Like a ghost speaking from the grave, the late Caliph Abdulhamid II has an active presence on Twitter. Every few days he tweets to his followers, calling on them to adopt the ideals of pan-Islamic solidarity in a tone of unabashed imperial pride. He posts black and white photos of a bustling turn-of-the-century Galata bridge, maps showing the contours of the empire at its apogee, and, appropriately enough for social media, plenty of self-portraits.¹

Ottoman ghosts are showing up in all kinds of ways in contemporary Turkish pop culture. The recent explosion of interest in the former empire, dubbed Ottomania, has invaded cultural forms both high and low. Amassing collections of calligraphic artifacts in the Arabic script has become a newfound hobby among the rich². Plans are made to construct shopping malls made to

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¹ (Abdülhamid Han). 14 Nov 2014. https://twitter.com/abdulhamid_han, Tweet
resemble Ottoman military barracks³. On television, one can find the wildly popular Turkish soap opera Muhteşem Yüzyıllar, which has spread Ottomania internationally. The show has been dubbed and broadcast in many areas which were formerly part of the Ottoman Empire⁴. In Egypt, it has even spawned its own vassal series, Saraya Abdeen, just in time for the month of Ramadan. The show is set during the reign of Khedive Isma’il and features a queen with her own Ottoman Turkish catchphrases. Like Saraya Abdeen, Burger King has for years capitalized on the consumer-oriented festivities of Ramadan to offer its Sultan menu.

What has perhaps attracted even more attention in the press and academic circles are those shifts in Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy explained by Ottomania. Originally conceived in tandem with Ahmet Davutoğlu’s “zero problems” foreign policy strategy, variations on the idea has been recruited as a political symbol by competing ideologies, with pro-Ottoman Islamists imagining a return to the Caliphate, and cosmopolitan secularists lauding a lost multicultural past. It is a fantastical alternative for those outside of power, as well as the aesthetic aspiration for the ruling regime⁵. As a political category, Ottomania has come to be an empty signifier. “The Ottoman past, like all history, is an arena for symbolic competition, between all of the obvious ideologies —nationalism, religion and liberalism—vying for control of Turkey’s future.”⁶

### Ottoman Voices

The Abdulhamid Twitter account can be seen as both a product of the cultural and political manifestations of Ottomania. This would seem to imply a contradiction between nostalgic entertainment and the serious business of politics. There is indeed an element of tongue-in-cheek humor, and on its surface the Abdulhamid twitter account seems to coincide with other superficial celebrations of Ottoman history in popular culture. But despite the medium, there is a clear political ideal being communicated; a message that sets itself in opposition to not only a current state of politics, but to the state itself.

³ The Gezi protests in 2013 were started as opposition to this plan
⁵ If the AK party has shown any consistency in its cultural policy, it could be described as a fondness for imperial kitsch.
Osmanlı toprak üzerinde kurulmuş bir imparatorluk değildir sadece. Bir zihniyetdir, bir hassasiyettir. Bu yüzden Osmanlı yıkımdı!7

There is something strange about the way that Abdulhamid speaks on Twitter. His discourse exists in a temporally ambiguous space, somewhere between the royal pageantry of the early modern period, and the pressing political debates taking place in the Middle East today. In fact, the latter is often commented on using the grandiloquence of the former. He speaks, for example, about reinvigorating the Ummah as a united Islamic political community as a way to fight against Israel and Western Imperialism.

Biz Arapız, Türkız, Kürdüz diyerek parçalanan ümmet, "BİZ MÜSLÜMANIZ" dediğinde kurtulacak!8

And the spiritual community proposed is not merely the Ummah, but the reestablishment of the Ottoman Empire.

Bağdat'tan Şam'a, Kahire'den Üsküp'e.. Dünya Osmanlı'yı özlüyor!9

The language used to communicate these messages is itself strange. While many of the expressions and ideas are old-fashioned, the attempt to match the writing style with antiquated language is somehow off. As much as it resurrects the past in archival images and historical allusions, its language isn’t an accurate recreation. It is the attempt by someone who doesn’t know Ottoman Turkish to mimic its perceived eloquence in 140 characters.

7 “What was founded upon Ottoman lands was not merely an Empire. It is a mindset, a sensibility. This is why the Ottoman has not been destroyed.” (Abdülbahad Han), “Osmanlı toprak üzerinde kurulmuş bir imparatorluk değildir sadece. Bir zihniyetdir, bir hassasiyettir. Bu yüzden Osmanlı yıkımdı!” 18 August 2014, 5:07 p.m. Tweet.
8 “For those who said we are Arabs, we are Turks, we are Kurds, and took apart the Ummah, they will be saved when they say WE ARE MUSLIMS” (Abdülbahad Han), “Biz Arapız, Türkız, Kürdüz diyerek parçalanan ümmet, "BİZ MÜSLÜMANIZ" dediğinde kurtulacak!” 11 October 2014. Tweet.
9 “From Baghdad to Damascus, from Cairo to Skopje… The world longs for the Ottoman!” (Abdülbahad Han), “Bağdat'tan Şam'a, Kahire'den Üsküp'e.. Dünya Osmanlı'yı özlüyor!” 10 October 2014. Tweet.
This attempt mainly includes the use of specific archaic words, familiar to the younger generations of Turks from their use in old books, or in a few expressions used by their grandparents. They are mostly understood, but carry with them a historically specific connotation. They are clearly out of place on modern Turkish social media.

Ottoman was once the prestige register of Turkish, used in court poetry and official bureaucracy before the “catastrophic success” of the language reform undertaken in the early Republican period. The vocabulary of the Ottoman literary lexicon was largely borrowed from Arabic and Persian, and was extirpated en masse at the beginning of the national project in an effort to purify Turkish of foreign elements. Over the course of the 20th century, modern Turkish continued to distance itself from Ottoman as it created a new vocabulary based largely on compound words formed by combining semantic elements from other Turkic languages.

But if Turkish social media is any indication, these words were not lost for good. Just as the sights of the Ottoman Empire are returning to popular culture, so are its voices. On Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook there are several accounts where you can receive daily aphorisms in old Turkish, admire tughras and other types of calligraphy written in Arabic script, and take lessons to learn the letters to be able to read Ottoman Turkish yourself.

Most of these social media accounts do not share Abdulhamid’s ideological convictions, and are content to use Ottoman Turkish casually. This dead language is coming back to life online as it is used to write spiritual truisms paired with images of whirling dervishes, or to rewrite the dialogue in comic strips, or to share antique curios found in second-hand bookstores. In these instances, the match between medium and message is even more jarringly anachronistic.

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10 “A nation’s strength is not from cannons or tanks...a nation’s true strength is in the credence of its progeny” Ibid 12 October 2014. Tweet
12 The same is true of many Arab countries. Turkish has shown up in popular culture in “the Book of the Sultan’s Seal” by Youssef Rakha, as well as on the previously mentioned Soap Opera “Saraya Abadeen.” On the show, Egyptians have come to know Queen Khoshyar, the wife of Isma‘il, who come to be known by her long list of half-Turkish, half-Arabic catch phrases such as “الضبابيات” and “Mantiq-siz”.
13 It will certainly be interesting to see the effect of Ottoman courses being mandated in Turkish public schools will effect this interest
than Abdulhamid’s politics. The best example of this is certainly is that of the use of Ottoman Turkish a caption for end-all internet ephemera: cat pictures.

It would seem that much of the interest in the Ottoman language seen online is by those with a purely academic curiosity, history buffs, or people looking for a new arts and crafts project. Ottoman writing is a way to explore part of Turkish cultural heritage, a high-minded hobby.

However, I would argue that the act of writing in Ottoman involves a more profound engagement with the past than many realize. While Abdulhamid knowingly uses an imitation form of Ottoman for political ends, others who use Ottoman in contemporary writing are also participating in a politically meaningful form of creative cultural expression. Using older forms of Turkish in new settings co-opts it from its historical context to be used it a new productive and polyvocal variety of the language. Although the idea of “contemporary Ottoman” may seem at
first like an anachronistic amalgamation, or a politically inconsistent motif, Ottomania as a form of writing actually benefits from these tensions to imagine a narrative identity founded on alterity. In order to explain this point, it will be helpful to look at more conventional forms of writing. It is in contemporary fiction where we can see many examples of fully-developed experimentation with the Ottoman language, as well as its literary traditions.

A first glance at the covers of recent novels might give the impression that popular fiction is as engaged with the cultural heritage of Ottomania about as meaningfully as Burger King. We now see the past intrigues of sultans and the harem as unsolved mysteries in police thrillers and tragic lovers in historical romances.

*Sultan Öldürmek
Osmanlı’nın Surri
Harem - Bir Aşk Yolculuğu*

However, just like the Abdulhamid Twitter account, there are also plenty of contemporary novels that use the Ottoman past as a way to challenge the current state of politics and culture in Turkey. Ottoman settings create allegorical opportunities for engaged authors to comment on contemporary issues. Several authors are not content with using the Ottoman as an exotic prop, but rather hope it employ it as a way to imagine political alternatives to modern Turkey. Reimagining the past allows for authors from a wide range of political persuasions, be they cosmopolitan and Islamic or multicultural and liberal, to express “dissatisfactions with the present”.

According to Walter Andrews, Ottomania is more than an aesthetic fascination, but rather a way of thinking beyond identity; a stepping-outside of the rhetoric of dichotomies (traditional/modern, Ottoman/Turk, religious/secular) surrounding Turkish and Ottoman culture. Experimenting with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *becoming*, the Ottoman is reconceived as a metaphysical ideal, as an authenticating, essential truth offered as anecdote to the rootlessness of the present. Adopting Ottoman as a form of expression allowed one to express feeling of

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14 “Killing the Sultan / The Ottoman Secret / Harem - A Journey of Love”
being bound, spiritually, culturally (and linguistically as we shall see), by the definitions of modernity. Rather than responding only as nationalist subjects interpellated by a fixed ethnic identity, these authors desire to respond to the calls from a more interconnected, a more meaningful, a more human world. Although no one now can realistically claim to being Ottoman, they can strive towards a certain imaginary ideal of Ottoman culture in an act of becoming Ottoman.

“The Ottoman becomes what we make of it….it becomes the sign for the regime of an underlying spiritual reality and moral consensus; it becomes the sign for social cohesion and cultural synthesis; it becomes the sign of a de-centered, secularized, and rebellious mysticism. Over time is also loses its direct connection with the cruelties and failures of Ottoman despotism. 16”

This re-imagining is undertaken by recent novels which portray the sacred and mystical experience before the modern nation-state as a way to recover a sense of religious identity. Nazar Bekiroğlu is an author whose novels explore the personal dimensions of spirituality. Along with this comes not only a celebration of the individual religious experience but the attempt to portray an open-ended concept of Islamic civilization. This is a concept that frees itself from the focus on dogma and antagonism, and turns instead to a recovery of its art, tradition, and myth. Her works are in conversation with the literary heritage of Islamic civilization.

Iskender Pala17 also writes novels which represent acts of historical remembrance. This includes the attempt, through fiction, to give an accessible understanding of the very difficult genre of Divan literature to everyone: from “housewives to students, teachers to lawyers”18. Much the same could be said of Nazar Bekiroğlu, whose works have successfully communicated the values of tradition, culture, and Islamic civilization.19 Both of these authors hope to provide

16 Ibid.
17 Iskender Pala is a professor of Ottoman poetry and contributor to the conservative Zaman newspaper who has written a great number of novels interested in Ottoman history and literature.
19 “Nazar Bekiroğlu, gelenegi, kültürü ve İslam medeniyetini eserlerine başarıyla taşımış ve bu değerleri eserleri içinde başarılı bir şekilde isleyebilmiş bir yazar olarak modern Türk edebiyatında dikkat çeken önemli bir yazardır.” Şeref, İzzet. Nazan
a way to build understanding and appreciation of the artistic and spiritual richness of the
Ottoman past. As the Egyptian author Youssef Rakha states in regard to his own Ottoman ghost
story, “the way to a renaissance has less to do with dogma and jihad than with such things as
love poetry and calligraphy and the cultural heterogeneity inherent in Islam.”

On the other side of the cultural/political spectrum we have recent works by secular and
progressive authors which focus on the multicultural richness of the Ottoman Empire. Hercules
Millas has surveyed the wide landscape of novels which are constructing memories of a plurality
of cultures and identities through a reimagining of the Ottoman past. A major theme in works
since 1980 has been “living together in old times”, when the various millet, Greeks and
Armenians, Jews and Muslims, were able to live together in peace under the umbrella of a
cosmopolitan Empire. Istanbul is offered as the heterogeneous cultural space *par excellence*.

The novelist Elif Şafak has written several novels which challenge monolithic depictions
of Turkish culture through time. Her protagonists are Kurdish and Armenian, immigrants and
minorities. The author Iktay Onur Anar’s novels also celebrate the heterogeneity of society,
especially its outcasts. In his novel Puslu Kıtalar Atlası (The Atlas of Misty Continents), Anar
opens with a depiction of a sailor coming to a 17th century Beyoğlu inhabited by pirates,
beggars, beggars, thieves, and the insane.

These authors are not merely interested in showcasing alternative identities. They hope to
claim and incorporate this plurality of cultural and literary traditions into their own writing. In a
practice usually described as postmodern (or by the exhausted image of Turkish writers standing
at the border between East and West), this kind of Turkish novel is interested in connecting with
both European and Islamic civilization. Elif Şafak pulls in her literary allusions from both
Western and Islamic sources, treating Sufi mysticism, 19th French Literature, Sharia and
postfeminism all with equal interest. She hopes to portray these different identities and traditions

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21 Millas, Hercules. “Contracting Memories of “Multiculturalism” and Identities in Turkish Novels” in Dufft, Catharina. *Turkish Literature
worth noting that this multicultural nostalgia is not the exclusive interest of secular writers, as even Bekiroğlu has expressed a
deep interest in multicultural in her work as well.
as able to coexist inside of a single narrative space. At the same time, she hopes to benefit from their referential webs and varied lexicons to enrich her text.

"Turkey's early Republican elite, modelling themselves after the French, wished to control language from above. Hundreds of old Ottoman words were taken out of the dictionary because they stemmed from either Persian or Arabic and so were not Turkish enough. When I write in Turkish I use lots of exiled words in addition to modern slang. I want to bring back the nuances that we have lost in time."22

This interest in borrowing from other languages and texts in novels is not just an exercise in postmodern pastiche. Nor is the desire of Muslim writers to connect to the stories and traditions of Islamic civilization a symptom of postmodern nostalgia or deculturation23. By connecting the Turkish language to other languages and literatures, these modern novels are reviving intertextual practices that were once a central part of Ottoman literature.

Most of these practices suffered the same fate as the Ottoman language with the language reforms of the early 20th century24. Along with all that the new Kemalist republic perceived as backward and oriental, these conventions and traditions shared by other Islamic languages and literatures were largely abandoned in favor of Western styles, thereby severing them 25. This is quite a feat, as the form and content of Ottoman literary works were almost completely adopted from Persian and Arabic. A large portion of the lexicon of Ottoman literature was made from borrowing Persian and Arabic words. As for themes, Ottoman works were not merely in conversation with Persian literature, but “were directly influenced by Iranian literary paradigms….the earliest works of medieval Ottoman poetry are direct imitations of Iranian

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23 “The elimination of religious markers in Oriental languages, apart from Arabic, was a relative success, recently resulting in a voluntarist of this marker among religious activist speakers of those languages. Religious markers, formerly embedded in the language, became floating once more. Speakers of the language used them as explicit elements of religious identification…” Roy, Olivier. Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print. pg. 102


models. In addition to poetic vocabulary, almost the entire corpus of images in early Ottoman poetry strongly resembles that of Persian court poetry.\textsuperscript{26}

In this way, Ottoman literature was not only intertextual in practice, but in its very essence. A text would often allude to stories from the Qur’an, Hadith, folk tales, or any other literary source that would be familiar to an Islamic audience by means of \textit{te lmih}. It could also borrow directly from other poets, a practice known as \textit{tazmin}, using whole verses in its own works. And it could even incorporate foreign words or whole phrases\textsuperscript{27} from other languages, using the process it referred to as \textit{mulami’}. These intertextual practices are not only to be found anecdotally among Ottoman texts. They had in fact been systematized as rhetorical devices in works of the \textit{belagat} form of literary criticism. This genre was adopted directly from the Arabic tradition of the rhetorical sciences, ‘ilm al-balagha, already well-established by the 13th century.\textsuperscript{28} It would continue well into the Tanzimat period with Cevdet Paşa’s \textit{Belagat-i Osmaniye}. The work is relevant to our discussion as it represents one of the last attempts to wrestle Ottoman literature away from European influences. The author believed that “as the basis of Islam was the Arabic Koran so, too, should Ottoman culture reflect the dominant position of those traditional sciences which found their origins in the study of the Holy Book.”\textsuperscript{29}

In \textit{Belagat-i Osmaniye}, the three terms \textit{mulami’}, \textit{tazmin} and \textit{te lmih} were all considered elements used in the science of poetic adornment (‘ilm al-badi’). They joined other such wonderfully extravagant devices as rhymed prose (saj’), the assigning of a fantastical cause for a simple phenomenon (husn al-ta’ilil), and the over-embellished used of description (aptly titled drowning in description: ighraq fi-l sifat).

These contemporary authors are experimenting with intertextual practices in their works as a way to reenact a forgotten past for the sake of a possible future. And this is not merely the influence of Ottomania as a form of a creative aspiration towards an abstract ideal as imagined by Andrews. By imitating Ottoman forms of writing, their texts are actually becoming Ottoman.

\textsuperscript{26} Silay, Kemal. \textit{Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court: Medieval Inheritance and the Need for Change}. Bloomington, IN: Indiana U, 1994. Print. pg. 32 Silay goes on to ask whether these similarities are “sheer imitation” or “intertextuality”
\textsuperscript{27} Silay 35
They have returned to set of textual practices which are at once traditional and post-modern. It is important to mention that this is not a blind imitation of past traditions.

“Becoming-Ottoman... is not a process of reversion to some past state or even accommodation of some past state. It is instead a dynamic relation of difference that exists wholly in the present.”

Connecting with the Islamic past and communicating with other cultures and languages, is being accomplished not merely in texts, but through the production of text itself. Specifically, the act of becoming-Ottoman is the return to historical practices which recognize the centrality of its own literary tradition. This includes an interest in invoking not only Ottoman characters and symbols, but a body of literary and cultural allusions associated with diverse conceptions of Islamic civilization. Previously lost genres, narrative traditions, and methods of textual analysis are reengaged.

For all of the previously mentioned authors, an interest in Ottoman heritage is extended to the style, language, and content of their work in interesting and meaningful ways. If allowed to indulge in a little Ottoman nostalgia ourselves, we could take up Cevdet Paşa’s cause, and arrange an exploration of Ottomania in contemporary literature according to those rhetorical devices found in the Belagat-i Osmaniye.

Telmih

“Telmih- is made by referring to a famous story or legend”

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30 In comparing contemporaneous Ottoman and Persian poetry, Kemal Silay notes the overwhelming parallels between poets such as Fuzuli and Hafez, and remarks that “whether these similarities are interpreted by scholars as “sheer imitation” or “intertextuality,” the striking linguistic, structural, and thematic resemblences among these early works seem undeniable to me.” Silay pg. 32
31 It is very doubtful that any of these authors would themselves describe their works as being Ottoman rather than being about Ottomans.
33 these definitions are taken specifically from Paşa, Ahmed Cevdet. Belagat-i Osmaniye. Istanbul: Nısan Berberyın Matbaası, 1892. Print. pg 152
In Ottoman literature, telmih was used performatively in poetry as a way to address a readership who would be familiar with Islamic themes and other sources of mythology. As a rhetorical device, it acted both to demonstrate the level of cultural knowledge of the poet, and to imbed the work within a certain cultural heritage. Cevdet Paşa points to the poetry of Fehim Süleyman Efendi’s (d. 1846), where in just two lines we have references to the stories of Suleiman and Belqis:

“bize aruz-u cemal etmez mi belkis amal ahir
fahiman hatım dağ mühbatale sülemanız”

In much the same way, contemporary authors are referencing the stories of legends of the Ottoman past. A huge body of scholarship exists which examines the ways in which contemporary authors have mined the “Ottoman theme” for its cultural references. This includes Turkey’s most internationally famous writer. Erdağ Göknar explains how in each of his works, Orhan Pamuk has used Ottoman history as a way to confront “secular national "taboos," including multiethnicity, multilingualism, cosmopolitanism, religion, and homosexuality.”

After nearly a century of effort by the Kemalist project to align Turkish culture with the symbols and metaphors of the West, the use of references to Islamic and Eastern mythology is a defiant reorientation towards what was once its collective consciousness. Telmih in this case is not merely a rhetorical flourish, but a conscious choice as to which culture’s history can be used to help explain the present. In his novel Snow, the narrator Ka is given a lesson in this cultural history by Lacivert, an activist Muslim who himself is interested in the cultural heterogeneity inherent in Islam.

“Ama ben Sana bu güzel hikayeyi onunla hayatımı nasıl anlamlandığımı göstermek için değil, onun anlattığını söylemek için anlattım,' dedi lacivert. 'En azından bin yıllık bu

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34 Göknar, Erdağ “Orhan Pamuk and the "Ottoman" Theme” World Literature Today, Vol. 80, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2006), pp. 34-38
Pamuk’s novel *Black Book* uses Eastern legends in constructing its narrative: Sheikh Galip and Husn-u Ashk, Mevlana and Shemsi Tebrizi, Islamic mysticism, Sufi orders, the Islamic encyclopedia, the Conference of the Birds, and the Thousand and One Nights. This range of Islamic sources is a reflection of Islamic civilization as an extended tradition uniting a plurality of cultures and voices which can in turn be adopted freely. Islamic allusions are treated as explicitly *literary* sources, and are not limited to the prophetic tradition.

Orhan Pamuk is in good company when he references ecumenically to works from Turkish, Islamic, and Ottoman cultures through his use of telmih. Many other contemporary authors are more than happy to join in unsettling these boundaries: secular, postmodern writers and self-identifying Muslim authors alike. Elif Şafak has made a career out performing telmih in reference to Eastern tropes with a postmodern or magical realist twist. Her novel Mahrem, for example, “constructs a historical background regarding the questions of “to see” and “to be seen” as the concept of intimacy is problematized within the framework of intertextuality through mythology, religious texts, legends, Shamanism and the Quran.” Not only in its themes or in indirect forms of allegory do we find examples of telmih. In many passages, we find explicit references to characters and stories from Islamic history. They are employed as similes in the method described in *Belagat-i Osmaniye*. Many even use the same references.
Ihsan Oktay Anar takes the use of **telmih** to postmodern extremes. He uses traditional themes and styles to create elaborate historical-cultural pastiches. His novels are made up of a dense collage of historical oddities, philosophical systems, and symbolic elements that range from the mystical to the fantastical. The line between history and fantasy is blurred as he brings together Sufi symbolism, Quran’ic allegory, Eastern mythologies, scientific explanations, and supernatural plot twists. For Anar, telmih is employed without regard to binaries such as West-East, Profane-Religious, or Historical-Fictional.

What is important is that Anar’s work is not merely influenced by these different elements that then make their way into his work. Telmih is more than the presence of outside texts. The concept contains a sense of appropriation that is deliberate. As a rhetorical element, telmih incorporates other works belonging to a tradition in order to claim a right to a specific cultural inheritance. Anar’s novels, then, become links in a chain of texts that stand outside of national boundaries, whether they be geographical, temporal, or ideological.

For those authors who themselves identify as religious, or who make more conventional claims to an Islamic heritage without the mediation of postmodernity, telmih works in much the same way. Literature is remembered and celebrated as a religious-culture possession. To remember the Islamic past is to revive it. Characters remember their own lives, and moments of emotional importance, in tandem with the readings of texts.

“Birden, çocukluğunda kendisine Leyla ve Meçmun okuyan enderun ağalarından birinin, Leyla oruldarının galibiyeti için dua eden Meçmun-i biçare kısmına gelince, derin yaşlandırımı hatırlayarak acıyla güldü. Ne güzel günlermiş o günler, diye geçirdi içinden.”

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39 **“If you life, he was as rich as Harun, and as powerful as Suleiman”** Şafak, Elif. Mahrem: Görmeye Ve Görülmeye Dair Bir Roman. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000. Print. p. 41


41 **“Suddenly, when she came to a section of Leyla and Mejinun that one of the teachers read to her at school when she was a child, Hopeless Mejinun praying for the victory of Leyla's armies, she remembered those intimate moments and smiled wistfully. How beautiful were those days, she thought to herself.”** Bekiroğlu, Nazan. Nun Masalları: Hikâyeler. İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1997. Print. pg. 88
Nazan Bekiroğlu’s characters use the Islamic past as a way to center their understanding of the world and to bring meaning to their existence. Though taking place in different cultures and at different periods in time, her novels all have characters who share a fundamental belief in God. In this way, Bekiroğlu demonstrates through literature how in fact there can be unity as well as heterogeneity in Islamic culture. Many of her novels also include an examination of female and Sufi forms of spirituality, which work to counter orthodox conceptions of faith.

**Tazmin**

"Tazmin - When a poet uses a section from another poem in their own poetry."

Rather than referencing or alluding to the content of a story or legend, tazmin involved the direct citing of the author of a work. Cevdet Paşa points to a line of poetry which quotes the poet Sabri, using the Arabic phrase “bi-qul Sabri.” This type of reference places emphasis on a poet or author rather than the story per se. Tazmin is a way to honor the eloquence and skill of those authors who have come before.

Both Nazan Bekiroğlu and Iskender Pala have an academic background in classic Turkish poetry, and are interested not merely in the mythology of the Ottoman Empire, but in the literary canon itself. This is reflected by the heavy use of quotations from poets in their works, as well as the interest that their characters have for older works. This interest serves as a way to introduce and explore the canon to the modern reader. And by using the actual words of works that have come before them, they are given new life in contemporary literature. In this way, Tazmin creates an intertextual bridge between past and present.

In Bekiroğlu’s “Nun Masalları” (Stories of the letter Nun) we have the Ethiopian servant who begs to be read to:

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43 Paşa pg. 155
At the beginning of Iskender Pala’s *Babil’de Ölüm İstanbul Aşk* (Death in Babylon, Love in Istanbul) we have the great Turkish poet Fuzuli risking his life to spend time in a Baghdad library reading Arabic and Chaldean texts. With Fuzuli as the narrator, the book goes on to explore secret messages hidden within lines of court poetry. This plot device is a way for the protagonist to dissect the poems meanings, which then acts as a translation and explanatory analysis for the reader. A lesson in Ottoman poetic appreciation is masked as a literary detective story.


In fact, in several of his novels Pala can be seen reenacting the classic practice of şerh, wherein he dissects a poem using the classical concerns of Ottoman literary criticism. This includes background information about the references which are being made, explanations of obscure words, and even anecdotes about topics ranging from geography to astronomy. In his role in teaching an audience about the world of these Ottoman poems through the use of şerh, he is not only using Ottoman intertextuality himself, but is educating readers on how to be able to

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44 “The Ethiopian servant would ask the lady of the house, and she might open up and read to her from the Diwan of Hafiz, The Bostan and Gūlistan, and section from the Mesnevi, Leyla and Mejmun, and even the Kabusname, the Čarname, and the Tazarrurname.” Bekiroğlu, Nazan. *Nun Masallari: Hikayeler.* Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1997. Print. pg. 52-3
45 “Ref oldu hicab-ı şahid-i raz/ aşk oldu melamet ile demsaz or in other words “when the veil of the secret bride was lifted love and reprehension spoke with the same tooth. The phrase “the veil of the secret bride” refers to the lost passcode for the temple of Ishtar. In order to open it we must know the relationship between the two words “love and reprehension”” Pala, Iskender. *Babilde Ölüm İstanbul Aşk.* Istanbul: L & M Yay., 2003. Print. pg. 114
46 Koçoğlu, Turgut. “Nâbi’nin “gelir ağır” redifî bir gazeline Walter g. Andrews ve Iskender Pala tarafından yapılan iki şerhin metot anlaşılmasından mukayesesi” *Turkish Studies / Türkoloji Araştırmaları Volume 2/3 Summer 2007*
participate. In order for readers to be able to read these works which have been rendered illegible, novelists are working as interpreters.

In a modified form, Elif Şafak also uses Tazmin. In her novel *Pinhan*, the protagonist continually comes across lines of poetry written on gravestones, in caves, and on old fountains. These lines come from traditional poets such as Yunus Emre, Omar Khayyam, and of course Rumi, all as translations interspersed into her text. The purpose here is not so much with showcasing the original words, and an appreciation of style, but in the use of poetry as a form of aphorism, as premonition, or as esoteric foreboding. The classical sources act as a commentary on the narrative at decisive points.

“Baş taşlanndaki kabartma sikkeler, usul usul açığa çıkaryordu toprağın altında kimin yattığını. Yahut küçük bir tasvir, bir serpuş, birkaç kelime... her biri sürülecek bir iş, birer nişandı. Ölümün değil hayatın nişanları. Mezartaşlarından birinde kabartma harflerle şu müsraları okudu Pinhan.

*Miskin ademoğulları Ekinlere benzer gider
Kimi biter kimi yiter Yere tohum saçmış gibi.

Yunus Emre.\(^47\)“

In this way, not only do current texts act as explanations and interpretations of past texts, but the old works can act as interpretations of the new. Through the act of tazmin, texts act on each other interpretively regardless of chronology. In this way, Tazmin can be both used as a way to celebrate and commemorate texts from the past, or to revive them, and to make them into narrative elements in a new narrative. Either way, by connecting two texts through time by the

\(^{47}\)“ The embossed coins on the headstones, quietly revealing who lay beneath in the soil. Or a small portrait, a few words… a few traces, the marker for someone. A market not for the dead but for a life. On one of the embossed headstones Pinhan read the following lines:
Poor son of Adam, who resembles the crops in the field he ends he vanishes his seed scattered over the ground
Yunus Emre”

use of direct quotation, the connection is interwoven through intertextuality, binding two traditions together.

**Mulami’**

“Mulami’ - is made in poetry when one language is used in one verse and then a different language for another”  

In *Belagat-i Osmaniye*, Cevdet Paşa considers mulami’ an extension of tazmin, where words and phrases are lifted directly from other languages. He gives a few examples of verses whose second line is an entire phrase written in Arabic, usually an Islamic idiom. In another example, the second line of the verse is in Persian, from the poet Fakir.

Because of the better part of a century spent training its lexicon, when even a single foreign word intrudes into contemporary Turkish, it rarely goes unnoticed. There are deliberate ideological boundaries set up around the vocabulary of Turkish. After a sustained lexical witch hunt, even words that had once been integral to Turkish identity have been erased. When they do appear, Arabic and Persian words are often used to give a specific connotation. Ottoman terminology has remained, albeit segregated, in legalize as a heightened register, or for use in religious contexts.

Contemporary authors are aware of the baggage these words carry, and are busy collecting them for use in their work. In *Mahrem* (Gaze), Şafak compiles a sözlük of terms which she intersperses through the text. Some of the words are Arabic, but their literal definitions are expanded to include meanings which are explained with reflections and anecdotes from Islamic mythology.
“Zahir: Tanrı’nın doksandokuz isminden biri olan zahir, “gözden saklanmayan” demektir.”

This redefinition often involves an Islamic (often Sufi) understanding of concepts such as beauty.

“Cemal: Güzellik. Güzel yüz. Tasavvufa, Tanrı’nın iyilik ve güzelligi şeklindeki tecellisi.”

Nazar Bekiroğlu’s Kelime Defteri (Word Journal) does almost the same thing. In the book, she tries to reenact the childhood act of collecting words in a journal.

“İlkokula gittiğim yıllarda öğretmenimiz bize Kelime Defteri tutтурdu. Öğrendiğimiz yeni bir kelimeyi ona yazdık....Şimdi ben de onları merak ediyorum, bir de acaba benim fark etmediğim kelimelerim de var mıdır benim?”

Her notebook is a collection of spiritual ruminations

“Aşk: Ezelden beri aşk olduğu için kelimelerin en başına yazıldı.”

Islamic stories


And theological concepts.

54 “Zahir: One of the ninety-nine names of God, it means “the hide from sight.”” Safak, Elif Mahrem pg. 69
55 “Jemal: Beauty. A beautiful face. In Sufism, it is a manifestation of God’s goodness and beauty.” Ibid pg. 89
56 “In the years when I went to elementary school, our teachers made us keep a word journal. We would write in it all of the new words we learned...I wonder now, are there words of mine I didn’t pick out at the time?” Bekiroğlu, Nazan. "Kelime Defteri." ZAMAN. N.p., 24 Aug. 2014. Web. 14 Nov. 2014. <http://www.zaman.com.tr/nazan-bekiroglu/kelime-defteri_2239458.html>.
57 “Love: From time eternal the word for love was written above all others.” Ibid.
58 “Animals: Even if you don’t love them, you must show respect to life. From the wolf that didn’t eat Joseph to the story of the refugee. It’s in all of my writing.” Ibid.
The act of remembering and collecting words, and giving expanded definitions to known words which have spiritual dimensions, reenacts the early Republican campaign of combing through the countryside and ancient Turkish sources to find indigenous words for the *Tarama Dergisi*[^50]. But rather than in service of the national project, collecting old Arabic and Persian words and stories works in defiance of the official boundaries set up by the national project of language reform. These authors understand the role books can play in teaching readers about the Ottoman past. In almost all of her works, Elif Shafak adds Ottoman vocabulary to an already busy polyvocality between the voices of Modern Turkey, the European Diaspora, minority languages, and the perspectives of women and queer identities.

İskender Pala uses the Ottoman practice of şerh to help his readers navigate the unfamiliar terrain of Divan poetry in much the same way. Ottoman words often come with an explanation in order for them to take place among his modern narrative, and Pala uses them to their greatest effect in trying to mimic the feel of older texts[^61]. Pala’s narrative become a way for readers to inhabit historical environments, and to learn Ottoman literature while embedded in its original, albeit re-imagined, context. In *Death of Babylon*, Fuzuli makes it back to Istanbul, and we are taken on a tour through the eyes, learning words along the way.

““Dersaadet,”İstanbul’un en zarif adıydı ve ‘kutluluğun kapısi’ demeye gelirdi. Yetenekli her insanın saadete ermesi mümkünü bu kente.”[^62]"
Ihsan Oktay Anar, on the other hand, seems to make a point of baffling his readers. His 1995 novel “Puslu Kıtalar Atısı” (The Atlas of Misty Continents) opens to an exotic scene of 17th century Galata. The reader is struck not only by what is described, but by the strangeness of the description itself.

“This opening paragraph is a challenge. Without an introduction or guidance by the author acting as a kind of temporal interpreter, the average reader is completely confused. The passage not only uses old words, but phrases such as “rivayet olurdu” (it was thusly chronicled) as a way to mimic traditional narrative devices. This succeeds in creating a sense of bewilderment in the reader. A typical response is shared in an online book forum:


There is a feeling of dread. Or it can be said that, in its confrontating of the reader with what is at once totally foreign but somehow familiar, the text strikes the reader with a sense of the uncanny.

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63 Anar, İhsan Oktay. Puslu Kıtalar Atısı. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007. Print. pg. 1. Intentionally left untranslated
64 “At first sight: oh wow what a great cover!... A Turkish writer. Good book to read. But man what happened! The book’s first quarter: Wow good Lord! For a second I thought I must have been mistaken…God what have I done. This book is in Ottoman Turkish… The first half of the book: reading the book is like torture.” Comment from Doğan Kaytan regarding “Puslu Kıtalar Atısı” on Goodreads.org May 09, 2013
“Ama olsun puanı yüksek okumaya devam. Ne de olsa Mazoşist bi karakterim de var. Dayanırım dayanırım. Ha! Çok zevkli! bu cümleyi de anlamadım işte!”

The novel stages a radical re-familiarization with these words and expressions. What is at first radically foreign is eventually revealed to be legible. While other authors integrates the words and expressions and symbols of the Ottoman as one of many alternative voices, Puslu Kıtalar Atlası confronts the reader with the uncanniness of the Ottoman as a challenge which is accepted through the act of reading.

**Ottomania as the Ottoman uncanny**

The authors we have mentioned are all interested in intertextual practices which connect them to the older form of their language. In order to make these connections, they at the same time working to teach the reader how to recognize allusions, appreciate obsolete styles, and to understand forgotten words. But using these exotic stories and strange old words is more than a simple exercise in creative writing. Along with new appreciations for cultural heritage, there is political potential in this strangeness. Because the Turkish language was the object of such an intense political project of erasure, the return of its history serves as a repudiation of such attempts at establishing control over language.

This is a continuation in the present of the process described by Nergis Erturk in her book *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey*. She shows how literature in the first half of the Twentieth Century, both consciously and otherwise, resisted the attempts to limit the Turkish language as part of the Kemalist project. For Erturk, national projects of language reform, and the Turkish case specifically, are not projects in which some pristine and wholly authentic vernacular form of the national language is discovered and then expanded and promoted to work for state functions. It is quite the opposite. Language reform is a process of suppression and

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65 “But sobeit it got a good score so I went on. And anyways, I have a masochistic character. So I kept on. And man! How nice! Even if I didn’t understand this sentence!” Ibid.
erasure. “Writing reform is driven by the experience of language as [a] threatening, uprooting force, generative of unforeseen consequences without end.”

Despite decades of trying to confine literature to the modern, allegedly indigenous form of the Turkish language, the appearance of Ottomania in literature has it returning yet again. The cultural and political dimensions of Ottomania are brought together as authors not only reinvigorate an interest and appreciation of Ottoman culture, but participate in the project of imagining an alternative to the disappointments of the present. Because of literature’s ability to not only represent the past, but to resurrect it through writing, any author who experiments with the language and literature of Ottoman Turkish is at the same time working to undo the rigid divisions of the nationalist project of containment.

“It is the power of literature’s fictive performance itself to teach us how to relinquish the binding of language: a lesson that individual actor-authors are free to learn or not learn, as they see fit, but which might be both learned and taught by their work, irrespectively.”

To “step aside” and relinquish the binding of a strictly national identity for the multiplicity and state of becoming described as Ottomans entails not a little strangeness. To be reintroduced to a past as a living tradition rather than as a removed object for historical contemplation is to feel a sense of uncanniness. There is something strange yet familiar when the reader deciphers Sufi symbols in the depiction of a 19th century freakshow, or when they find emotional resonance in what was formerly ancient poetry in a dead language, or when they read the tweets of the last Ottoman sultan.

But this sense of the uncanny is the first step towards the values of interconnectedness and belonging which are at the core of Ottomans. The mania is the feeling of uncanniness in discovering ourselves in the past, and in others. In a reversal of Julia Kristeva’s formula, It is possible that the very act of Turkish becoming strange to itself may be the path to coming to terms with the foreign, and thereby opening the possibility for a new literary cosmopolitanism.

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66 Ertürk, Nergis. Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2011. Print. pg. 27 (I would argue that for most Turks, it is actually through the fictive performance of social media, internet culture, and even street protest that this process is being undertaken. 67 Ibid. pg 22
As Kristeva states, this process “would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious—desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible.”

Ottomania as a state of uncanniness and alterity shares one more feature with the historical Ottomanism it seeks to emulate. Even before the interventions of modernity and the national project, Ottoman was never wholly itself. It was always split between the different languages and traditions that constituted it. As Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar says:

“Kafka hatıralarında bir yahudi için, Almanca anne ve baba kelimelerinin hiçbir zaman tam manasıyla bu kelimelerden bıktelenen sıcaklığı vermediğini söyler. İşte Türk şiir büyük bir taraflıyla çok defa bu iç uzaklığından konuşacaktır. Bu şiir yapanların umumiyetle nesir ve nazım, üç dilde yazdıklarıunu unutmamalıdır. Heidegger’in “düşüncenin evi” dediği dilin bu tarzda çoğalması, tabiatıyla insanın dağılmış neticesini doğuracaktı.”

Rather than be discouraged that the historical body of Ottoman literature (as opposed to its contemporary reimagining) was itself schizophrenic, it should be a comfort for those watching recent attempts by the Erdoğan administration to dictate cultural policy based on the patronizing imposition of Ottoman symbols in everything from social mores to construction projects, and now in the field of education. As much as our discussion has borne out the fact that the term Ottomania is too slippery as a concept for any purpose other than to describe an uncontrollable celebration of polyvocality, so should any attempts to harness the meaning of Ottomania elude those who would attempt to wield it in the service of state power.

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69 “Kafka remembers how, in being a Jew with German parents, he was never able to feel the warmth of words in their full meaning. In this way, Turkish poetry represents this same inner distance. We should not forget that those who composed poetry and prose in general wrote in three different languages. In this way, as this style spread in our language, what Heidegger calls “the house of thought”, it would cause a split within people themselves.”
Tanpinar, Ahmet Hamdi “XIX Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi” Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları. 2006 pg. 21
70 see http://www.todayszaman.com/national_council-proposes-ottoman-turkish-as-compulsory-subject-for-high-school_366210.html
As much as Ertürk and others have largely trained their aim at the Kemalist project in discussions over Turkish language reform and cultural politics, I believe that their point on the power of language as a generative, uprooting force is just as valid against neoliberal ideology. As much as it can be used for personal expression, high art, political demagoguery, or sharing cat pictures, Ottomania in the Turkish language is no one’s exclusive property. If, for example, there was to be an attempt to commodify Ottoman symbols, to copyright its lexicon, to claim Ottoman imagery solely for the service of capital, it would just as soon be overrun by the productive force of language.

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71 In fact, the focus should quickly be shifted away from our apparent habit in Turkish studies of producing yet more elaborate critiques of ethnic nationalism to more contemporary concerns.


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