these examples do not come across as an integral part throughout the novel; they provide only as glimpses due to the aforementioned inclination towards a more secular ethics that focuses more on the material well-being.

As to the dialogism in *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*, Felatun Bey is presented as a flat character subject to mockery, and the protagonist Rakım is purely static in his idealism. It is not a fertile narrative to scrutinize for heteroglossia. Rather, Parla's argument is effective for this novel to remember: out of the need for agreement and formulating a concluding judgment, he does not leave his narration open; rather, he concludes his statement (*Don Kişot* 79-80). This is the reason Jale Parla called Ahmet Midhat'a attitude a step behind Bakhtinian dialogism. This seems true for *Felatun Bey* since even from the beginning Felatun and Rakım are presented in the contrast of ideal-wrong modernization models. The main thesis is unraveled and this is pursued throughout the narration. Even though Ahmet Midhat strives to formulate a blend of Ottoman and Western values in Rakım, his narration does not seem to be very comprehensive in terms Islamic tenets, as he chooses to view life more from a professional aspect, i.e. aiming at economic development. However, in the next novella, *Felsefe-i Zenan*, we will see he has made a choice of focus, which will be discussed.

Felsefe-i Zenan has a crucial place in the bibliography of Ahmet Midhat works; for it is a thouroughly avant garde piece in terms of the issue of women, society and religion altogether. Before I start to present the 'highly-religious tone' found in Ahmet Midhat' novelist discourse, *Felsefe* succinctly puts that the early life of the author demonstrate a rather secularized voice. Be it due to an ambition to imitate Western novels or the heavy influence of the Western influence directly on way of thinking, he offers quite a secular worldview in the women of *Felsefe-i Zenan*, the subject of discussion of the following.

3.4. *Felsefe-i Zenan*

One of Ahmet Midhat's stories that he wrote in 1971 from among his collection of stories, which he assembled from 1870-1894 is the *Letaif-i Rivayat, Felsefe-i Zenan* (*The Philosophy of Women*). It tells the story of three women and their philosophy on life. Some of the *Letaif-i Rivayat* works are classified as short stories, while others as novels. Interestingly, these works do not show many thematic and stylistic similarities between them. Nonetheless, Okay classifies them as the first novels of the period. I find it more accurate to categorize *Felsefe-i Zenan* as a novella as it is between fifty to sixty pages and it tells the story of not more than three people, while it focuses on one single plot. It provides a perfect example of Ahmet Midhat's diversified and experimental approach in how he construes literary works. Being among the earliest of Ahmet Midhat's novels, it corresponds to the early stage of Ahmet Midhat, when he was yet to start writing novels.

Fatih Altuğ highlights the importance of *Letaif-i Rivayat* as a collection describing it as: "Ahmet Midhat Efendi structured his *Letaif-i Rivayat* series as [accounts of] an imaginary society. *Letaif-i Rivayat* is an ensemble of genres, discourses, authorial roles, fictionalized readers/audiences, stories/novels and volumes." Altuğ also suggests that the author creates an alternate public space to the real-life society in this series of stories (35). An idealized sense of community in his imagination of novels can be observed in most of his works, as well as novels. A notable stylistic feature of *Felsefe-i Zenan* shows the characteristic of an epistolary novel, the type narrated through letters. The main course of plot is conveyed through letters that two sisters exchange.

I have chosen to discuss *Felsefe-i Zenan* found in the second volume of *Letaif-i Rivayat* for two reasons: first, this is a work Ahmet Midhat produced before his life altering experience of exile at a time when he seems to have been less cautious in experimenting with various ideas in his writing. Second, it is seen as the earliest novel(la) by which he advocates women's rights. The narration challenges the social constructs of womanhood that are imposed on women which is done not subtly or indirectly; on the contrary, it is done in a fiercely assertive way, and in all the examples of female characters.. This angle, where he focuses on women's socially constructed conditions, renders this novel a good example through which we may observe Ahmet Midhat's expectations of the female figure in his 'imaginary society'. The suppression of women by men, particularly through conjugal relations, comes as a central criticism where he promotes absolute independence and freedom. Indisputably, the place of women in society was one of the primary impetuses for modernization, and in such project the novels arose. Mardin saw the issue of woman's status as the first theme of the novels of the era. This brings the question of religion to the table, i.e. how should the place of women be rethought in the tradition, which is why this novel stands out for discussion here.

Felsefe-i Zenan is the very first example of a literary work, which tackles this issue at this avant-garde level. Not only do the female-only characters pursue their rights for freedom and education, they also deny the patriarchal hegemony over women, which confine them to the role of domestic wives. Men, in their eyes, deserve to be hated only, as they have been the oppressors of women. For the time this novella was written, says Handan İnci, the female characters Ahmet Midhat draws would look very marginal. However, what is more interesting about this book is that the writer as a man criticizes men from a female point of view (IV).

Regarding the plot summary, Fazıla is a mature woman, who after losing her father, invests all the inheritance in her education, e.g. building/enlarging her library at home. To that end, she even refuses to do housework and cooking, in her home where there is no kitchen, and she even has her laundry done outside (17). All in all, she refuses to get married for “she is a woman solely devoted to education and learning” (18). She adopts two girls whom she raises with the same mentality and aspiration - the yearning for education and the stance against marriage, and men in general. As for their philosophy about life, the three not only avoid men but also hate them. Fazıla passes away soon after the introductory pages and her two adopted girls grow up. One is named Akıle (the intellectual) and the other Zekiye (the intelligent). The main story starts as the two girls are separated when Zekiye, the younger one, is offered a job as a governess in Syria and leaves her sister behind. Soon after she departs, they start exchanging letters. Zekiye starts writing and her writing gets corrected by a male clerk working in the same house who becomes interested in Zekiye. She is drawn to return his feelings and gets married, to Akıle’s great resentment. Although Zekiye finds him unique, “not like common men whom they have hated”, he eventually cheats on Zekiye engaging in an affair which causes Zekiye’s rapid death. Akıle’s stance against men and marriage never changes and the tragic ending affirms her persistence in her ‘philosophy’ that marriage (men indeed) causes women’s misery. Fazıla’s negative view of men is maintained by Akıle whereas the tragic consequences of the opposite thinking is demonstrated in Zekiye’s unfortunate ending.

To start with, Ahmet Midhat Efendi has proven throughout his literary life as a writer to defend rights of women. *Felsefe-i Zenan* is the very first one which does this directly, as Handan İnci states (V). Besides, as quoted from the same critic above, he interestingly does so from a female perspective. However, in addition to that, what is interesting in this novella is the determined resistance – suggested and affirmed by the narrator - to the social role of women. Argunşah puts forward that it is 'the new woman' which Ahmet Midhat wants to create, in *Felsefe-i Zenan* (87). As a socially concerned figure, Ahmet Midhat usually promotes family and family relations since it is the essential unit of the society for what he suggests as an ideal woman and her philosophy is noteworthy in several terms. In general, despite his steady advocacy of progress and modernization, Ahmet Midhat always keeps his balanced position among different units of the society, like the new and the traditional, men and women and the Muslim and Western. Surprisingly enough, *Felsefe-i Zenan* depicts radical female characters who are against marriage and hateful of men and who argue the futility of marriage with intact reasoning and determination. Recalling Altuğ's 'imaginary society' reference, we can infer this is the new woman in his imagined society, and her desired status, though very controversial in regard to the tradition of society at the time this was written.

Considering Ahmet Midhat's objective of the service of his society, his idealism in characterization aims at endorsement of good examples. However, this imagined 'new' woman, he envisions in *Felsefe*, is pushing the boundaries of his sought balance between the new and the traditional. She refuses her social role of a woman that the traditional society suggests, and even further, she refuses a marriage bond altogether which, in terms of the societal order essential for the continuation of society. This suggests a denial of the tradition and also Islamic principles that promote marriage. "Fazıla Hanım both hated and was repulsed by marriage. She found joy in nothing but reading and perusal, and that is what she persuaded Akıle and Zekiye with, every now and then. She would exhort the cons of marriage and the pros of spending one's life reading and learning" (20). To that end, she advises them to maintain the same position after she passes away. On her death bed, she reminds them once again of this position, informing them that she made sure both would be able rely on themselves financially with the inheritance she left (20-21). The message is clearly and directly put forward: marriage is an obstruction for the education of women, which is the main purpose of life for them as individuals, and therefore marriage must be avoided.

Ahmet Midhat strengthens the pejorative view of marriage by the negative depiction of men as cruel and marriage as enslavement: "With the thinking they inherited from Fazıla, they detested marriage to the extent that when they would see a man passing by their window, they would think: ‘there another one goes who ties the rope of enslavement to the neck of a woman forcing her to act according to his own desires” (22). Yet things change for Zekiye as she leaves home for a job, where she ends up getting married. Upon finding out Zekiye’s intent for marriage, Akıle keeps uttering to herself: “Oh Zekiye, I didn’t know you were so weak-minded! ... What can I do! Zekiye, like the rest of the people, has become a slave to lust” (58). In Islam, marriage is the only and legitimate place for the expression of human sexuality, which forms the family, the foundation of a society. However, Fazıla and Akıle denounce it for its traditional practice as having come to enthrall women and deprive them of right to education. In a protesting manner against marriage, this philosophy stands against the tradition, which principally is in accordance with the Islamic order, i.e. marriage as ideal relation between the two genders.

Another criticism, which is fiercer, is directed at polygamy, in the example of Zekiye’s husband. When Zekiye’s husband Sıdkı is involved in an affair with another woman, Zekiye cannot stand this. When her student related the story to Akıle after her death, the following conversation takes place between Sıdkı and the woman with whom he cheats on Zekiye: “You have initially told me you wouldn’t love anyone but your wife. You would say a spouse is sufficient for one. Admit now that you are surprised that I have won.” Sıdkı replies “...if something is acceptable by *sharia*, is it possible to deny it?” (69). Sıdkı takes advantage of the Islamic permission of marriage with more than one woman here to justify his adultery. This is another criticism directed at people’s practices of polygamy and legitimizing their acts through religion, if not Islamic law itself.

The opening sentences of the story, describing Fazıla, specify her education as in the following: “after her father taught her ‘grammar, logics, theology’ and she studied *hadith, tafseer* and similar kinds of knowledge by her own endeavor. After her father’s death, she starts to take interest in philosophy” (7). Notably, she is educated in Islamic knowledge while she is under her father’s supervision, whereas she shifts to philosophy after that. It is as though the religious education is associated with the father authority and once the father passes away, Fazıla meets philosophy – which symbolizes the Westernized preference of knowledge -, and this looks to me the starting point of ‘the philosophy of women’ that the novel title refers.

A closer attention to the discussion of belief and religion is necessary, since certain discursive aspects in *Felsefe* are phenomenal. Throughout the narrative, a recurring emphasis on ‘the nature’ is made as an omnipresent creative force. This admiring view of nature starts with Zekiye’s very first letter, as she is excited about her first travel by sea by all the nature she views on her travel. These references continue in the rest of letters and goes slightly beyond admiration; talking about the beauties of the sea as she sails, she ponders how insufficient poets are in figures of speech when describing the sea. She states: “Because the nature gave purity to the sea, it reflects the celestial bodies to the viewer. It also bestowed the sea- as an exceptional virtue- the amazing power to show one beam of stars as though they are thousands, just with a slight arousal by the wind” (30). She raises the intensity of her descriptions to an extent that she personifies elements of nature:

The wind would resonate in such incredible harmony as it hit the ropes and as if the celestial bodies would give all their ears to it as they bowed their heads... call it a fight between the art and nature. The nature would cry out at our ship “how come you pace loosely in such a magnificent night fastening the sea to yourself’ and our ship would with its arrogance fight back” (31).

Zekiye in the concluding part of her first letter speaks of nature as: “when friends see these [rocks], they would say ‘Oh, rocks rained from the skies over here!’ Such an irrelevant thinking! Rather it is the world order (*nizam-ı alem*) named ‘nature’ that organizes them” (32). All these natural beings she attributes to nature as its “artistic creatures”. *Nizam-ı alem* is a concept deep-rooted in the Ottoman tradition, Kara explains, which is used to refer to the unchanging divine system commanded by Allah, in creation of the world(s) (*Din ile Modernleşme* 15). Although, the use of *nizam-ı alem* cannot be fully taken out of this Islamic context that Kara points out, in Zekiye’s letter, the penetrating descriptions and lively allusions to nature seem to be emphasizing nature on its own as a creative force, rather than Allah’s creation of the nature. These notes on nature and its elements resemble mythological, or rather pantheistic, explanations of those, which presumably emanates from the Romanticist philosophy which centralizes nature as divinity.

This phenomenon goes on as Akıle addresses the nature as a force regulating the order of human life, too. When Zekiye gets married, Akıle receives the news with rage and resentment. She talks of nature: “Apparently the nature how we admire her and are crazy (*deli divane*) about it, in return, she, like a coy beloved, gives us, her lovers, several torments and sufferings” (58-9). In talking to herself as she does, she ponders that the nature in return of such a trouble like marriage, gives a baby as a favor. She addresses nature, as if addressing divinity: “Oh nature, the cruel! I do not wish your blessings! I don’t, I don’t. What moral and eternal blessing do you have any way that I could wish for!” (59). These cries demonstrate two contradicting phenomena: first, she recognizes nature as an omnipresent force in the place of God, which echoes like a Romanticist/pantheistic view of nature in terms of belief, and at the same time she rejects its eternity which denies any sacredness in her. However, Akıle’s general attitude towards nature as a divine being is maintained and this proves Akıle has a tendency towards a belief in the temporal world since references to afterlife do not take place that which forms the basic teachings of the Islamic faith. In that sense, the closing scene too is remarkably verifying as well as very confusing. Akıle, Kamile and Zekiye’s student visit Zekiye’s grave as they all are in mourning upon her death. As the two recite *Al-Fatiha* (the verse which is recited after the dead in Muslim customs), Akıle throws herself on the grave and starts kissing the stones on her grave. Then, she starts talking to a piece of stone holding it in her hand: “Ah, this thing I am smelling is but a stone. Yet I feel I smell Zekiye in it. Oh, stone you are so blessed to lie down with Zekiye for eternity here. Oh, I am mistaken again! What blessing is there in the world that lasts forever so you could have it? Tomorrow destiny (*felek)* will tear you apart too” (70-71). Up to here Akıle maintains the same pantheistic-like discourse as in addressing a natural element, and the pessimistic view of ‘*felek*’. However, her following final words by the grave of Zekiye shows a diversion from that discourse, as for the first time, a direct communication with God, in an Islamic sense, appears: “Oh Zekiye, you well know that I never wished a thing from this world. However, just now I happen to hope something. That is solely to get rid of the burden of this life and lie beside you and enter the gate of rewards on the Day of Judgment, hand in hand with you. Oh God! Is this desire of mine going to realize? No no! The door to hope, too, is closed for me. Oh Lord! You have created your servant, Akıle, as an example of unhappiness. Had you willed to fulfill my wish, you would have just let me reunite with my Zekiye right here” (71). Just then, she repents of what she said and utters the following words: “I made a mistake again. I have crossed the border as a servant [of God] again. As I hadn’t had a say when You created me, I don’t have any authority to say anything about my ending, either” (71). Though it is very inferable that the women of *Felsefe* do not seem to acquire a religious point of view of Islamic belief when looking at the general course of their characterization, the very final words make a deviation from that and a connection is attained with Akıle and God just before the closure.

Apart from the concluding statements, the discourse has been set focusing on the temporal world and nature as the overarching force over the world and humankind. Both through letters and Akıle's monologues, the narrator comes across as under the influence of pantheistic discourse which the Enlightenment Romanticists promoted starting from the eighteenth century. This philosophy that rises from bond with nature, contemplation and favor of a life in solitude (Akıle decides to spend the rest of her life on her own in the end) echoes Romantic literary revolution and the poetry, which later influenced novelists like Victor Hugo and Honoree de Balzac and the like. Evidently, among the works Ahmet Midhat read were Romantics as well, since he makes references to such novels as by Hugo, in his *Ahbar*. Orhan Okay strongly presumes relation of influence between Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Julie or the New Héloise* and *Felsefe-i Zenan* due to similarities in both the close connection with nature and also epistolary choice in narrative style (112).

All in all, *Felsefe* is an example to show Ahmet Midhat's early phase as a novelist in which he tended to imitate a more Western discourse; from this, it is possible to infer that his inclination of thought was turned westward, too. However, as I read the cry uttered by Akıle at the end as a deviation from the pantheistic utterances maintained in the course of narration, it is not insignificant in the sense that it indicates the Islamic thinking will be more and more influential in Ahmt Midhat's later phases. Nevertheless, *Felsefe-i Zenan*'s unorthodox avant-gardism is an indication of how far Ahmet Midhat wandered despite his socially-concerned moralism. In the following section, however, a very different narrator will appear in the novel *Hasan Mellah*.

3.5. *Hasan Mellah yahut Sır İçinde Esrar* (*Mariner Hasan or Mysteries within a Mystery*)

> *There is Madam, there is indeed a life after this one...*

Unlike the women of *Felsefe-i Zenan*, the protagonist of Ahmet Midhat's later novel *Hasan Mellah* is a pious character. I have chosen to analyze *Hasan Mellah* for a few reasons that make it significant for my discussion. Firstly, it is listed as the first of his extensive novels with the complexity of plot and numerous characters whose stories are narrated in detail. Secondly, he reveals in the preface to this novel that he was emulating *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the French novel which he had translated into Turkish a few years before writing *Hasan Mellah*. Ayten Er argues that this translation experience and the public interest that arose in *Monte Cristo* bred the idea of writing a novel in Western technique, in the writer's mind. However, though he exposes his emulation, the plots and themes are not similar; narrative techniques show similarities to *Monte Cristo* (161). In this light, the question arises how Ahmet Midhat interprets the first example of the Western genre in a Muslim context, and what differences it shows from, for instance, *Felsefe-i Zenan* in religious discourse. Thirdly, the time of his initial novels corresponds to his years in exile; thus, he writes *Hasan Mellah* in Rhodes under the charges of disseminating atheist views which places these works in a very different biographical experience especially in comparison to works like *Felsefe-i Zenan*. Very overtly, there is a religious dimension in themes of *Hasan Mellah*. Accused of infidelity, Ahmet Midhat presumably feels the need to update his rhetoric and content assuring a level of piety in his central character. Having just discussed, *Felsefe*, in the analysis of *Hasan Mellah*, I aim to draw attention to the religious and belief-related references both the thematic and rhetorical aspects.

In the preface to his very first novel *Hasan Mellah*, Ahmet Midhat Efendi talks about his motives and his literary capabilities. He notes that in writing this novel he is inspired by the story of *The Count of Monte Cristo* adding the following a notable remark:

> But my work shall hardly be close to Alexander Dumas' work... So be it! I do not expect to be condemned for my striving, in a nation which has been dealing with writing for only three years among up to only thirty writers, against a writer who stood out over three thousand writers in a nation which has been tackling with literature and thought over three hundred years" (5).

This apologetic statement clearly demonstrates that he is manifesting a hierarchical inferiority, before a Western ideal, placing it as a standard, a point he can never achieve due to historical realities.

As to the novel's plot summary, it starts in the Moroccan coast, in the house of Alfons who has a daughter named Cuzella. Cuzella is a beautiful and smart girl who refuses to get married to Pavlos about which her father is excited. A burglar breaks into her room, one night, and she finds out the man is the person whose picture she has been hiding. She is in love with his face; he is Hasan Mellah, an Arab mariner. They immediately fall in love with each other and Cuzella hides him and helps him sneak out with the help of her governess, Marie, a nun. The two are lovers at first sight and agree to elope together. However, Cuzella gets intrigued by Pavlos and gets kidnapped by him. Hasan sails off in search for Cuzella which becomes a journey in where he stops by different places, meets various people, and helps some of them; all in all, it is a novel in which his adventures are related. In the end, Cuzella and Hasan get married while the good ones are rewarded and the evil characters punished. Throughout the story and in the end, Ahmet Midhat keeps the reader alert for the lessons he wants them to draw from the story, with a lot of intense religious and pious references.

In many aspects, religion is a very important theme/dimension in *Hasan Mellah*, which is accommodated considerably all in content, themes, language. The characterization of both Muslim and non-Muslim characters who are good are – without exception - religious. Besides, most of the characters are Christians and there are theological discussions among these characters; moreover there are instances where religions are compared. There is a pursuit of discourse with religious advertences throughout the novel, as will be typical of Ahmet Midhat's works that are to come.

As already mentioned, the majority of characters are non-Muslim in *Hasan Mellah* yet the protagonist, Hasan, is a Muslim. He is defined as a person who has the 'Muslim nature' in his character, with good ethics, wisdom, as he is one who seeks refuge in God's mercy and who talks to people about afterlife and gives them religious and moral advice (Timur 47). Not only his character and rhetoric, but his pious characteristics is manifested in his practice and relations. Though only one time, he goes to a mosque in Damascus: "The first thing a man does visit is the Umayyad mosque" says the narrator, and Hasan prays his afternoon prayer in this mosque, and also stays to listen to the preacher (376). Moreover, he is devoted to helping people who are in trouble, like Madame Ilia who has lost her husband; he takes her to his cruise promising her to find her husband. When the husband shows up on board by coincidence, the narrator describes Hasan Mellah's reaction: "looking up to the sky he uttered *takbir* (Allahu Akbar – God is the greatest) by the tip of his tongue in a level of voice that no one can hear but Allah". On another occasion, he helps a concubine who was given to her, whom he likes but does not touch when he finds out she has a lover, to whom she was devoted. Not only that, he helps her find her lover. His

Christian friend Alonzo, upon seeing him help several people, says: “Are you created to become a Jesus. Are you going to find solutions for every troubled person in the world?” (305). This becomes an aggregating symbol of the Muslim and Christian goodness in ethics.

Cuzella, the female protagonist of the novel who appears before Hasan Mellah in the scene is a well-educated young Christian girl who was raised by nuns. With reference to the nuns as her governesses, religion is referred to in the opening chapter of the novel. Sipros who is her main governess – who passes away before the time of the narration of the novel - is a Catholic nun who is “curious about everything” and reads Protestant literature and philosophical works and “injected freedom into thinking”, “spaciousness in faith” in the girl (9). These are Cuzella’s praised characteristics that she had inherited from her nun. We observe her critically approaching the religious issues every time she is enforced to act in a certain way for religious reasons.

The first reference to religion is with the same character Sipros, a nun, who criticizes the prohibition of marriage in clergy. Ahmet Midhat discusses the issue of marriage in Christianity in many works where he presents Christian characters. He does the same in this work not only in the issue of marriage but also generally the status of priesthood as well.

Cuzella gets on very well with her governess nun, Marie, but does not hesitate to challenge her when it comes to the issue of belief. Free in thinking, as just mentioned, she makes an interesting remark regarding Christian worship: her governess Mari warns her of her obsession with a picture, i.e. Hasan’s picture, whom she does not even know then, and says “Are you going to marry an inanimate picture? Cuzella responds: “Like we worship inanimate paintings in the Church, I am going to worship a painting” (99). When Cuzella, in a conversation, asks Marie if she can swear on her companionship to Cuzella, Marie responds with quoting from Jesus that “we should not take oath on neither God’s name or in one’s own name, nor in the skies and the earth. Our oath only be either yes or no” (102).

The fact that Cuzella is a Christian and Hasan a Muslim, the question of intermarriage is raised several times. In each occasion, one of the characters explains that it is allowed for Muslim men to marry non-Muslims, those from the people of the book. Below is the conversation between Marie and Cuzella on the issue:

> Marie: “If everything is alright, what about Pavlos the third, [i.e. Hasan] being a Muslim.
> Cuzella: Oh dear Mari. I can’t say anything against that. In my view, all religions summon people to the worship of the one God who has created the sky and the earth and all the universe. There is no religion which regards God less holy than we do. As there is no religion which prays to God less than we do. Do not all the religions advise the good and prohibit the evil? True but Islam is against our religion, replies Mari.
> Cuzella makes these even more remarkable statements on religion(s):
> Sipertiyo who passed away would say the opposite of what you are saying. A religion cannot be against another religion. It is only politicians who are against each other, he said. Did Muslims fight against our religion as much as Protestants did? Nevertheless, we do not consider them infidels. No need! Sipertiyo would say: Muslims recognize Jesus (110).

And she continues justifying her getting married and Arab Muslims by giving examples from history of marriages conducted between Muslim men and Christian women. “Even the Emperors of Constantinople let their daughters marry Muslims”. They both admit their knowledge of Muslim men protecting their Christian wives’ religion. However, Mari the nun gets “annoyed by her free thoughts on religion,” yet, she does not interfere (111). Although the characters in this scene are Christians, the narrator seems to highlight the Islamic law and practice. And in Cuzella’s independent thinking, he praises free thinking and is critical about one’s own religion. Not only Christians, but rather, I would suggest, he subtly addresses his Muslim reader, showing the benefits of “thinking” on religious issues with individual reasoning faculties.

Hasan on his way to finding Cuzella goes to Korsika where he dines at a mayor’s house. The mayor’s brother disappears after killing his parents and sister and leaving his wife behind, Madame Ilia. While he learns of this story, the wife of the mayor says: “But, isn’t it different for one when it comes to his wife. The Torah states that man is like two different souls in one body[5], and that you are a Muslim perhaps you have not read Torah.” Hasan replies: “As Muslims we are obliged even to read the Torah” (161). Hasan sympathizes with Madame Ilia’s sorrows as she gives a detailed account of her story of her lost husband; he takes her on board with him promising to find him. She sails with them and gets involved in an illegitimate affair with one of the ship crew, Trillo.

The part of the novel where the most intense religious moment takes place is the dialogue between Hasan and Madam Ilia after Hasan returns to the ship when

[5] Referring to a verse in the Torah: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and become one flesh". The narrator does not quote the verse directly, only mentions it.

meanwhile, the affair happens between Madame Ilia and Trillo, to Ilia's great remorse. Hasan, without knowing of the affair, tries to console her while he thinks her resentment is due to her missing husband. Madame Ilia repenting her sinful deed feels she doesn't deserve forgiveness and wants to commit suicide. The following dialogue - more Hasan's talking- takes place which discusses deeply the issues of afterlife, repentance and forgiveness, which I regard as the climax of the religious sentiment in the novel, a cathartic moment for the reader:

> You must not be desperate. Even if we are desperate about the rewards and punishments of the temporal world, we should not be so of that of afterlife. You do not take less heed of the other world, do you? I would feel sad if you do, because in that case you are in a great loss. Some miserable minds assume there is no other life but only this one... Would you really believe that the Creator who made this world did so with no meaning? He is the One who makes the rules of the universe for the beginning and for its end and performs according to those rules; would you really expect him to make our ending excluded of rules? ... There is Madame, there is indeed a life after this one. ... Therefore, you will get the rewards you did not attain here, hereafter. This is what I believe and this faith is what gives my conscience reliance and peace (208).

The longer Hasan talks, the more ashamed Madam Ilia feels, and cries, as the narrator describes to the reader she has demeaned her honor despite this chaste man's favors for her. "Oh I am such a sinful woman. ... My evil deed does not leave my vision." In his following tirade, Hasan elaborates on repentance and forgiveness:

> This the narrator refers to as a religious sermon. What is interesting here, other than the highly religious content, is the dramatic irony that the narration creates by not letting Hasan know about Madame's deed. It serves as a catharsis for Madame Ilia's situation to intensify her feelings of regret and sorrow. Besides, as he mentions, the Christian custom of confession, his not knowing her adultery, manifest the Muslim approach in the secrecy of sins which encourage concealing sins between the human and God and the repentance to be offered only to one's God.

Madame İlia is the character whose end is concluded soon after her regretful act. She throws herself in front of the men on the ship, including her husband whom she has been looking for. Despite Madame Ilıa's adultery, she is a character who arouses sympathy for the reader by her remorse and the dead end in which she finds herself. In Madame Ilıa's scenes, we see her trying to decide in which way to end her life, and we are informed that Madame has designed her suicide even before her husband showed up by taking one of the balls on the ship to drown herself tied up with weight. It is clear that the choice is deliberate of the narrator who comments: "It was that the arduous woman who was so extremely ashamed to look in the face of God, let alone any person, buried herself in the depths of the sea" (224). It is as though the narrator is approving the ending. On the other hand, noting that she was a religious Christian, the choice of drowning in water complements her shame as water is the symbolism of cleansing and purification, which is also found in the Christian custom of baptism.

Another experience Hasan goes through is after he is granted a concubine in a competition in Egypt. Esma "as beautiful as Cuzella", attracts him and although he has strong desires for this girl, Esma does not accept to be partners with him. She reveals that she has a lover that she devoted herself to and cannot be with another man in any circumstance. As he is virtuous and selfless, he gives up his desire, and the narrator also explains that Hasan is not driven by wicked lust and he cared for his partner (300). Moreover, he promises to help Esma to find her lover, Timur Bey, too. In fact, when Esma initially tells him she is not a virgin, to keep him away from herself, Hasan says: "That does not diminish your value. I am not a bigot to that extent" (315). In the religious example of Hasan's character, he suggests subtle criticism to bigotry, which he seems to address in the tradition of his society.

The pious attitude of the novel is established most in the ending of the characters. When coming across Trillo, Hasan finds out Trillo was imprisoned for a murder he did not commit and complains to Hasan that he is innocent and a victim. However, Hasan who has deep faith in the justice of God replies in tears: "No brother no! ... A person can hide his deeds from the government and people. Yet he cannot hide it from God. He cannot be rid of His revenge. Believe me these convicts in here are here not due to the faults written in their files but because of other murders. Trillo is an example: what convicted him forever here is the blood of Madame Ilia" (414). This instance is not only significant because it demonstrated his faith in the ultimate justice of God, but also because it delivers another important message: the guilt of adultery is not a burden ascribed to women only, as would be the tendency in the tradition where women were seen as the source of evil. He rather shows that – after she drowned herself in guilt - the partner in crime who escaped without feeling remorse as her, was caught by the justice of God and was imprisoned. In other words, it is very important how Madame Ilia – though dead - remains a good character, and Trillo a bad one, as compared by their penitence. This, I would argue, comes from the Islamic tenets, which suggest that penitence is a purifying act, and also that man and woman are equally subject to this principle.

The good characters, though, are rewarded in the ending. Hasan and Cuzella get married, Alonzo, Hasan's good friend finds out he is Cuzella's brother, and is happy to join the family. In his epilogue to the novel, Ahmet Midhat notes that Pavlos, the evil character, dies miserably. He concludes by saying that every story intends a moral. Says to the reader "May the moral of story be blesses for whoever got whichever one" (433). Comparing the novel to *Felsefe-i Zenan*, it is hard to find thematic and discursive similarities as *Hasan Mellah* draws the issues and relations from a religious outlook. An omnipresence of God as the creator and the maintainer of the world order prevails, in contrast to *Felsefe*'s pantheistic allusions.

3.6. *Hüseyin Fellah*

Hüseyin Fellah was written in 1875, a year after *Hasan Mellah*. Although their names rhyme when pronounced together, they do not show a lot of common characteristics other than the religious tone in narration and characterization. I have chosen *Hüseyin Fellah* as the last one of Ahmet Midhat's early novels for both the similarities and the differences it shows with both *Felsefe-i Zenan* and *Hasan Mellah*. Like in *Hasan Mellah*, *Hüseyin Fellah*'s good characters are formed with by religion. On the other hand, plot-wise and from the centrality of characters, it is very different from *Hasan Mellah*. In *Huseyin Fellah*, the ideal and the key character is not Hüseyin as the name suggests but a female protagonist who is given the central role in the narrative. A strong and dominating woman, in Şehlevend's idealism, I see Ahmet Midhat pursuing his motive for the strengthening of women. Şehlevend, a character as strong as Fazıla, remains unmarried until the end of the story; she is well-learned, dominant, determines the flow of events and leads the men around her. As religious as Hasan, however, she is a manifestation of a different female character as that of *Felsefe*, in terms of philosophy. The main difference is due to Şehlevend's religious worldview and often references to *Qur'anic* teachings and connection to God.

Secondly, the main female character appears to be the really main character as she is more crucial in the story compared to *Hüseyin Fellah* who gives the novel its name. *Hüseyin Fellah* like *Hasan Mellah* accommodates religion and its related issues widely; however, its difference from the latter is that it does so from the outstanding female figure. Therefore, it becomes important for comparing and contrasting it to other novels like *Felsefe-i Zenan*, *Hasan Mellah*, as well as *Felatun Bey*, as they were written in the same year.

Unlike Hasan Mellah, all characters are Muslims in *Fellah*; it takes place in different settings other than Istanbul, like Algeria and Egypt. Şehlevend is the female protagonist of the novel, who occupies more place than Hüseyin Fellah, the main character. She and her mother Hasna are hopelessly wandering in the streets of Istanbul when they witness two men trying to kill another, and the women help this other man survive, who will later end up with Şehlevend in the same house in Algeria as servants. Waiting near the mosque, Şehlevend and her mother wait for people to help them like beggars when a man recognizes Şehlevend and convinces her to become a slave that he can sell to save her mother. They lie to her mother that this man is taking her as a wife for his son; Hasna is eventually convinced and the two apart. Şehlevent becomes a slave to Ahmed Bey. Pretending to be deaf and mute, she works for him without becoming a concubine to him. Not hearing from her daughter for a long time, Hasna sets off to find her daughter. She goes through tough experiences and ends up becoming a servant herself.

Civelek Mustafa, who was the man in the opening scene who was almost murdered, comes as a servant to Ahmed Bey's house where Şehlevend and Mustafa come together to later find out it was not their first encounter. Ahmed Bey is the leader of a group of bandits who assassinate other people to usurp their wealth. With Şehlevend's initiative, they help Hüseyin Fellah, who is a rich farmer, and also a good and honorable man. Both Hüseyin and Civelek Mustafa and another man, Omer, are in love with Şehlevend; however, she refuses all by saying she sees them as her brothers. Coincidence plays the big role in most of the plot and Mustafa and Şehlevend keep helping people whom Ahmet Bey designs to kill. Mustafa happens to find her mother, while Şehlevend's former servant, Ömer, is found by Hüseyin, who investigates Şehlevend's story. Ahmed and his team die as they become unsuccessful in their plots and learn it was Şehlevend and Mustafa who revealed and destroyed Ahmed Bey's plans.

In the end, all good characters become friends and gather to live together in Hüseyin Fellah's house on his farm. Civelek commits suicide when he learns that Şehlevend does not want to marry him and after which Hüseyin orders him not to see her as the house is divided into a men's and women's section (*harem*). He kills himself after he has a nervous breakdown due to his passionate love for Şehlevend. Şehlevend ends up getting married to Omer while Hüseyin marries Sabire, his previous beloved.

The good characters are very faithful and religious people, which is inferable from their speeches which contain many references to God as the greatest and the omnipotent Lord of all human beings. I will address some of the scenes where religious references are made and those prevues, which are related to this discussion, as well as the faith-related aspects in the formation of good character.

In the opening chapter of the novel, it is a cold and stormy-rainy night where Şehlevend and Hasna are helplessly trying to find shelter. Describing the strong thunders of the cold night, the narrator quotes from the *Qur'an*, saying, "at a night when everybody recites 'Ve yusebbihurrad' to seek the help of God, two human silhouettes appeared" (9). This verse is found in the thirteenth chapter of the *Qur'an*, chapter "Ar-Ra`d", the Thunder, which is translated as "and the thunder extols His limitless glory and praises him". What makes this reference to the *Qur'an* by its verses related to nature significant is if we compare it to the narrative choice of *Felsefe-i Zenan* while referring to the nature. The two women in *Felsefe* in depicting nature did not refer or allude to God as the Creator but rather viewed nature as a potent creative force. However, in *Fellah*, the narrator makes a *Qur'anic* reference, which explains natural forces by their adherence to God's order and divinity. The language of the novel altogether is full of pious statements relating to God and His religion, and instances of those will be given in the characters' in the following.

Hüseyin Fellah is an Arab farmer who is not as dominant in character as Hasan Mellah, but rather a moderate. He is but a humble, respectful and faithful man. He fits the general picture of all characters who are religious and who show this in their reactions to the happenings. We see him praying to God, referring to God, uttering religious statements. The narrator relates this in Hüseyin's character as in the following: "If the people of every story are like Hasan Mellah then all stories would be similar. Some men are moderate and they show themselves as examples of humanity not with manners and wisdom they acquire but with their decent nature, like Hüseyin Fellah and Ömer". This explanation is noted when the two pay a visit to an asylum and the narrator explains they would not look at the misery of asylum dwellers for fun as some people do, but would rather learn a lesson and to praise God for the blessings they have been given (254).

Şehlevend, on the other hand, despite the choice of the novel's title, is the most powerful character in regards to the whole story. She is the most respected character by the good-male characters with all of whom she becomes close friends. She is the one determining most of the action that is taken in the plot, and decisions are made according to her reasoning. She is also drawn as a pious girl. In a dialogue with Mustafa talking about saving Hüseyin, Civelek mentions his father's advice, which is 'Do good to those who did good for you'. Şehlevend replies that what she learned from her father is 'do good anyway for the sake of God' and that is what she prefers (136). Her character is drawn as an honorable woman with high morals who fights against evil. Upon revealing Ahmed's plans against other people, two of his bandits get killed. She explicates her motive with the will of God: "Allah wills every right of man taken from another be paid either in this world or in the next. The idea of revenge comes from this. If those victims do not have the power to avenge these bandits, I do. I do not have that for my own revenge, but Allah will definitely create the one who does" (232). This reminds of the religious responsibility of Muslims as the vicegerents of God to act according to the will of God on this earth. She gives this almost sermonic speech to the men; thus, she is depicted as a strong Muslim woman who commands the men around her. Her strength is probably related to the higher class she is originally from.

When Ahmed and his team perish altogether as a result of Şehlevend's plots against them, she utters the following words, which summarize the idea of justice of God that illustrates the idea of reward and punishment in the novel:

> You assumed these poor people are without an avenger. With your alleged fame in piety, have you not ever reminded yourselves that there is a true avenger in this world, named "Allah"? Yet He did not design this to teach you a lesson. He rather did so to show the bandit of the ummah who are weak in faith, those who admit the presence of God, yet they presume He does not see them while they are committing their evils (311).

This tirade, which goes on, also proves that Şehlevend acts as an agent of God's will, which is ensuring the good.

Virginity is an important characteristic of Şehlevend; although she is taken as a concubine to Ahmed Bey, she punches him every time he wants to approach her, and the same happens with Civelek and Hüseyin, too. Later in the story, she reveals that she went mute on purpose before she arrived in Ahmed Bey's house in order to protect her chastity. On the other hand, she accepts that she has love for all three men in her life, Hüseyin, Civelek and Ömer; however, she suggests that they all become brothers and sister, as love – to her - does not necessarily mean lust (334). However, this leads to Civelek's death, as he has been madly in love with her. When the doctor declares a *gassal* (one who cleanses and prepares the body of a deceased Muslim) is needed, Şehlevend utters that he is a martyr "for in my faith he is a shaheed" (342). Şehlevend is devastated upon Civelek's death especially that she feels guilty for not returning his love. She declares mourning for three years and neither she nor Hüseyin get married. After three years, she gets married to Ömer wearing all black and talking by the grave of Civelek that she will mourn for him forever and she is getting married just because Civelek asked so on his death-bed.

After they gather in his house to live together, as Şehlevend and her mother gain freedom from their servant status and go back to their high class from which they came in the first place, Hüseyin Fellah starts treating them in a different way. As Şehlevend decides all three men become as her brothers, Civelek hastily wants to face her. However, Hüseyin stops him by saying that the harem is forbidden for men to enter from then on: "unless we are not summoned by the harem, we shall not go in there. Do you still consider Şehlevend as a concubine? Remember that, thank God, we all are Muslims and bound to the shariah of Muhammad (338). The treatment of women is adjusted according to *shariah* rules as they are implemented in the society, as another instant where tradition and religion become intricate.

Civelek is a naive and good character as a young boy. As we get to know him, we find out he has killed several people, yet mostly for self-defense or revenge. He revolves around Şehlevend like her orb, influenced by her strong character and his love for her. The scene where he is dying is presented by intense religious sentiment with the idea of passing away to the afterlife. As he kills himself out of Şehlevend's love, Şehlevend feels so guilty for not accepting his hand. She attempts to give him a kiss, for which he always asked. Civelek replies:

> I have become a resident of eternity now. There is no jealousy in eternal life. [To Ömer] You should take Şehlevend. Be a blessing for yourselves. On Judgement Day, I I will be in front of Allah without having attained what I desired. I was deprived even from a kiss all my youth and for that deprivation I will ask for my forgiveness. For I desperately need forgiveness. I have sinned a lot. I have killed people. Yet, eventually I have done my *kısas* with my own hands. This... These mistakes... Oh Allah! Oh my Lord! There, I see... O Lord!..You... You... Allah! (342).

Right in this is the scene Şehlevend declares him a martyr and his grave is likened to a garden of paradise – despite his suicide which is considered a great sin in

Islam! Our writer, one can infer, regarded his naivety and sorrows as his atonement, and his insane moment a justification of his suicide, so to let Civelek rest in peace.

The other good characters also demonstrate pious characters, as they strive for justice. The issue of prayer is also mentioned several times in the novel, by characters turning to God for help and for what they desire. In some occasions, this issue is questioned as well; for instance, the narrator questions the human prayers and God's will: The ship going for pilgrimage where Hasna is also on board gets attacked by pirates. All the pilgrims start crying in panic and they pray to God, some solely want to survive by handing all they have over to the pirates; others wish to escape and save the ship. The narrator intervenes:

> Now with this upheaval, different hearts wish for different things. Which one is going to be accepted? If both are accepted, both the chaser and the chased should achieve while the two contradict each other. Yet, people of the sunnah have the best explanation for this: the one that is by the will of God will be accepted and whatever will happen shall happen (75).

This discussion is remarkable for it shows us that the narrator, besides always giving, endorses religious norms for his readers. He also raises questions related to religion and this shows us that religion is not merely an ornament, but a theme for the narration. There is another occasion, which carries a more controversial cry rather than a prayer: when she was wandering helplessly in the beginning of the story, Hasna Hanım speaks out addressing God: "Oh God, Alas, alas! ... We have so far prayed for being saved. Yet that wasn't accepted. And now we are praying to be dead. At least, accept this one! Şehlevend – Ameen!" (12). This rather rebellious tone in prayer is different to the general tone of the discourse, which is obedience to God's will.

Other than the two novels studies in the beginning of the chapter, so far we have seen four examples by Ahmet Midhat and how his stance towards religion changes in time especially as seen in the shift from *Felsefe* to *Hasan Mellah* in terms of piety as an ideal characteristic. I ascribe this overt change in discourse to his experience of being exiled, which is an experience that shook Ahmet Midhat when he was charged of atheism. However, it is useful at this point to remember that *Felatun Bey*'s narrative does not manifest itself with religiosity in Rakım Efendi's idealism much; in fact, far less than *Hasan Mellah*, considering it was written after the latter novel. Therefore, though I believe the exile is a crucial point for Ahmet Midhat's journey as a novelist in relation to personal concerns and religious discourse, and that it made him more attentive to and cautious about his religiosity as a narrator, I do not see it as an ultimate shift that will make his discourse a thoroughly pious one, and he would, later, still write novels that are drawn around a secular narrative discourse. In other words, despite the fact that Ahmet Midhat's novels appear as more and more intense in religious discourse in later novels, there is still a degree of/examples of those that show secular tendencies and emulation of modern Western discourse. Yet, altogether, Ahmet Midhat is still to be remembered with the extent and diversity in his character as a novelist.

In this chapter, I have analyzed a novel like *Hasan Mellah*, *Hüseyin Fellah*, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* and *Felsefe-i Zenan* under the same heading for two reasons: firstly, to underpin my hypothesis that the exile experience urged the author to seek a more pious discourse in the novel. Secondly, religion being the theme of discussion in the thesis, the changes in the discourses shows the diversity of Ahmet Midhat in this issue. Although it is obvious that the novels written during the exile manifest a religious idealism in characters, Hasan and Şehlevend, *Felatun Bey* comes across with a more Western ethical framework. Hence, by giving a biographical understanding of his changes in religious discourse, I do not mean to confine him to strict chronological hypothesis, I solely try to make more sense of his journey as a novelist with its shifts, oscillations and transformation and thus maturation as a fiction author.

In this light, I realized Ahmet Midhat maintains a religious discourse and the later novels ollowing the years when the afore-mentioned novels were written, we read Ahmet Midhat as a more pious narrator. The following chapter will discuss two novels written later than the ones discussed above, *Esrar-ı Cinayat* and *Müşahedat, Hayal ve Hakikat,* respectively. Each novel deals with greatly different issues and employ distinct tecniques. However, looking at the extent and role the religions plays in these narratives, particularly *Esrar-ı Cinayat* and *Müşahedat,* piety is maintained in the narration and the characterization, whereas, in *Hayal ve Hakikat*, the situation is a bit different.

CHAPTER 4
NOVELS THAT WAVER

In this fifth chapter, the novels under discussion will be those written long after Ahmet Midhat was released from exile. *Esrar-ı Cinayat* is dated 1884, Müşahedat was written in 1891 and *Hayal ve Hakikat* in 1892. Although they vary in terms of themes, style and discourse, all share one aspect which is that the author is more assured of himself as a novelist and claims a convincing level of realism in his novel-writing. Moreover, he brings more every day reality into his narrative from his own society since he discusses Ottoman society/tradition more bluntly, and makes direct references to politics and history. His post-exile period is, also, when he came to be on good terms with the Sultan and his regime; where he makes sure he does not upset the authority so that he is secure from any disturbances. Nevertheless, to do justice to him, it is crucial to note that Ahmet Midhat always stays loyal to his ambition to write novels and this way, he pursues his literary identity as 'the first teacher' and continues his duty as the social educator with his criticism and thinking reflected on the novel narration.

In the earlier examples, which were analyzed in the previous chapter, except for *Felatun Bey*, the early novels dealt with an imaginary society, like in *Felsefe*, or stories took place in distant territories other than the center of the Ottoman State, as in *Hasan Mellah* and *Hüseyin Fellah*. However, the following three novels suit better Bakhtin's definition of the genre as "the new world that is still in the making", as they discuss the very Ottoman issues at stake, like the legal system, inter-communal relations and gender relations. All of these are either handled with the religious dimension or are concerned with it to a considerable extent. *Hayal ve Hakikat* will demonstrate a different stance as to the religious discourse; thus, it is important to visit an example as late as this one which indicates Ahmet Midhat's versatile choices from one novel to another. Apart from the fact that I have tried to view Ahmet Midhat's discourse as a novelist in a chronological transformation, it is useful to accept that these classifications work only to a limited extent, given Ahmet Midhat's versatility. *Hayal ve Hakikat* will be instrumental in understanding the fluidity of discursive stances, especially since he oscillated between philosophies of the East and the West in his endeavor for the right synthesis -or grafting-. The novel provided Ahmet Midhat the literary space for his experimental shifts and blends both in thinking and style, considering Bakhtin's theory, which puts forward the novel's capacity to accommodate multiple different utterances.

4.1. *Esrar-ı Cinayat*

Esrar-ı Cinayat was published in 1884 as a novel which has been entitled as the first detective novel of Turkish literature. It is not only the first but also, as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar describes it, "an achieved detective novel" (471-2) Ahmet Midhat, being the prolific writer as he is and who hastily gives different genres a try, also produced an example of this genre which became popular especially through Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series or Edgar Allan Poe's works in the nineteenth century. This novel is particularly important for my discussion not only for it is a novice type for the Turkish literature for the time but also due to the notion of justice as occupying a great part in the thematic discussion of the novel. This renders *Esrar-ı Cinayat* an interesting piece to analyze, for being a Muslim adaptation of the detective genre and in how the poetic justice is attained in a story of crimes with a Muslim ethical point-of-view. Moreover, the rhetoric and narration of *Esrar* is highly concerned with religion and providence while the notions of crime and punishment, good and evil deeds are raised every now and then. In other words, the narrator chooses a religious objective in approaching this particular genre, in a slightly more didactic way compared to his usual narrative style in general. He educates his reader in accordance with the Islamic tenets in the themes and events he relates. Although political issues, like the legal system or criticism of the bureaucrats, are introduced, Ahmet Midhat mainly approaches the rest of the moral phenomena, both individual and social, from a highly religious stance. Such includes constant reference to God, the Creator, as the ultimate maintainer of justice as an answer to the overarching theme of justice. Considering this, *Esrar-ı Cinayat* will be analyzed according to three main aspects it deals with: firstly, the criticism of the judiciary system in the Ottoman state overshadowed by an emulation of the European system, secondly, the overall religious discourse of the intrusive narrator who gives religious- moral lectures, and thirdly and finally the ending which manifests itself as a deviation from the typical detective novels to offer a providential conclusion to the plot.

The plot of the novel can be summarized as follows: Three dead bodies are found on a small offshore island of Istanbul, called *Öreke Taşı*, one of which belongs to a Muslim girl, the other two to Greek men. The following month a suicide is reported, which is not in fact a suicide, but another murder designed to appear as a suicide. Osman Sabri is the interrogator and his duty is to uncover the truth behind these four murders, which he from the beginning assumes to be connected. The district governor, Mecdeddin Pasha, attempts to hinder Osman from furthering his investigation as he finds out his secret lover Hediye Hanım is involved in the murders. He sends Osman to prison while Osman, as an honest officer, strives to solve the cases through other means like newspaper from jail. He writes letters to be published in the newspapers and finally reveals the killer, Kalpazan Mustafa, who collaborated with Hediye, and Halil Suri in counterfeiting money, and reveals Halil Suri as the victim of the latest murder. The story reveals that Hediye and Halil Suri convinced Mustafa to make counterfeit money in exchange of Peri, Hediye's *cariye*. As he cannot get Peri in the end of the project, he goes to kill Hediye when he ends up murdering Peri and the other two, injuring Halil Suri. A month later, he completes his unfinished plan by killing Halil in his house.

By working arduously and meticulously towards solving the murders, Osman Sabri succeeds with the help of the press (whose power Ahmet Midhat apparently believes in) and public attention of the case. The narrator keeps the reader's suspense alive for the whole storyline. Açıl argues, from all three types of detective fiction Todorov lists, *Esrar-ı Cinayat* is most similar to the suspense novel, while bearing some characteristics of the other two, 'whodunit' and 'thriller', as well. (146). Yet, the ending of *Esrar* is the key which makes this novel peculiar to Ahmet Midhat. Neither Kalpazan the killer, not Hediye Hanım the evil woman end up in the hands of legal justice. They are both punished by their destiny; in other words, the narrator chooses to sustain poetic justice with a direct providential intervention rather than the man-made legal system, which is criticized throughout the novel. The ending will be revisited in detail in the following discussions.

The protagonist of the novel is Osman Sabri Bey, a civil servant who, as a detective works on murder cases. Typically for a detective, he is characterized by his curious nature. What is distinct about Osman Sabri is his earnest concern with the corruption in the Ottoman legal system. He repeatedly grabs attention to the corrupted *pasha*s (Ottoman officials) and the flaws in the traditional judiciary system. Parallel to this denouncement, he also lays his appreciation and admiration for the European justice system. It is not only appreciation but a desire for his state to convert to the same system:

> Oh Necmi! Shall I not ever see this order of justice to convert to the European way? Is there not going to be a public prosecutor who will, in the name of justice, plead as the litigant on behalf of the society, and seek justice for that which is not investigated? Is there not going to be an inspector, though, whose initiative for investigation shall not even be refused by a pasha? (65-6).

He denounces the lack of a public prosecutor who would be responsible for the truth to come out for the sake of justice, an independent interrogator who would investigate only as a service to justice, without any hierarchical obstruction by pashas. The judiciary system is one of the most vital segments of a state's authority. The fact that he looks up to the European system as the ideal while criticizing his own country's is another instance indicating Ahmet Midhat's ideal of progress lies in the Western model. This is one of the persistent thematic points to which he refers in his narrative in *Esrar*, besides its religious narrative tone. In his other works, his ideas both originated from the European and the traditional Ottoman civilization, i.e. the Islamic and the non-Islamic are intertwined or coexist in his literary artifact, being Ahmet Midhat's own formula.

Before moving on to the analysis of the religious nature of this narrative, there is an additional note to make regarding the criticism of the judiciary system. The narrator time (time of narration) is different from the author time (the time when the novel was published). *Esrar-ı Cinayat*'s publication time corresponds to Ahmet Midhat's post-exile period, the period in which his political sensitivity and greater self-censorship can be observed. Since Ahmet Midhat conceivably avoids anything Abdulhamid would not approve both in fear of another conviction and because of his favor for him, he does not address the criticism towards the time he wrote this novel. He dates the time of narration as "*hijri* one thousand two hundred something" (211) which corresponds to the last decade of the eighteenth century, the exact year not specified. He also seems to make sure that he praises the reforms of the Hamidian regime.

> To caution our readers is necessary regarding the time the murder of Öreke Taşı took place, as today's justice system, reformations of courts, and the [new] legal institutions had not existed. His Excellency's establishment of legal institutions is one of his numerous achievements, he, who is our benefactor, who is in favor of reformation; the improvement of a new court

> system is one of his most beneficial among the most vital series of reforms which he has accomplished to revive the country (227).

This nuance of being careless about specifying the exact time of the plot and the emphasis on Abdulhamid's great deeds inserted in the beginning of the plot can be interpreted in two different ways. They are arguably either due to Ahmet Midhat deflecting his criticism for Abdulhamid's regime towards a previous reign to avoid any uneasiness it would create between himself and the Sultan, minding that Abdulhamid had a special favor for the detective novel which meant it was likely his work would personally be scrutinized by him. Or, he wanted to criticize an earlier period and Sultan which therefore suggests that he is pleased with the current regime, meaning he is sincere in his appraisal of the Sultan. Which of these assumptions is closer to the reality remains an enigma.

Coming back to Osman, as an officer/detective who strives to reveal the truth behind the crimes, the preliminary obstacle for him is Mecdeddin Paşa, the governor he is entitled to, who tries to prevent proceeding with the investigation of murders. This is the main conflict as the source of tension between the good and the evil, i.e. the corrupt one who abuses his authority. Hediye Hanım, who is Mecdeddin's lover, is associated with the murders since the victim Peri was her maid and behind her murders lies the plot of counterfeiting money. Figuring this out, Mecdeddin tries to stop Osman from revealing this case. What Osman Sabri centers his criticism on is that he is hierarchically bound to obey Mecdeddin Paşa for he is a civil servant working under his command. This corrupt Pasha is driven by self-interest and, as we later find out, he too is involved with illegal acts with his lover and is abusing his bureaucratic authority. Besides the legal system in general, Ahmet Midhat emphasizes the corruption in the bureaucracy by placing the example of a fraudulent Pasha against the righteous and hard-working officer.

The eulogy of the Western system is drawn from the fact that it allows more space for the legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Later in the novel, he makes similar points the same issue- "had the judiciary system been a separate one" (109), which demonstrates his disappointment and his usage of this particular genre to point at these shortcomings that he finds. This criticism of the State and appreciation of the Western system does not necessarily render Ahmet Midhat's approach thoroughly a secular one, although one might draw the conclusion that this characteristic places the novel as pro-modernization in its project. Instead, the search for justice, which is the overarching theme in this detective novel, is intensively supported and ornamented with a religious rhetoric, pious utterances and praise of God as the only ultimate maintainer of justice. These two seemingly incompatible discursive aspects coexist in the Ottoman heteroglossia of Ahmet Midhat's literary imagination.

Besides laying out the progress towards the Western judiciary model, *Esrar-ı Cinayat*, serves as the platform from which Ahmet Midhat reaches out to his readers to educate/remind of Islamic tenets. This is an atypical feature for the detective genre that Ahmet Midhat constructs, to the extent that we can classify *Esrar* as one of his novels carrying a high religious sentiment. He both accommodates rational and moral reflections to underpin his religious teachings. This is observed in the general narrative discourse in the novel, also in some of the chapter headings and in his didactic discussions where he aims to transmit his message to the reader, as directly as possible. For example, the second chapter is titled "A Suicide in Beyoğlu" which starts with an introduction of a lengthy discussion (or a lecture) on the act of suicide from ethical, legal and religious aspects. From all these aspects, Ahmet Midhat makes sure it is clear to the reader: suicide is a moral crime and a deed of disbelief.

Orhan Okay, describing Ahmet Midhat's approach to religion as a novelist, argued he never solely preached in his works (235). Though this statement seems very accurate when looking at Ahmet Midhat's discourse in general, in *Esrar-ı Cinayat* the narrator tends to preach especially in introductory and concluding parts of the chapters.

In his denouncing lecture on suicide, he follows an argumentative order. He begins with a moral point of view, saying "'*Ahlakiyyun*' would view suicide as the greatest and most vicious of murders" (33). Secondly, a philosophical reference takes place saying nothing falls outside the realm of philosophy and wisdom. He elaborates it is the intention behind a crime that is judged while making laws. A suicide is premeditated; therefore it is first-degree murder, for the person designs a murder against their 'self', and he gives example to make his point (239-241). All these arguments expound on the rationale behind the act of suicide being an irredeemable sin. The concluding sentence of the discussion and the first unit of this chapter states: "One who kills himself is an unbeliever [rebellious to God?]" (243).

Towards the end of the novel, the level of religious references significantly increases. Phrases like "*Cenab-ı Hakkın adalet-i müntakimanesi*" (the punishing justice of God) or "*pençe-i intikam-ı Rabbani*" (the hand of God's revenge) are used to intensify the reference to divinity. He says that while the criminals can avoid law of the state, the law of God will seize them and give the deserved punishment (392). The concluding chapter of the novel is titled after a Hadith: “El-cezaü min cinsi’l ameli” which can be translated as “reward and punishment depend on the deeds”. The ends of the evildoers will be resolved to assure poetic justice. *Esrar*’s ending is quite a digression from the rest of the plot characteristically. Conveniently to the genre, the events were untied analytically and a cause-effect order was followed. Yet, in the closure, Ahmet Midhat chose to intervene Providence to design the ending of criminals.

The very introductory passage goes: “All those people of wisdom who have power of discernment would consent that the superiority of wisdom in Islam prevails over the rest of the great religions and civilizations of history ever” (391). While he pays his tribute to other civilization and the Greek and Roman in the part that follows this statement, the narrator gives pride of place to Islam for bringing forward the unique principle of *el-cezaü min cinsi’l ameli*. A *Qur’anic* reference follows: “Could the reward of good be aught but good?” which is from the chapter Ar-Rahman ([55:60] ibid, 392). The overall religious pious discourse reaches a thematic conclusion by this emphasis. The discussion of justice is construed suggesting that the Islamic understanding had already proposed it. Besides, putting this principle forward, Ahmet Midhat indicates that the novel’s ending will be based on this Islamic rationale.

With this idea introduced, he draws the most striking part of the ending as Kalpazan Mustafa dies falling from a tree on his way back to his country after he set off to confess the whole crime in detail. The narration strikes the reader, as Mustafa is expected to surrender himself to the court. Yet the hand of God’s revenge grabs him to sentence him with the kind of punishment that his deed necessitated: death at an unexpected time.

Although the death of Mustafa comes unexpectedly, it is, in a way, consistent with the thematic discourse of the novel. As the narrator targeted his criticism at the corruption of judiciary system, and places the justice of God as almighty, the verdict of Mustafa is not surrendered to the corrupt system. Hediye’s ending also manifests a similar touch. After the conviction as a galley slave for a period, the narrator shows the character in a pathetic situation stricken with misery. The sentence by the court did not satisfy Ahmet Midhat; thus, he made sure Hediye pays with a divine sentence of lifelong misery.

Admiring the Western novel, and aspiring to mimic them stylistically so to excel in the genre, Ahmet Midhat endeavors write his novels in the footsteps of Western novelists. As Açıl analyzed, he uses most of the detective novel aspects. However, choosing to leave the conclusion of the characters' destiny to the divine order, I suggest, he makes a deviation from this endeavor and this derives from his Muslim way of thinking, which includes the general principle of Allah as the Creator who controls not only the afterlife and judgment but also the temporal order in this life. As such, Ahmet Midhat's version of the detective novel gives us an Ottoman adaptation of a genre with Islamic transference. The dialogic imagination reflected on his interpretation of the genre consists of and is based upon a discursive feature of a devout Muslim, placed next to his emulation of the European legal system, which he appreciates and prefers over his own country's. In the analysis of the next novel, we will see the same way of thinking in a different context, in *Müşahedat*, a novel written six years after *Esrar-ı Cinayat*.

4.2. *Müşahedat*

Müşahedat is Ahmet Midhat's novel published in 1891 which, until today, triggered a great deal of discussion about its novice narrative techniques. Nüket Esen emphasizes that *Müşahedat* is "the most important of his novels and must be handled in its own right in terms of narrative techniques" (74). It is a metanovel and Ahmet Midhat himself appears as a character in the novel, narrating his narration process itself. Along with that, *Müşahedat* claims itself to be an example of a "naturalist" novel several times, and Ahmet Midhat, presumably, may have done this to strengthen his level of similarity to "reality" as it is the ultimate aim in novel-writing at the time - to convey "reality" as it is. It is alluring in the sense that the writer represents himself, as the narrator-character Ahmet Midhat, in which the ideas of the two – even three, adding the real Ahmet Midhat the writer himself - converge and offer more interesting material regarding his representation of religion in the novel. Having referred to Ahmet Midhat as the thinker who has invested all his thinking and writing on the idea of a best synthesis of the Western and the Ottoman civilization, *Müşahedat* is peculiarly interesting to analyse, for he claims it to be a naturalist novel - a genre that has a purely Western origin, but in which he discusses religion and faith, as well. Naturalism was mostly promoted by Beşir Fuat, a materialist intellectual, who was a graduate of

Tıbbiye (Moran 22), whereas Ahmet Midhat brings his own treatment of the genre in *Müşahedat*, which is not a materialist one.

With this novel, Altuğ suggests, Ahmet Midhat aims to establish a space of balance between the entrenched civilization of the Ottoman and the dominant nature of the contemporary age (100). The space that belongs to the "us" at the time refers to the tradition/culture and values that the civilization was nourished by and the dominant modern/secular nature of the age refered to as the naturalist novel which enjoyed popularity in the West at the same time. Therefore a technically naturalist novel should be written in the Ottoman context, yet to serve its own cultural values system, namely Islamic values. This was quite a synthetical blend that Ahmet Midhat pursued!

The novel is noticeable with the fact that most of the characters are non-Muslims, namely Armenians, including the female protagonist, Siranuş. She is the one whose story Ahmet Midhat eavesdrops on when on the Bosphorus ferry and chases her and her friend Agavni to hear the whole of the story. Persuading Siranuş to relate the story to him – in which he uses his fame as a novelist to which Siranuş pays respect, he not only becomes the author of this story but also the friend of the characters in the novel, Siranuş, Refet and Agavni. Altuğ identifies this unusual sneaking of the author among the characters and the intricate relationship of the author-narrator-implied author-character with the reader, narratee and the characters as an attempt to form a model, which Ahmet Midhat would ideally like to have with his public/readers (*hasbihal*) (102). Besides all its peculiarities mentioned, religion, faith and overall Islam is a hot topic of discussion throughout the novel – especially because there are non-Muslim characters - necessitating a thorough analysis for this study. Ahmet Midhat's tour in Europe and encounter with orientalists is worth mentioning at this point: An old Russian professor whom he meets and develops a relationship at the Congress of Orientalism in Stockholm, calls him to work hard to show the wisdom of Islam to Europe which develop in science and technology but not in wisdom ("An Ottoman" Findley 30). This is a couple of years before he wrote *Müşahedat*, which is notable. In the preface to the novel, "Kariin ile Hasbihal", though the author is claiming that the novel is a naturalist one, he criticizes the pioneer French novelist of this genre saying no virtues and ethics are represented in the novels as if they do not exist any longer, especially in France. Criticizing this for not being a thorough representation of reality, as a naturalist claim, Ahmet Midhat implies he will give place to the good aspects of the society and examples of virtuous behavior (15-7). In this representation of goodness and ethics, though, Islamic tenets play the key role in the novel.

To summarize the long story in brief, the opening pages of the novel show Ahmet Midhat listening to two French-speaking women on the ferry and his curiosity about their personal story is boosted when one of the women, Siranuş attacks a man she comes across on board. Ahmet Midhat follows her to her place revealing his identity as the renowned writer Ahmet Midhat Efendi, and eventually becomes friends with both women and they make friends with Refet. The group comes together to reveal different parts of the story and help the author who has started making a novel out of the story. Seyit Mehmet Numan is another key figure, who is Siranuş's protector from whom in the end we learn that her father is Seyit Mehmet's deceased friend, Ali Osman Topuz. Karnik is the man who fled to Europe with another woman on the day of their marriage with Siranuş, and also the one whom Siranuş slapped on the ferry. While Refet and Agavni are in a relationship, Seyit's daughter Feride who is in love with Refet, plans to kill Agavni. The ending strikes the reader, as Siranuş's father is a heroic Muslim who leaves her a letter to summon her to Islam. Eventually accepting Islam, Siranuş and Refet get married after a long and secret love for each other, which they have hidden from one another out of loyalty to Agavni. The novel can be considered a literary projection of Ahmet Midhat's conception of civilization - which Orhan Okay suggests is strongly correlated with religion, as a person both well familiar with that of the East and the West. Hence, when we analyze religious concern in this novel, it is parallel to studying of his concept of civilization with regards to Islam. The novel's direct and indirect references will be studied in terms of the following dimensions: formation of the good and the bad characters, religious rhetoric, theological discussions among the characters, spirituality, and conversion as a theme which takes an important place in the ending of the novel.

As the good characters of Tanzimat novels in general represent the aimed ideal personality in the writer's mind, scrutinizing the ideally-depicted characters, we highlight the role of religion in this formation. Unlike the other novels such as *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*, there is no dichotomy of the ideally exalted and the mocked character, but most of the characters are mostly good characters, if not ideal. Siranuş, Agavni, Refet, Seyit Mehmet Numan, and Ahmet Midhat himself are the ones around whom the story of the novel is based. Besides, they are the ones who contribute to the novel in its narrative creation process. There is another character, Ali Osman Topuz

Bey, who appears only at the end as a dead character who left a letter to his daughter, Siranuş. His identity comes to light as his will for Siranuş is handed to Ahmet Midhat to submit to her; we get to know this man through Seyit Mehmet Numan's words. Described as a great man, "his greatness is in his own character" and he is affiliated with the following assets: generosity, devotion, purity, perseverance, and fortitude (375). He is the one who summons his daughter to convert to Islam in its magnanimity. Through his will/letter, a religious sentiment is aroused; whereas also his character portrays, -although he appears only through his story and his relics-, the ultimately idealized one in the novel.

All the above-mentioned characters, besides Topuz, prove goodness thoroughly or with one outstanding aspect. What is common in all of their depictions is that the conception of goodness is based on virtuous behavior and moral attitude, which stands out in terms of characterization among other novels studied so far. This has two further important points to note: First the good characters do not belong to one religion or ethnic background so that a particular religion or ethnicity is represented to be superior in a deterministic way; rather, Ahmet Midhat highlights the moral act and attitude. One point which is worth mentioning here is that Agavni refuses her Italian roots by his father, tears up her Italian passport and claims herself as an Ottoman national on her maternal roots which is an exaltation of Ottoman citizenship. In an inclusive manner, this is to not to confine characters because of their innate affiliations nor to doom those to be good or bad based on their ethnic background. To illustrate this, we can give the example of Refet, a Turk and a Muslim character, who has had a life of a typical prodigal snob, like that of Felatun, in which he enjoys the low materialist pleasures until he runs out of the money he inherited. Up to this point, this would make him a typical Tanzimat snob who is superficial and is doomed to end up like a loser; however, Refet gives up on that kind of life and starts working hard and reclaim his self-respect and good virtues, and despises the life of a playboy. He is utterly praised by Ahmet Midhat, for his hard work, loyalty to his boss, Seyit Mehmet Numan, maintaining his own living, and staying away from his life in the past. This highlighting is remarkable because he is the writer who established a dichotomous typology of Felatun and Rakım; Refet is a character who rises from a Felatun to almost a Rakım - the ideal, and that resurgence is developed upon his repentance and good behavior. Agavni, who is Refet's lover, has a similar story of rising from a life of enjoying lowly pleasures as a female version of a prodigal and then commits herself to Refet with deep and faithful love. What Ahmet Midhat praises in her character is that she refused Refet's hand when he had wealth because she did not want to be in a position to be after his money and she did not want to be the destroyer of his wealth despite her deep love for him. She approached him only after he spent all his wealth and she remained loyal to him from then onwards. Secondly, those characters are from different social backgrounds and life stories; they are congregated around their love for one and the other and their shared moral values. This communal circle which Ahmet Midhat also becomes a part might be what he recommends to the public reading him, i.e. morality, genuine love and fraternity under Ottoman citizenship. Saraçoğlu reads Müşahedat's narrative as a dialogic imagination in which the author "defined an Ottoman society that was imagined as a reaction to the West and that was built around an imperial self-understanding—as opposed to a nationalist one"(29). Ahmet Midhat and Refet as Turk characters form a harmonious group of friends with the Armenian characters with their shared values and lifestyle.

Seyit Mehmet Numan is a fatherly figure has an exclusively good character in the novel by whom Ahmet Midhat himself is enchanted. He is a man of virtues who refuses a job offer by the Ottoman state and instead serves his "*din ü devlet*" as a merchant which Ahmet Midhat sees very important because with the ideal attitude of Seyit Mehmet Numan, he seems to criticize the general tendency among the Ottoman men to see civil service as an easy way of making a living. He is rather a man who chooses a difficult job, masters a trade and in such manner accumulates wealth. He is also praised repeatedly for financially guarding Siranuş, Agavni whom he never sees, yet never expects anything in return, which can be described as generosity and selfless giving. He has an eloquent way of speaking by which he wisely illuminates Ahmet Midhat, the character. The writer, Ahmet Midhat, presumably uses this character to convey his edifying ideas and strengthens those ideas by approving him through the character Ahmet Midhat.

Another aspect to Seyit Mehmet Numan, which is noteworthy in his character, is that he is a very forgiving person. In the early life of Refet, Numan does not avert him from living a low life and spending his inheritance as a vagabond; instead, he employs him again as well as guards him like his own father. In the case of Karnik, who is also his employee, and who turns out to be the bad character in the course of the story, he is also very merciful and forgiving towards him. Through the words of Refet, we face his treatment of Karnik, in the advice he gives Refet about how to approach Karnik. Declaring his wish to convert to Islam, Numan realizes Karnik's intent is to plot to get easy money by getting married to Mehmet Numan's daughter in order to get the possession of his wealth, which Numan, as a wise man, easily figures out. Having realized this, Numan does not despise or punish him; rather, in a forgiving manner, he offers to help him financially and marry the woman he genuinely likes, who then seems to be Siranuş. Refet, the one reporting this to Ahmet Midhat quotes Seyit Mehmet Numan's following words: "...in this last instance, though the Satan had usurped him [Karnik] *Rahman* rescued me" (197). He attributes his wrongdoing as coming from Satan and his own mercy and forgiving compassion as coming from divinity. This demonstrates the formation of good and evil is derived from his Islamic understanding in which Satan is the source of all evil behavior. It is critically important to note that Numan, as the character associated with "*Rahman*" the Almighty, the source of all the good and always forgiving, is the one who always forgives misbehavior, guards, benevolently gives as well as guides towards the right path, illuminates with his wisdom, and feeds souls with his deep spirituality.

Despite these elevated characteristics, his old age is referred to as a kind of flaw. He is not informed of the wedding of Siranuş and Refet for it would cause him grief. This blend of qualities in an old character whose presence overarchingly contributes to the story can be interpreted metaphorically as the Ottoman civilization which possesses religiously, morally and culturally right qualities, yet is not young enough to catch up with the new age.

Siranuş, on the other hand, is the freshly good character as the protagonist around whose story the novel revolves. As already relayed above, goodness is depicted with highly moral behavior and magnanimity in attitude. Although Refet and Agavni are depicted as rising from a lowly life to a morally appropriate one, Siranuş displays utmost virtue and morality throughout the course of her life story. Despite having a similar background, being an illegitimate child of an unmarried couple and raised in the same Christian orphanage, she always stays away from the inappropriate pleasures and loose environment of Beyoğlu. To Ahmet Midhat the character's surprise and awe, he finds out that Siranuş is a chaste, decent and smart woman with whom he ends up building a close relationship as her "father". This inspiriting experience of their emotional bond is built upon their shared moral values and selflessly decent manners. She is also an educated woman who speaks French very well, plays the piano beautifully and enjoys reading, as Ahmet Midhat's ideal woman character. He eventually helps her to teach as a governor, which would give her ultimate freedom by helping her make her own money. She becomes the subject of admiration in the houses she goes to; what is more, she is asked her hand by one family of high social status. This is another sign that moral acts and decent behavior is applauded as goodness regardless of one's ethnic and religious roots. However, it is important to pay attention to the ending of the novel: Siranuş converts to Islam. Intact goodness in her implicitly refers to her ideal compatibility with Islamic tenants in nature and at some points suggests foreshadowing her reversion. Consequently, she receives her father's penetrating letter, which works as the final trigger towards conversion. In other words, Siranuş's elevated character is rewarded by Islam in the end.

When it comes to punishment, the bad characters who insist on evil behavior, like Karnik or like Feride who designs Agavni's death, are both punished with a dreadful end. In both cases of death, the narrator does not omit expressing that these are the implementation of the divine justice of God and that He does not leave any cruelty done onto others without punishment. Poetic justice in Ahmet Midhat's novel is carried out on religious grounds.

Having already stated that Ahmet Midhat usually defends and exalts the religion of Islam before the West in his non-fictional writings, it is worth pointing out that he also does the same in his fictional works in front of the non-Muslim characters he draws. Siranuş's conversion might be considered another reference to the superiority of Islam Ahmet Midhat defends against the secular schools of the West. This can be considered a rewarding for Siranuş's high character (which will be later revisited in the discussion on conversion). Another rewarding end, we might consider is Seyit Mehmet Numan's. Although he dies at the end, his death is designed as an exalted ending: He dies in Madina where he goes to dwell in the sacred land of Islam, leaving one third of his wealth for the poor of that city and, in Refet's words passes away in "the most beautiful" way. The concluding words of the novel are prayers for this old man wishing him an afterlife as good as his life in the world. This is a rewarding conclusion for this man, which also underlies the hereafter phenomenon that occupies a great place in Islamic belief, as the world being a passage to the eternal life which is the afterlife.

Most of what we find in this category is the references to God and the attributive phrases used to praise him. For example, when the reader is told of the end of Karnik, Ahmet Midhat describes God as "*Cenab-ı a'delü'l-adilin, ahkemü'l-*

hakimin” (the Most Just of all, the Wisest of all) (334). He uses these attributes as he heeds the punishment of the bad by Providence. This stressing of Providence is meaningful in the sense, also, that the narrator makes allusion to a greater authority, i.e. God, than himself within the narrative frame, which is important in the comparative sense of the Turkish novel. The narrator, though, as usual of Ahmet Midhat’s narrators, does pause his story-telling and starts chatting with the narratee. At one such point, as he admonishes his reader to go around to observe the aspects of the world (“*ahval-i alem*”) to increase the insight of the mind so they become of those who avoid falling in to the category of “for them (are) eyes (but) not they see with them, and for them (are) ears (but) not they hear with them”(74). This is an *ayah* in the *Qur’anic* surah Al-A’raf in which Ahmet Midhat makes a direct reference as he advises his readers. This indicates both the writer’s internalization of the *Qur’anic* sermons and that his novel-writing also has dimensions of religious motivation as he locates himself in the position of a fatherly teacher.

Overall, the language Ahmet Midhat uses makes a lot of religious references not only as the narrator addresses the reader but also when the characters speak. Most of the characters are non-Muslims and yet they display the same aspect of religious allusion. For instance, the characters like Siranuş and Vartov Dudu use words like “*Cenab-ı Hak*” as do the other Muslim characters. In one instance, Ahmet Midhat reports his conversation with Vartov Dudu about Siranuş’s financial guard. He consolidates her saying “*Hüda kerimdir*” (God is gracious), whereas she responds with the same word “*Allah kerimdir*” (318), which indicates a submission to God’s kindness. In another instance, the verger who is involved in Siranuş’ story of being found by her father after her mother as a baby, uses the words “*hasbeten lillah*” (for the sake of God) (235). Such illustrates the narrator assembles Muslims and non-Muslims around the same use of attributions of God whereas the conceptions of God are distinct in Islam and Christianity. This may not necessarily be a conscious choice, though, as the Ottoman Turkish was the dominating language for different *millet*s of the State which included the use of religious words.

Notwithstanding a historical reality, when looking at the narrative, such common utterances in referring to God echoes a *Qur’anic* principle: “common word between the People of the Book”, the principle that assembles the Muslims, Christians and the Jews around their revealed books. In this sense, the favorable approach to the Christian characters might be underpinned by this Islamic principle, if not derived from it. This is important to pay attention to given that even though Ahmet Midhat discusses a lot of religious issues throughout the novel, and provides the Islamic view on the issues like marriage and conversion, he does not touch the most basic questions of the difference between Islam and Christianity: the conception of God, i.e. oneness of God and the Holy trinity. With this remark, we go back to Orhan Okay's interpretation of Ahmet Midhat's attitude in relation to religion: he does not preach. He rather relays the concerns that relate to his civilization that regulates the society rather than the individual dimension of belief. In the following, we will see what religious issues Ahmet Midhat, the character, raises through the rest of the characters.

Overall, in the discussions pertaining to religion, Ahmet Midhat heeds the social aspects that religion regulates. For him, Islam is a higher promoter of the social order as opposed to the heathen life of Western societies. Ahmet Midhat takes a comparative point of view as he defends and favors the Islamic civilization. Enslavement is one of the issues at hand:

> French intellectuals would despise slavery in our custom, huh! Where in the life of Islam will you ever see the provision of the word "enslavement? Which *cariye* became miserable because of her status? How many of them had to remain without a husband? On the contrary, the *cariyes* in our society are fortunate to have their homes, their own children, and a prosperity that cannot be seen in the lives of the lucky girls of Beyoğlu (164).

Islamic treatment of the *cariye*s is more rightful, according to him, and he states there are unfavorable differences in the treatment of slaves in Europe, which would make one hateful.

Marriage and divorce are two other recurring discussion topics that place in the novel as the characters exchange ideas. It is made clear that Islamic practice does not bind couples by prohibiting divorce as in Catholicism. Let's look at Novart, the evil female character who is the wife of Agavni's father. Agavni's father is stricken by misery because of the licentiousness of his wife; Agavni asks: "Had this story taken place in an Islamic context, what would happen?" Refet's answer is that he would be free divorcing her whenever he wanted and marry the woman who he loves, that is Agavni's mother Maryam (148). In these instances, the writer highlights that Islam has a wider space for individual freedom in marriage.

As the female characters are Christians, the permission given to Muslim men to marry from People of the Book is also consulted several times. When Siranuş is asked for her hand by a Muslim family, she takes it as though she is also asked to convert to Islam upon which Ahmet Midhat stresses that there is no compulsion in Islam and it is allowed to marry Christian women for Muslim men. It is repeated when it comes to the marriage of Refet and Siranuş at the end after the discovery of the deep love between the two and Ahmet Midhat encourages them to get married. Evidently, Ahmet Midhat's revisiting of these issues indicates he wants to draw a picture of Islam which is open to others, inclusive and supportive of all who is of good nature like Siranuş. Here, it is necessary to elaborate on the issue of conversion, another theme which is persistently addressed in the course of the novel.

The first encounter where the issue of conversion is at hand is the one with Seyit Mehmet Numan and Karnik. As already mentioned above, Karnik comes to Numan to say that he would like to convert and asks his "permission". Karnik expects to be welcomed immediately; however, Numan, the wise, inquires into his intentions with the following question: "prior to giving you the permission you demand, I have to understand what differences you have seen in your mind between Islam and Christianity that you leave one at the expense of the other or you prefer one over the other?" (192). This inquiry is followed by Karnik's bewilderment and further questions by Numan who conceptualizes conversion, therefore Islamic explanation of belief with these words: "My son, conversion does not happen out of anyone else's permission. One converts on his own… It is a light which we, in our terms, call *Bezm-i Elest* that had been lit in our hearts." (192).

The *Qur'anic ayah*, or principle "There is no compulsion in religion" is repeatedly presented at every encounter with the conversion issue. The subject of conversion reaches its peak in the last chapter of the novel named "*İnkişaf-ı Esrar*". The secrets of the story are revealed here; that Siranuş and Refet had long loved each other secretly and that Siranuş's father was Seyit Mehmet Numan's friend who left his daughter a will and his portrait to be given to her. Along with the will, a beautiful portrait of the father appears and when Siranuş receives the portrait, the physical resemblance of the two is pointed out, which can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Siranuş's conversion as her father had been a pious Muslim, like Seyit Mehmet Numan. The letter/will summons her gently to convert – with the highlight that it is her choice regardless of her father's will. He doesn't avoid praising the portrait and the art of painting despite the fact that, he adds, iconography is not welcome in Islamic understanding as opposed to that of Christianity. It is worth remarking that the portrait, besides the letter, is used as a tool to invite Siranuş to Islam; in other words, a Christian element is used in the story of a conversion which Ahmet Midhat finds “beautiful”.

The letter, finally, has a climactic role in Siranuş’s story leading to her conversion and marriage with Refet before the novel ends with a “happily ever after” ending. The inaugural part of the letter is essential (which will be quoted in the original language):

> Vahid ve Samed olan, validiyet ve mevludiyetten münezzeh bulunup hiçbir ahd kendisine küfüv olmayan Hak Sübhanehü ve Taala Hazretlerine hamd ü sena ve dini din-i İbrahim olarak müddeası Zebur ve Tevrat ve İncil ile musaddak bulunan Hatemü’n-Nebiyyine salat ve selam ve her hangisine iktida edilse mucib-i ihtida olan al ve ashab-ı kiramına tarziye ve tehayadan sonra ben Ali bin Osman Topuz derim ki… (378).

Starting with a highlight on the most essential principle of Islam, that is the Oneness of God –which distinguishes it from Christianity, he draws the truly Islamic framework. He adds that Prophet Muhammad was verified by *the Bible* and *the Tehillim*. As he continues by mentioning Abrahamic religions and the other Books, the inclusive nature of Islam that Ahmet Midhat constructed in his treatment of the non-Muslims is maintained. It is only in the letter that there is a discussion of the theological basics of the religion Islam in comparison to Christianity, the birth of Jesus and the prophethood of Muhammad, which distinguishes the two religions. Topuz invites her daugher to scrutinize “*hakayık-ı İslamiye*”, the truths of Islam, upon which he states “only then you will understand that there is no compulsion and enforcement in Islam” (380). He concludes his letter saying there will be no resentment if she chooses *not* to convert. In the end, we are not told about the details of Siranuş’s conversion; it is only mentioned that she concludes by converting and the two get married. It would be true to say that Siranuş and her outstanding virtues ensured harmony with a dignified and pious father and her eventual conversion. All in all, Ahmet Midhat provides an understanding of Islamic civilization that is underpinned with Islamic principles in terms of social construction which is compared and favored in the face of Christianity, of course, when there is an encounter with non-Muslim characters. Having stated that Ahmet Midhat has equivocal views when it comes to synthesis of the two civilizations, and philosophy vs. religion dichotomy, I would suggest that in the case of defending Islam against non-Muslim characters, he has a more intact standpoint in terms of religion. Nevertheless, though he inclines to gather his ideal characters under the umbrella of Islamic belief, he gave voice to characters from a different religious and ethnic background, which gives the narrative a degree of heteroglossic dialogism. In the next novel to be discussed, we will face a different narrator designates a different discourse from what we have seen in *Müşahedat*'s or *Esrar*'s religiously concerned point of view.

4.3. *Hayal ve Hakikat*

Ahmet Midhat's 1892 novel *Hayal ve Hakikat* (*Dream and the Truth*), which consists of two parts, is most of the time visited for the analysis of women's position in the Ottoman literature for its co-author is a woman writer, Fatma Aliye, who wrote with the signature "a Woman". The first part is written by her which tells the miserable story of a woman's (Vedat) love who gets abandoned by her fiancé and dies of agony. The second part is written by the male voice, which is the faulty fiancé's (Vefa), telling the story from his own perspective to refute the accusation of causing Vedat's death. Vefa retells the same story from a realistic, rational point of view, diagnosing Vedat with the medical disease hysteria notwithstanding her melancholic story of agony of love. As much as two authors/narrators brings a different voice to the novel, Ahmet Midhat seems to dominate over the female voice, promoting Vefa's version of story over Vedat's, the woman's. The dialogy, here, remains limited to the extent that Parla described Ahmet Midhat's in general: "out of the need for agreement and formulating a concluding judgment, he does not leave his narration open; rather, he concludes his statement" (*Don Kişot* 79-80). Even though the woman is there, her story is not given a discursive autonomy but rather is too suppressed to call it a heteroglossic voice.

Vefa is a *Tıbbiye* student and he is a fitting example of the positivist medical graduates of the school, which served as a source of dissemination of materialist, positivist, and Darwinist thinking that Moran points out (22). Vefa's part of the story is striking in two ways: He uncovers "the truth" that he has had no feelings for or commitment to Vedat as the female narrator claimed telling Vedat's story, but he consented to marriage merely due to his submission to his father, and he demolishes the female narrator's approach and interpretation of the story because of its delusiveness. With a profoundly dominant manner, Vefa criticizes Vedat's, as well as the female writer's stand for being pervaded by fancy and delusions, which had nothing to do with reality, and their obsession with love and marriage. He categorizes them, women in general, as being in *hayal* - the world of dream and fancy - that is a construction of a world out of touch with reality, whereas he himself claims *hakikat*, the truth, in a very didactic and assertive way. For my discussion, what is important is how he constructs this new concept of "truth". Vefa's proposal of "the truth" is a material one through which the changes in the Ottoman intellect and the epistemological transformation (or confusion) can be traced. "The age of progress which we are in is not the age of a dream, it is the age of the truth." (37). He presents this as *hakikat-ı kübra,* the greatest truth. In Vefa's letter, the fatal case of Vedat is "clarified" that no one was guilty of her death but the deluded mind, which aspired for nothing but emotions and marriage. Vefa not only harshly criticizes this but also diagnoses this delusion as "hysteria" which is the medical name for this syndrome, to speak scientifically as he wants. In addition to Vefa, Ahmet Midhat writes an epilogue spared for this illness where he gives detailed explanations, which also appear as a scientific back-up for Vefa's standpoint. (It is evident that in many of these writers' life stories, they read much about medicine and clearly the medical field is important in Vefa's informative fiction.) In other words, as a writer, Ahmet Midhat strongly suggests that the age of, what he calls, emotional delusions is over and rational thinking should be given priority over that which is neglected by positivist sciences like medicine. In Vefa's speech, this is highlighted in such examples where he adds the medical name for his father's sickness next to what it is known as in public, and so, he redefines Vedat's situation as being "hysteria which is the name given by the doctors", not as a death caused by agony of love as it is told by public. Moreover, when he talks about his success at school, he says he has proved it with *burhan-ı maddi* (concrete evidence), and he concludes his letter assertively as "It is the doctors who should be asked for advice not the poets" (40). Poets and poetry is openly condemned of not giving the truth but only creating a delusional fixation.

Vefa also elaborates on the concept of marriage from two different points of view: that of the woman and the man; thus, that of emotion and reason, the former associated with the woman and the latter with the man. Vefa attacks the view of marriage that treats it as the ultimate goal and corrects by saying that love and marriage are not the purpose but an inception of a life in the material sense of reality; and he continues to elaborate on the realistic and material aspects of a marriage and household (39). The character with his utmost didactic tone takes on the responsibility of enlightening women with his truth, who he thinks have no idea about the truth about marriage but are fixated on the idea of love and emotions. He not only suggests the truth but also makes practical suggestions on how to approach marriage and the household.

The dichotomous categorization of reason and emotion, which assertively puts forward the former as superior, entails other dichotomies which fall together within these two, which are man and woman. Inevitably we are reminded of the orientalist association of the East as female as opposed to the male West. Vefa's pointing at the closure of the age of emotions, as the rational male character who speaks with the power he gets from his Western positivistic teaching, is pregnant with meaning as to the dichotomy of East-West to the one traditional and other modern. Given the positivistic decorations in his argumentation, Vefa evidentially is in favor of modernizing and rational development in the level of thinking and barely refers to religion and Islamic civilization while preaching to his opponent in regards to how to look at things alternately. This is an illustration of a call for a radical shift to positivism, which is remarkable for the religious discussion, especially comparing it to the pious narrators of *Esrar* or the promotion of Islamic values in *Müşahedat*. Lack of religious references, like those in most other novels, indicates a different epistemology is followed, i.e. positivism. Recalling what Okay called as "belief crisis", he found in poetry of the like in Şinasi's, which asked to witness the creation without the book but his own faculties.

The alternate means to discussing questions of love, marriage, man-woman relationships, from a rational point of view which he offers as "the truth" illustrate a seeking of a new truth as envisioned by the writer. With this, he proposes a new worldview and in his sharp discursive formation, he "imposes" to give up emotional delusions distorting "the truth", which, in this sense resembles the assertiveness of *Felsefe* when discouraging marriage. In *Hayal ve Hakikat*'s instance, the heeding to the rationalistic faculty blurs the religious character in his general narrative discourse. This is especially that his later years as a writer is more characterized with his religious concern.

Some lines appearing in Vefa's letter are important to point out in the face of the question. As mentioned already, he uses wording that relies on tangible facts, which are thus easily affiliated with the positivist discourse. When any religious allusions are sought, one of the only few religious connotations appears as in the following lines:

> It is my human and civilizational duty as a man who has proved his achievement, with concrete evidence by becoming the second best student in a class of thirty-seven, to strive to make a beneficial man of myself to serve my *din ü devlet*. Seeing the aptitude in myself and finding the aspiration in my heart, how can I sacrifice this *God-given* aptitude solely because my father asked so and a girl loved me (37, emphasis mine).

The context in which the terms like “religion and the state” and the name of God appear in the word *Hüda-dad* (God-given) are remarkable, especially in the case of this novel in which they seldom appear. They are not central to his argumentation; rather, Vefa uses these as if he is justifying his determination in the eyes of the reader. In other words, putting these allusions as an underpinning to his argument seems to be a reflex in that he is trying to legitimize this in the public mind. To an extent, it is similar to the religious “cosmetic changes” that were added to the second version *Tanzimat* edict, which was an attempt to legitimize the orders (Hanioglu 73). This similarity between a political act and a novel’s discursive reflex denotes the same discursive gap between the Western way of thinking when applied in an Ottoman context, be it in a political or in a literary domain.

The overall comparison of the three novels does not show uniformity in terms of an approach to religion, as *Hayal ve Hakikat* was quite different to the two narratives of *Esrar* and *Müşahedat*. Read on its own, *Hayal ve Hakikat* can even itself manifest an epistemological shift from the Islamic thinking to a more secular epistemology under the Western influence. That is the reason why I find Ahmet Midhat’s narrators as changing discourses from one novel to another. The next chapter will be spared to Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad which will show us another narrative that is ornamented with a religious dimension and utterances as found in *Hasan Mellah* or *Esrar-ı Cinayat*; yet, another dimension also stands out in *Ahmet Metin* very visibly, that being a political dimension. I would like to draw attention to the fact that *Ahmet Metin* was written the same year as *Hayal ve Hakikat*, which is striking as we will see the discursive difference while analyzing *Ahmet Metin*.

CHAPTER 5
AHMET MIDHAT'S MATURE PHASE

5.1. *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad*

Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad Yahud Roman içinde Roman (*Ahmet Metin and Şirzad or Novel within a Novel*-1892) stands out for several reasons among Ahmet Midhat's list of works. In their exchange of letters to Ahmet Midhat and Fatma Aliye, Ahmet Midhat takes pride in this novel specifically and he reveals to Aliye that he wrote this novel just to spite a "gentleman" who was despising novel-writing and to show him how important novel-writing is, adding how good he is at it (185). Ahmet Midhat and Fatma Aliye debate over the novel in several other letters, and in those we can observe Ahmet Midhat defending his character Ahmet Metin very passionately, even after two years after the novel was published: "I could tell you my daughter, you cannot find a single novel like Ahmet Metin in the languages of the non-Muslims [the West]. It is not a novel. It is a source of knowledge!" This, Ahmet Midhat also notes was achieved "by the Grace of my Lord," which he highlights in Arabic: "*Haza min fazli Rabbina*" (185-186) from which I infer his passion for writing this novel was accompanied with religious sentiment. Apparently, the novelist invested all his talents and passion as a novelist and also as an encyclopedist as to its bulky volume, over seven hundred pages. The volume of the novel does not entirely comprise of story-telling but to a weighty extent informative passages relating to numerous fields from engineering of the ships to geography, from history to mythology, to languages and etymology; this is actually why he called this novel a source of knowledge, all kinds of knowledge impossible for one novelist to cover, indeed! Despite its volume, Orhan Okay detects that the novel is not based on an important event for the plot, the novel is "thoroughly written to manifest the greatness of the Islamic, Ottoman and especially the Turkish civilization" (457).

The other reason this an interesting piece is due to the novelist's personality. I suggest Ahmet Metin is the protagonist of all that Ahmet Midhat identifies with the most. This is inferable, in addition to his aforementioned defensive attitude of Ahmet Metin. There are autobiographical similarities: the narrator relates Ahmet Metin's youth as a libertine who tasted everything dissolute but then got disgusted with such a life and turned out to be a man of high morals, who illuminates every person he encounters from all aspects –like our '*hace-i evvel*' Ahmet Midhat: it is very identical to how Ahmet Midhat related his own youth in his *Menfa*. Ahmet Metin's magnanimous idealism, considering the author's boasting about his novel –in his letters-, altogether shows us that he is proud of both himself and the hero. This is significant to understand the vision and message the writer wants to convey in his 'masterpiece', since the distance between Ahmet Midhat's mentality and that of Ahmet Metin is minimized through this identification - not to mention the closeness of the two names: Ahmet Midhat-Ahmet Metin.

So far I have studied novels through the themes, symbols relating to belief and religion, religious discourse and practices as well as piety as a dimension in characterization. When it comes to religion in *Ahmet Metin*, we have to take on the term ideology for a central phenomenon in the case of this novel. In some of his letters to Fatma Aliye dated 1894, he makes a very interesting remark, which I believe is an indication that Ahmet Midhat's thinking: … [in that case] the religion of Islam would become harmful. I am [in the first place] an Ottoman, my daughter!" (*Mektuplar* 173-74) This is a radical statement which manifests that religion is important to the extent it serves the political – or ideological - context of Ottoman identity. This is the late Ahmet Midhat's statement, who started to revisit phenomena through ideological formation, and it is similar discourse of Ahmet Midhat who wrote *Ahmet Metin*. As the critical works analyzing this novel unite, this novel brings forward the dominant ideologies of the Ottoman scenery.

In his introductory statement to the novel, Ahmet Midhat visits his division of *hayal-hakikat* (imaginary and real) and declares that all characters, and events are imaginary while he assures that the knowledge and thoughts presented are 'sole truth'. In an instructive part of his narration, he declares he emulates Jules Verne while for his imaginary narration that of Alexandre Dumas' (9) – just like in *Hasan Mellah*. This is not the only similarity between the two novels, *Hasan Mellah* one of his very first novels, and *Ahmet Metin*, one of his last novels, i.e. both heroes are sailors. Moreover, Ahmet Metin, the character, is presented as the "new Hasan Mellah". This reference encourages us more to see how his protagonists transformed through time.

Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad will be analysed with some comparative references to other novels that we have discussed like *Hasan Mellah* or *Müşahedat* with the purpose of analyzing if/how Ahmet Midhat's stance as a novelist transform traceably in his novels in terms of his approach to religion and belief. With *Ahmet Metin*, another term gains importance, ideology, as the rise of ideologies accelerates at the time of this novel influencing literary discourse as well.

For instance, a very overt comparison of the character reveals this a major difference from *Hasan Mellah*: Hasan was an Arab while Ahmet Metin is presented as a Turk, with an emphasis on his being Turkish in his idealism. With this very nuance, it is very obvious that Ahmet Midhat as a novelist was not isolated from the influence of Turkish nationalism in the Ottoman context. The rise of nationalism in Western countries for over a century started penetrating Muslim countries too, giving rise to new nationalisms in Islamic contexts. There, among Ottomans, were different variations of ideologies swayed by nationalism. Ahmet Midhat creates the vastest platform for himself in order to discuss the four different ideologies in detail and illustrate their examples through Ahmet's journey. Ahmet is not only a figure who encounters and serves these ideologies; he is also the one who provides the answers, who puts rights and wrongs on table and who reaches – has already reached - the optimum amalgam of all these ideologies to set a model for a possible new Ottoman, who has been dangling aloft among several conflicting ideologies and changes of regime.

Prior to the analysis of the novel, it will be useful to visit the intricate relation of ideology and the novel and the nineteenth century ideologies in the Ottoman State.

5.1.1. Ideology and the Novel

Herman and Vervaeck remind that as novel and ideology are of the same origin, i.e. the West, their births are also time-wise close to each other; thus, the two often are discussed together. When it comes to the relation of ideology and narrative fiction, we can define ideology "as the frame of values informing the narrative" (1). Terry Eagleton finds the narrative "the most potent of all ideological forms" (71). As ideologies rose, they found ready a genre in the novel in which they could manifest themselves in a form they could reach the public. The Ottoman novel, in that sense, comes across as an infant example of how ideology and narrative worked together in the transformative period of the late nineteenth century.

Why the term ideology turns vital to this study is that it is what drastically changed the understanding of religion - Islam with an ideological formation: the emergence of Islamism. This is what gave the perception/practices of religion its more political feature, as it came out of a struggle for survival against the West and its ideologies. Before and together with Islamism, there were different ideologies, which formulated different answers to the political struggle. The first of the ideologies according to Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar is civilizationism, and then came Ottomanism, Islamism (*Ittihad-i İslam*), and nationalism as Turkism. Although each of these are separate ideologies which have different strategies for the survival of the Ottoman state, they are therefore to an extent conflicting. Ahmet Midhat draws close to each of them in *Ahmet Metin* by deploying each in different aspects of life in Ahmet Metin's utmost idealism. It is also useful at this point to remember that he also was an intellectual who kept his distance from each political movement like the Young Turks, initially. As already mentioned, he made sure he was on good terms with the Hamidian regime, especially after returning from exile.

In *Ahmet Metin*, his eclectic nature of artistry reaches its peak in terms of the ideologies mentioned - an eclecticism aimed to create the best synthesis as an ideal model for his reader. Jale Parla's question is notable in this regard; she asks why does Ahmet Midhat feel the need to write a quest novel at such a late time as 1892 (45). Even though he has already produced numerous novels by then, he is writing a quest novel, which hunts down another (an archaic) novel, *Şirzad.*

The very reason why we cannot call Ahmet Midhat a nationalist or an Islamist essentially, despite his representation of such ideas, is that he does not find any answer sufficient and he seeks the right one for himself. Therefore he is eclectic; yet, while linking to each school, he keeps a distance to the other. Each of the ideologies will be briefly visited and its literary manifestation in *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzat* will be analyzed in the following in order to understand the place religion takes among all these ideological manifests.

5.1.2. Civilizationism[6]

Civilizationism (medeniyetçilik) is the first ideology referred to in discussing *Ahmet Metin*. The word "civilization" enjoyed popularity in especially the last quarter of the nineteenth century Ottoman thought. The third meaning Tahsin Görgün assigns to civilization, which we refer to with civilizationism, is:

> In its plural form, from an evolutionist point of view it refers to the totality of transformative procedures and phases until humanity reaches the Western lifestyle, i.e. modern. The primary element this term bears is in regards to the current state of the West as the ideal, seeing the rest as behind it (*İslam Ans.*, 298).

Civilizationism is coined to refer to those who welcomes this view and strives toward a Western understanding of progressivism, towards science, positivist philosophy and technological advancement. As we have already observed, this is present to different extents in Ahmet Midhat's literature, which is maintained in *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzat*, yet to a limited extent. Şemsettin Şeker points out that in his novels after 1876, Ahmet Midhat cautions that civilizationist thinking is not always respected and welcome (215). Since this ideology mirrors the West in a totality, as already discussed, Ahmet Midhat prefers to filter the Western civilization for especially in his later novels as Şemsettin Şeker noted.

First of all, civilization is the consistently overarching theme/phenomenon of *Ahmet Metin*'s narration and the character in the novel. Ahmet Metin's quest is all pertaining to civilization(s), an Eastern and Ottoman/Turkish civilization while he is searching for it through the West. Bahar Yıldırım, in her study "The Route in the novel Ahmet Metin ve Şirzat," argues that Ahmet Midhat is trying to introduce the Ottoman to the "other" i.e. Western civilization, which is present in the novel (192). The focal ideological point is the Turkish/Ottoman Muslim character (to be further discussed in the next section) whom he wants to introduce; yet, the subtle presence of the Western ideal is very central to the discussion of civilization that Yıldırım is referring to. It is an "other", yes, but an "other" not in the sense of a low status but in the sense of an ideal "other" which Ahmet Midhat is striving to reach to and compete with. If an ideal other, it is also the source of threat which he describes as 'the sea scaring us' "the more

[6] I use this term to refer to one of the ideologies of the era named as *medeniyetçilik* in Turkish . As the word civilization carries a central importance to show the idea behind this ideology, "civilizationism" is a useful translation, despite the fact that it is not widely used in English.

we advance in education, science and industry which is the field of implementation of these two, the more dominant we get over the world and the stronger we shall be in conquering the universe. Then *the sea scaring us right now* shall scare us no longer" (13 emphasis mine). The search for power and civilization is not on its own, but under the shadow of the Western model of advancement.

Ahmet is the personification of this civilized ideal character while he is so because of his western qualities: he speaks the western languages, French and Italian perfectly, is good at science, engineering (designing ships), and is knowledgeable about the aspects of Western civilization, i.e. history, geography, mythology that we observe through the journey as he lectures Neofari. In terms of etiquette, too, he is like a Western gentleman; he makes sure everything is perfect on his ship, of which the terms of perfection are determined according to western manners. For instance, he teaches his servant Vasiliki French in order for her to serve the Western guests at her best. He makes sure she is dressed up with very fine quality clothing and jewelry. Ahmet Midhat introduces Ahmet Metin as in the following sentences:

> The hero of our story is the – though he has not yet reached that level of excellence [referring to the passage quoted above] the sapling of progress[ivism]. Just like a very early vegetable, he has come prematurely before the season thus is not as perfect as the ones to come in the right season. You will closely see his level, understand and judge it (14).

In addition to his European-like merits, he is the ethical, virtuous man like an Ottoman man should be.

Neofari, the woman figure, is a Moldovan woman who accompanies Ahmet Metin as the female character in the novel, and to whom Ahmet Midhat acquaints the Ottoman Muslims as well as the Turkish race to change her negative views about them. The choice of Moldavia, as it is like the boondocks of the Europe as Ahmet Midhat refers to it, is significant. The narrator says there are parts of Europe where the level of civilization is quite behind. Neofari comes from such a background but grows up and gets educated in Paris to never feel that she belongs to Bogdan again, where she is from. She lives devoid of moral values and with no parents to be watched; thus, she is morally very corrupt. She is a non-Muslim example of excessive westernization, which Parla interprets as the narrator's aim to show the bad sides of Western culture to the extent that it challenges Christian communities as well (46).

Mythology occupies a considerable extent of Ahmet Midhat's narration. Despite the fact that he defines myths as superstitions – *hurafat* - his employment of mythology plays certain roles in the narrative. Firstly, he refers to Greek civilization as the preliminary point of European civilization and observes that the West still relies a lot on Greek civilization. Mythology he heeds as he sees it so influential for the Western culture. He draws attention that it even penetrated into the Biblical texts as well as influenced Western literature.

More interestingly, when the ship Volska sinks and he saves Neofari and her alleged husband from the sea, he is stunned by the beauty of the woman who comes out from the sea to Ahmet Metin's ship, *Meliketül Bahr*. This view of the woman he likens to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty in mythology; later he tells the legendary story of Aphrodite's birth and is excited by the coincidence that the spot where Neofari came out of the sea was the spot that was pointed in the myth. The myth of Aphrodite here is used as a bridge between the Eastern story-teller, Ahmet Metin, and the Western woman figure who listens to this story for the first narrated orally. She belongs to the Western territory and is likened to the myth of that territory; yet, she admires the Eastern man who is calling her Aphrodite. This utilization of mythology to connect the two civilizations' discourses is unique to Ahmet Midhat's synthetical attitude in his narrative. It also shows the extent his eclecticism can reach!

Regarding the way he constructs Ahmet Metin's idealism and praise is also significant. For instance, besides the idealism of Ahmet Metin's there is also the ideal character Şirzat constructed as a parallel to the protagonist. He is the ancient model of greatness whose footprints Ahmet traces. Şirzad is instrumental in exalting the Turkish race. However, other instruments the narrator uses for praise are interesting: he borrows a term from the western culture: knighthood, to praise ancient Turks. Ahmet Midhat takes one page to make connections between ancient Turks and knighthood. He relates a tale of (he is not sure if it was Battal-Gazi or not) which he claims is the '*şövaleresk*' narrative. He relates the story with Islamic elements; yet, he describes "if this is not knighthood, what is?" In doing this, he acclaims the Western romance and knighthood, through which he views the Eastern Turks commendable. This is to say, minding that *Ahmet Metin* is a 'quest novel,' which searches for a certain Ottoman identity, on the narrative level, his search has Western-like qualities as in his national history, which he already accepts as the model of excellence in several aspects.

For Parla, Ahmet Metin is the perfect synthesis of East-West civilizations (45). However, this also raises a question mark; it has been already said that the narrator gives vast informative parts relating to western civilization with which the writer wills his reader to be familiar. He aims for those that he thinks are beneficial to his own civilization. On the other hand, as already mentioned, Ahmet Midhat is the first teacher who instructs the good and the moral and filters out the immoral and blasphemous that is harmful to his reader. In that sense, I would argue, the substantial exposure to mythology exceeds his filters that do not cross the borders of the Islamic framework whereas he goes as far as reflecting on Neofari with the imagination of her as Aphrodite. Moreover, his search for 'a coherent narrative history,' to borrow Eagleton's term, is idealized by Western values as the western understanding of civilizationism and is quite enunciated. Deliberate or not, in the construction of Ahmet Metin's idealism, although we call him the Muslim/Ottoman/Turk, his civilizationism, i.e progressivism on Western terms, is the other core founding facet. Thus, it becomes missing if we do not add the 'Westernized' label next to the other three. It constructs all the means through which he aspires to achieve; he emulates Western education, knowledge, culture, manners, and civilizational accumulation. Besides the characterization, it is also true for the narrative discourse in general that Ahmet Midhat construes, as revealed in his celebratory remarks about this novel through *Ahmet Metin.*

Şeker draws attention to the connection between Ahmet Midhat's experience at the congress of Orientalists and *Ahmet Metin*'s narrative. Such is a defensive discourse against Western civilization, as in the example of saying that the Muslim civilization taught the first lessons for Europe, with reference to the great past of the Islamic history (219). The fact that Ahmet Midhat constructs his counter-discourse around the concept of civilization while he also construes a model of progress on the Western example is another illustration of his twofold discourse which is the dialogy that his novel offers.

5.1.3. Ottomanism/Turkism

In spite of the usage of Ottomanism and Turkism together, they are by definition different and conflicting ideologies. Ottomanism promotes and encompasses the variety of religious, racial and ethnic elements comprising the Empire to exist together. On the other hand, Turkism as a form of nationalism, lays emphasis on the racial triumph of the Turks among other elements in a segregating manner. Raymond Williams defines the term that nationalism "has been a political movement in subjected countries which include several ‘races’ and languages as well as in subjected countries ... where the distinction is a specific language or religion or supposed *racial* origin” (214). Although Ottomanism is verily much against what nationalism adverts, Ahmet Metin’s discourse is entrenched in the two ideologies, reciprocally and assertively.

In the same letter to Aliye which was mentioned above, Ahmet Midhat’s attachment to the Ottoman Empire and his own Ottomanness is manifected succinctly:

> Islam’s viability, peace, prosperity, and progress is possible through the Ottoman [State]. Now, assume that Islam spreads around in England or America, and moreover, imagine this materializes through the Iran and Indian branches [of Islam]. Wouldn’t your heart shiver out of your patriotic feelings for the Ottoman? Then Islam would turn harmful for our Ottomanness rather than valuable. Prior to everything else, I am Ottoman, my daughter! I wouldn’t feel proud for the Muslimness of those who don’t have connection to the most sacred authority of the caliphate (174).

Should we take these words in a personal letter as a reference point in analyzing his discourse in *Ahmet Metin*, out of all the ideologies that we claim are present in the novel, with these statements alone to put forward that Ottomanness is the superlative identity encompassing the rest of the ideologies. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar who views Ottomanism as the ‘official’ ideology of the Turkish history of thought in the nineteenth century, notes that Ahmet Midhat in his *Üss-i Inkılap* (1877), takes the Ottomanist discourse which emerged between the years 1856-1876 and attributes it to the whole history of the Empire: “The Ottoman state has not emerged solely as an Islamic state ... Likewise the Ottoman state has not solely emerged as a Turkish state too.” He also notes that since *Üss-i Inkilap* was produced with the approval of Abdulhamid, he must have been happy with the Ottomanist movement too (qtd. in Tanpınar’s footnote 160). Ottomanist ideology would be briefly defined as the political approach which suggests an Ottoman identity under which all distinct races and religions/sects and multicultural existence is welcomed under the Empire. Like Tanpınar put it, it was a very valid set of ideas and implementations, for the survival of the Ottoman state in the nineteenth century struggle (*Ibid*).

It is possible to infer that Ottomanist ideas occupy a prevailing place in Ahmet Midhat’s novel discourse in general, like in *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*, *Müşahedat*, he gives a lot of space for Armenian, and characters from different ethnicities and religions, especially Christians, and in dialogic relations. In spite of his emphasis on the greatness of Islam, he welcomes many non-Muslim/non-Turkish characters, provided that they are of good personalities, like Agavni and Siranuş in *Muşahedat*, though the former converts to Islam in the end.

This is effective for *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad* too, according to Koçak who puts forward that the novel is written with the same Ottomanist ideas that views the State as a big family who hosts different ethnicities and sects together; Ahmet Metin's ship Meliketül Bahr is an illustration of the Empire (78). However, like in any of his works, this is also very debatable. The main reason is that the very narrative of this novel suggests a new form of ideology, which Ahmet Metin is after and which comprises Ottomanness and Turkism. The emphasis on Turkish ethnicity adds a dimension that is contradictory to the Ottomanism that was just defined. Thus, we observe another synthesis that inclines towards a hardcore nationalist ideology. Like in the description of Ahmet Metin by Ahmet Midhat, this ideology is not a mature ripe but an early crop of a nationalist ideology which digs out a Turkish narrative.

Şirzad-ı Selçuki is the novel character, which is omnipresent in *Ahmet Metin*'s plot as Ahmet's primary aim in sailing with Meliketül Bahr is to trace Şirzad's route, which he takes in the novel. Jale Parla in her article on Ahmet Midhat's ideological transformation as a novelist argues that he turns from Ottoman congregationalism to Turkish communalism. She regards Ahmet Metin as a character who manifests this transformation to Turkish communalism. Şeker also notes that even though *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzat* represents the multi-ethnicity of the Ottoman Empire, Ahmet Metin's character is highlighted with his Turk identity (232).

Ahmet Metin utters: "Yes! I shall be a Hasan Mellah too. Yet I am not going to look for a Cuzella. I am going to look for a Şirzad (48). In *Hasan Mellah*, the main motive was love for a girl; yet, this motive is replaced with a curiosity for this character, Şirzad, a curiosity that is accompanied with patriotic feelings about the ancient Turkish history. In *Şirzad*, and the route of the novel, he searches his ethnic roots as a Turk to construct "a coherent narrative history" of Turks. This is to show us that the ultimate Ottoman does not suffice for this "new crop" any longer, and that requires him to hunt more to add his identity as an Ottoman: Turkish ethnic roots.

At this point it is useful to draw attention to the fact that Ahmet Metin represents the greater Ottoman territory, his father being from the Balkans, i.e. Bosnia. His father's name is Islam Dragoz, an interesting coining of the name, His surname is a typical Slavic name while his first name Islam is a blunt contradiction to the family name. This is an illustration of the impurity of Turkish ethnicism and that his

Ottomanism interferes with his Turkism. Through his quest for the Ottoman Turkic roots and through his ideology, he becomes a Turk along with his Muslimness and Ottomanness.

Throughout Ahmet Metin's journey, he refers to Turks as a glorious race. His choosing not a Turk from the Ottoman times but the pre-Ottoman state Saljuk is noteworthy as it is a deviation from the prevalent Ottomanist discourse. This implies the opposite of what he uttered in *Üss-i Inkilap* by saying the Ottoman state is not solely a Turkish state. By digging out from history the greatness of Turks as non-Ottomans, he is inferring that Turks were worthy of praise before Ottomans too. "In our Ottomanness, there are two glories that God Almighty has bestowed upon us while only one of us was for our honour. One is Muslimness and the other is Turkishness. Both of these are... incomparably heroic and poetic as to the histories of other communities" (46). The fact that he regards Islam and Turkish ethnicity as equal is very remarkable and also new for Ahmet Midhat's narrative which he puts forward in *Ahmet Metin* systematically.

With his vast knowledge in humanities, he makes different claims regarding the antiquity of the Turkish race. At one point, he dates the origin of the race back to the time of Noah. At another, he claims that the most ancient civilization, i.e. Chinese, was established by Turks. More surprisingly, in a visit to a church in Otranto, Neofari and Nikolso talk to the priest while Ahmet Metin goes to examine the tessellations of the ancient structure. The two are surprised by what he is trying to do as the priest informs them that he is looking for footprints of horses. We find out that the local people believe that when the Ottomans arrived here prior to the conquest of Italy, they tied their horses in the middle of the church. Ahmet Metin refutes this myth by revealing that the Ottomans treated non-Muslims and their temples with utmost respect, and a place of prayer would always remain for the same purpose (387). His journey merges with history, historical narratives that pertain to Turks and Ottomans both of which he wills to pay honour.

Several other similar instances take place in the narrative of *Ahmet Metin*, which pertain to the two ideologies. Although they are two different streams of the nineteenth century ideological thought, in Ahmet Midhat's discourse they coexist to the extent that they support one another. In other words, the novel narrative and the ideal, magnanimous characters seize the opportunity to reconcile opposing thoughts in a heteroglossic imagination. One can infer from Ahmet Midhat's eclectic approach to the two ideologies that he wanted to construct an ideal Ottoman identity which – inevitably - highlights the major dominant ethnicity which is Turk, in order to formulate an answer to the growing nationalist political discourse against the changing balances of the Ottoman communities. One thing obvious is that he couldn't prefer solely Turkism to the expense of the Ottomanism, which has long granted them a coherent narrative history as the great Ottomans of different religions and ethnicity. Therefore, Ahmet Midhat, again, went for a 'grafted' synthesis rather than polishing one nationalist discourse over the other.

5.1.4. Islamism

Of all the ideologies discussed so far, Islamism is the most significant one for this study, as we shall discuss the transformation of religious discourse in the novel that is assumed to be the reflection of the perceptions of religion in the politically/intellectually stormy era. This ideology was usually referred to as *Ittihad-ı* Islam at the time; yet, I prefer to use Islamism as Tanpınar does in his book on the nineteenth century Turkish literary history. Okay places Ahmet Midhat as one of the earliest novelists who brought Islamism into the novel genre by insisting on highlighting Islam and civilization, Islam and knowledge, and ethics in his novels (*Batılılaşma* 239). Firstly, I will borrow İsmail Kara's definition to familiarize ourselves with this conception of Islamism as ideology:

> Islamism is the thought and movement which encloses all political, philosophical and scholarly studies and pursuits in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, which was activist and eclectic in nature and whose ultimate object was to make Islam dominant "again" in its entirety (belief, religious practice, morality, thought, politics, law, education); with a rationalistic method, to civilize, unite, and to uplift the Islamic world, and to save it from Western exploitation, from cruel and despotic rulers, from enthrallment, affectation, superstition (*İslamcılık Düşüncesi*, 17).

Secondly, it is important to mention that Ahmet Midhat is not mentioned as one of the Islamists of the century, like Namık Kemal has often been. Even though Ahmet Midhat mostly promoted Islamic ethics and he exalted the Muslim identity, the ultimate pursuit of the writer was not aimed at Islam's dominance at large. It was a vital aspect of the civilization that its subjects adhered to; therefore, religion served Ahmet Midhat's formulations. His discourse is eclectic and it does not see any harm in borrowing the aspects of the opposing, i.e. Western ideologies. According to

Türköne, the main objective in Islamism is progress and its eclecticism is in order to enter the world of Western though/ideologies (33). In this sense, Ahmet Midhat's thought is identical while there is also a systemic parallelism between the method of Islamism which Kara outlines and that of Ahmet Midhat's eclecticism.

I would like to revisit the two quotations that were referred to earlier. In 1894, Ahmet Midhat wrote in his personal letters to Fatma Aliye that for three to four years he has been more "on the path of God" and that he enjoyed reading the *Qur'an* more than ever. On the other hand, another letter the same year fiercely stated that before all he was Ottoman and Islam was viable through the Ottoman state. In the same letter, he mentioned that to serve the Sultan was the same thing as serving God. Keeping these notations of his pertaining to his approach to religion as well, I will observe religion in the narrative of *Ahmet Metin*.

Ahmet Metin is drawn as a person of integrity in terms of ethics; although he has experienced pleasures of a morally inferior life, such as drinking and womanizing. However, he was soon disgusted with such a life (31). He is depicted as having "clean blood," so he was not able to adjust to a life of lousy pleasures. He hates smoking as well as drinking. As a mature man, he is very well-behaved with everybody around him, from his servants to his guests, e.g. Neofari. Unlike any other Ahmet Midhat protagonist, he does not engage in a relationship with any woman, despite his servant Vasiliki being beautiful, and the beautiful Neofari who he falls in love with. In her letter, Fatma Aliye criticizes the character to be like a Christian monk, while Ahmet Midhat defends his chaste character (167).

Ahmet Metin is faithful in God and believes in *inayetihi teala* (the help of God), *hikmeti teala* (the wisdom of God) (353) and *adalet-i ezeliye* (justice of God) (456). He prays 'salah' collectively with the ship crew, which is followed by a recitation of 'mevlit' to 'embellish their ears' and 'to illuminate their hearts'. After such communal rituals, Ahmet Metin stays up to read chapters from the *Qur'an*. This passage is followed by these words describing him: "because this young man was both quite a philosopher and also a very faithful believer. His wisdom was the wisdom of Islam and his love for Muhammad, the wisdom of Muhammad which enlightened his heart and soul granted by God" (101). Or in staring at Neofari's beauty, he praises God as 'the most magnificent of all Creators' (300). Ahmet Metin quotes the verse from the *Qur'an*, which says "Go, then about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those..." (3:137). He makes a connection with this verse and his journey; yet, we know that his preliminary motive/aspiration is chasing *Şirzad*. It does not seem unjust to say that Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad proposes an eclectic identitarianism harmonizing the competing ideologies that were in effect at the time.

All in all, Ahmet Metin is drawn with adherence to belief and his identity as Muslim. On the other hand, as discussed with his inclination towards western civilization, he does not hesitate to sit and drink with Europeans he comes across with on the way and behave with western manners to impress them. He does not come across as deeply pious as Hasan Mellah or as illuminating as Seyit Numan of Müşahedat. His religiosity seems more instrumental towards his idealism rather than a natural part of his characterization. In other words, it is reflected more as an ideological construction compared to his earlier novels, in harmony with other ideologies in the novel. This can be crystallized better if we look at his journey at a metaphorical level.

Chasing *Şirzad* is like a pilgrimage Ahmet Metin practices. It is pilgrimage not entirely in the religious sense of the word but in the ideological, nationalist sense in which he is on a quest for historical and racial bonds with which to formulate an ideology. Ahmet Midhat's Ottomanism is deformed with his nationalist touch of Turkism; as well, they underpin one another. His pious/religious discourse is de-crystallized with his political/ideological emphasis on the greatness of the Ottoman as well as the Turkish race. Like he wrote to Aliye, he was an Ottoman before everything. As the final word, I would conclude not only the representation of and the religion by Ahmet Midhat became more politicized in parallel with his changing thoughts on politics and the state in the later stage of his life but also he underpinned his novel with a pious discourse and religious tone as seen in the example of monumental *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzat*.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was an infantile attempt to locate religion and belief in the discourse of late Ottoman –and first Turkish- novels, mainly through the ones by Ahmet Midhat Efendi. The very emergence of the genre to the Ottoman context in this period is one example of the cultural impenetration of Europe into the society, i.e. through those Ottoman intellectuals who mostly led this importation process. It was Ahmet Midhat who spent the utmost efforts for the genre, first imitating the Western novels whereas later endeavoring to write those that were his own culture's. In my reading of his biographical accounts along with his novels, I have derived a conclusion that as he matures as a writer, he takes a more religious stance in contrast with his early novels where he tended to reflect the positivist-realist views or highlighted values of modernization. This shift also is a part of a clinging to his own culture, Ottomanness, i.e. identity. For the axioms of Ottoman culture are substantially derived from the Islamic tenets; writing indigenous Ottoman novels entailed religious backdrop and this differentiated Ahmet Midhat's novels from the Western ones, those once he had imitated.

However interesting my research question seemed in the beginning, it was a challenge to analyze Ottoman novels in terms of religion and secularity. For among all the discussions of modernization and tradition, categorizing the phenomena as either religious or secular was confusing; especially in fiction it was more in vain. Rather, the need was for a comprehensive view: Surveying the relation between religion and the genre theoretically, which was important for understanding the place of religion in modern literature and how Islam, and Muslim concept of literature is different than the others. Secondly, there was a need for historical accounts of the Ottoman modernization to depict what was being discussed *about* religion in this new experience of change, e.g. the sense of political and intellectual defeat in the Ottoman Empire which was synonymous with Islamic civilization. Thirdly, since I focused on one author, I felt the need to overlook Ahmet Midhat's personal journey as a novelist in order to make better sense of the issues and discourse in the novels. To this end, in my second chapter I tried to look at how the relation between religion, texts of revelation and the novel has been so far studied, especially in the West. In the third one, I compiled a survey of late Ottoman history focusing on the secularization processes which is meant to lay a historical background to understand the social, political, cultural context of the novels efficiently.

Being the main author I studied, it required me a long process of reading and thinking until I figured out the approach I will take to study Ahmet Midhat's discourse as a novelist. Let alone labelling Ahmet Midhat either a conservativist or a modernist, I tried to trace his authorship in its dynamism as open to influences of the turbulent time he was living in. In doing so, I aimed to reach at a truer picture of Ahmet Midhat's stance towards secularity and religion in his maturation process as a writer.

In the attempt to analyze Ahmet Midhat's narrative with regards to religion, I looked at themes, characterization, rhetorics and plot in the novels. Apart from Ahmet Midhat, I took two more novels, *İntibah* and *Taaşşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* by Namık Kemal and Şemseddin Sami to give a comparative framework for a better understanding of Ahmet Midhat's novels. These early novels seemed to imitate more the Western examples where religious expression and representation did not take a prior place in the themes or activities depicted or discussed in the novels. However, as the political scene changes and Ahmet Midhat matures, I observed a shift in his novel discourse towards a more religious, at times, pious idealism in his characters through which he aimed to educate his people.

The novels are *Felatun Bey ve Rakım Efendi*, *Felsefe-i Zenan*, *Hasan Mellah*, *Hüseyin Fellah*, *Esrar-ı Cinayat*, *Müşahedat*, *Hayal ve Hakikat* and *Ahmet Metin ve Şirzad* that I managed to look at, for the analysis of the above-mentioned phenomena in terms of religion, faith and ethics. I have chosen Ahmet Midhat as the main novelist of the study for he is the writer who strived towards establishing a novel discourse that is indigenously Ottoman-Turkish, with his peculiar eclecticism between tradition and progressivism. In addition to that, Ahmet Midhat also represents ideas from different rising ideologies of the time in his own eclectical synthesis while keeping his distance to each, which makes his novel discourse interesting to critical analysis. For instance, he merges Ottomanist and Turkist ideas together in the character Ahmet Metin, which are essentially incompatible. Altogether, Ahmet Midhat's efforts are towards reconciling what are not reconcilable, therefore, among all the debates of religious traditionalism and secular modernization, he creates a novel that accommodates both values. The examples of Hasan Mellah, and Ahmet Metin showed us that he imagined the ideal Ottoman man to marry both the traditional-Islamic values that are core to the

Ottoman identity, and the appreciated Western qualities, which are basically those associated with modern progress, e.g. good education in worldly sciences, western etiquette.

In his self-assigned duty of educating his people, the fact that Ahmet Midhat chose the genre novel and invested vast efforts in this genre is no coincidence. I view this better when I looked at the genre in the light of Bakhtin’s theory of novel, dialogic imagination. Although Ahmet Midhat’s novels are not as mature as to claim they are dialogic in nature, I believe the best instrument for Ahmet Midhat’s aim to synthesize and reconcile opposing poles was the novel for the very reasons that Bakhtin will talk about a century later, the open-ended form of the genre to represent different voices in one body, i.e. *heteroglossia*. Even if we cannot confidently argue Ahmet Midhat’s novels are heteroglottic, as his didacticism always closed many a different speeches in a monolithic moralist voice in the end, it will be fair enough to say at least that he paved a way for the Turkish novel to be a dialogic genre with his vast contribution to novel narrative in Turkish.

All said, Ahmet Midhat’s individual endeavors for an Ottoman novel is invaluable for the history of Turkish novel. Religion and faith occupies an essential dimension of his novel discourse and its evolution. Analysing the religious sentiment, faith-related themes in his novels depicted both the evolution of Ahmet Midhat’s novel discourse and his individual stance towards religion as a nineteenth century Ottoman intellectual figure; in other words, he was the father of his society narrating them novels made of his synthesized ideas and values, calling the people to develop themselves in modern terms as well as holding on to the essential religious values and ethical commandments that Islam and the tradition taught them to.

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