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Toward Canonical Status: A Study of the Contemporary Turkish Novel

SUMMARY

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Topic of the doctoral thesis and fields of study

The research is situated within the field of literary studies, with a focus on the mechanisms of canon formation and legitimation through the analysis of contemporary Turkish literature in the context of *World Literature*. It examines the extent to which contemporary Turkish literature meets the aesthetic criteria of the literary canon and may participate in the process of canonical recognition, beyond mechanisms of circulation and international visibility.

Research objectives

The general objective of this study is to investigate the mechanisms of literary canon formation and legitimation through the analysis of contemporary Turkish literature in the context of *World Literature*, in order to assess the extent to which it meets the aesthetic criteria required for canonical status.

From this general objective, several specific objectives derive: clarifying the theoretical framework of literary canon and *World Literature* through an analysis of key critical perspectives; examining the aesthetic criteria that underpin canonical recognition, with a focus on Harold Bloom's theory and its dialogue with other canon theories; analyzing the relationship between national identity, globalization, and *World Literature* in order to highlight how these factors influence the reception and circulation of literary works; studying contemporary Turkish literature in relation to aesthetic criteria and the mechanisms of canonical legitimation; and evaluating its potential for inclusion within the literary canon, distinguishing between international recognition and aesthetic consecration.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into six chapters, numbered with Roman numerals, and subchapters, numbered with Arabic numerals. Starting from the observation that the literary field has become increasingly diverse and open, **Chapter I**, *The Western Canon and Canonical Opening*, discusses the relevance of maintaining stable evaluative criteria in the context of an expanding publishing market and the influence of marketing and publicity on literary reception. In such a context, readers may find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between works of aesthetic value and literary productions lacking artistic depth; therefore, the need for the canon as an evaluative framework returns to the foreground.

The concept of *World Literature* is a more dynamic one, based on the global circulation of literary works, in which translation and publishing play a crucial role in shaping authors' visibility. International recognition facilitates canonization, but does not guarantee it, as the decisive criterion remains aesthetic value. For this reason, the analysis is grounded in Harold Bloom's conception of the canon as aesthetic rather than ideological, in dialogue with the definitions proposed by other literary theorists such as Mircea Martin, Charles Altieri, Pascale Casanova, Nicolae Manolescu, Stanley Fish, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, as discussed in **Subchapter 1**, *The Canon – Definitions.* The application of these concepts to the analysis of contemporary Turkish literature assesses the extent to which contemporary Turkish writers may attain canonical status, taking into account both aesthetic criteria and the mechanisms of validation specific to *World Literature*. The literary canon is conceptualized as a living organism, subject to continuous transformation, in which the stability of aesthetic values coexists with openness to diversity and re-evaluation, while the inclusion of non-Western literature becomes a necessity in the context of cultural globalization.

In this context, the need for national identity affirmation becomes increasingly pronounced, sometimes leading to conflicts or to restrictions on individual freedoms in the name of collective belonging. **Subchapter 2** examines *The Need for National Identity Affirmation* from a sociological and cultural perspective, drawing on the theory of Anthony D. Smith, who argues that nations and nationalism cannot be understood solely as political or ideological phenomena, but must also be approached as complex cultural realities. National identity is defined as a multidimensional concept encompassing language, symbols, myths, and collective sentiments, closely linked to ethnic identity and the idea of community. Nationalism is considered one of the most powerful myths of modern identity, grounded in elements such as territory, common descent, and historical memory. Smith identifies a series of defining features of national identity that distinguish the nation from other forms of collective organization and separate it from the state.

This analysis will be relevant to discussions regarding the inclusion of Turkish literature within *World Literature*, as critics examine the extent to which it succeeds in moving beyond the national framework and acquiring a universal character, a debate addressed in the chapter *Aesthetics of the Novel*. Identity is understood as a dynamic process, subject to transformation, as emphasized by Amin Maalouf; it results from an accumulation of multiple affiliations (national, religious, social), which can generate both complexity and tensions or conflicts. The discussions

on identity in this chapter establish a theoretical foundation for the literary analysis of novels centered on identity, developed in the chapter *Multi-ethnicity and Literary Confrontations*.

Identity confrontations generate a tension between the need for integration into a global community and the need for cultural preservation, as individuals and collectivities seek to define and maintain the features that distinguish them from others. Within processes of globalization, relationality becomes a key concept. Christian Moraru proposes an ethical alternative to globalization through the concepts of *planetarity* and *cosmodernism*[1], both grounded in the recognition of difference and in the construction of a planetary community that resists homogenization. He advocates a paradigmatic shift, a "global turn,"[2] in which identity is produced through the simultaneous dynamics of similarity and difference.

Moraru develops *cosmodernism* as a cultural logic of the present, positioning it as an alternative to the homogenizing tendencies of late globalization. He criticizes forms of global integration that rely on standardization and ego-centered structures, proposing instead an ecological model of *cosmodernism* based on the preservation and valorization of differences. In this framework, relationality becomes an ethical principle: community is defined by shared existence without the erasure of alterity. The process of "worlding" thus reorganizes cultural formations within a planetary horizon.

The distinction between *planetarity* and globalization is articulated through the concept of the cultural commons and through alternative models of organization that move beyond both the nation-state and neoliberal global systems. The digital sphere, including the internet, is often envisioned as a form of planetary commons, enabling unprecedented forms of interaction. Building on Elinor Ostrom's theory of collective resource governance, Amy J. Elias argues in *The Commons…and the Digital Planetarity*[3] that digital resources evolve within relational structures grounded in trust, reciprocity, and ethical cooperation. These conditions are not automatically produced by systems themselves but are prerequisites for their functioning.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri[4] further conceptualize cooperation, solidarity, and collective political transformation through the notion of love as a productive social force. Lauren Berlant[5] shifts this perspective toward affect, emphasizing how individual emotional experiences

[1] Christian Moraru, *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2015.
[2] Christian Moraru, *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2011.
[3] Amy.J.Elias, „The Commons…and the Digital Planetarity" in Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2015.
[4] *Ibidem.*

can crystallize into shared "structures of feeling" capable of generating broader cultural and political change.

The planetary commons is thus constructed through multiple forms of relationality—proximity, friendship, cooperation, and the negotiation of difference. Although digital technologies enable global connectivity, direct interaction and negotiation remain essential, as virtual environments cannot fully replace embodied human relations. *Planetarity* is therefore proposed as an alternative to globalization, grounded in interdependence, ethical responsibility, and sustained forms of cooperation.

The conclusion of **Subchapter 3**, *Globalization – the Need for Acceptance as a Citizen of the World*, is that the future of humanity depends on the strengthening of social and cultural relations, on the construction of a shared heritage, and on the cultivation of harmony in an increasingly fragmented world.

Against this theoretical background, Turkish writers address readers through their novels by envisioning forms of symbiosis that suggest how unity and collective belonging may foster progress, whereas fragmentation and oppositional divisions such as "us" versus "them" contribute to social disintegration, as illustrated by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, their novels often revisit political and historical dynamics that led to societal decline, functioning as cautionary narratives against the repetition of history.

Literature functions as a key medium of intercultural communication, capable of fostering planetary dialogue and enabling engagement with alterity. The idea of "world literature" is often associated with a vision of cultural unity; however, it has also been questioned as an extension of globalization and of Western structures of power. For this reason, Aamir R. Mufti critiques this paradigm in *Forget English! Orientalism and World Literatures*, arguing that "world literature" frequently operates through European epistemic categories that incorporate and reframe non-Western literary production within hierarchical systems of value. Drawing on historical figures such as Goethe, Macaulay, Tagore, Borges, and Salih, he shows how the notion of a "universal library" simultaneously enables cultural openness and processes of assimilation.

Non-Western literatures are often validated through translation and recognition in metropolitan centers, which underscores their dependence on Western institutions and the dominance of the English language. This dynamic produces a form of "glocalization," in which global circulation coexists with local specificity and postcolonial hierarchies. The metaphor of the library

[5] *Ibidem.*

thus functions not merely as a physical space, but as a mechanism of selection, canon formation, and cultural legitimation.

This raises critical questions regarding selection criteria, linguistic hierarchy, and access to this allegedly universal space, revealing the structural inequalities of the world literary system. Mufti ultimately argues that, despite its claims to universality and openness, world literature remains shaped by historical relations of power, linguistic dominance, and colonial legacies, thereby calling into question the very possibility of cultural universality.

The dream of literature without borders is presented as an ideal of harmonizing relations between peoples, achievable through libraries, *planetarity*, the cultural commons, and the digital environment, as well as through the existence of a shared language already internalized and used globally. The writer is envisioned as an "emissary" of this global world, engaged in constant mobility, which transforms the traditional role of the author as a mere representative of a local culture. Literature is no longer understood solely as a representation of a world, but as a dynamic process of transformation shaped by the writer's encounters with other cultures and by the spirit of the age (Zeitgeist).

The identity of the contemporary writer is therefore double or plural, situated simultaneously within the space of origin and the global sphere. The contemporary author emerges as a "citizen of the world," and their literature should be received as belonging to humanity as a whole rather than to a single nation or identity category. This perspective calls for the overcoming of rigid oppositions (East/West, national/global, genres, identities) in favor of an integrative vision based on relationality and shared belonging, a view that Turkish writers will also articulate through their works.

Globalization simultaneously generates proximity and alienation, while identities emerge through processes of inclusion and exclusion, a phenomenon theorized as "glocalization" (Roland Robertson). Edward Said emphasizes the role of the gaze upon the Other in the construction or liberation of identities, while humanist education and philology are presented as forms of empathetic openness toward alterity. This chapter argues that humanism may function as a form of resistance against historical injustices and stereotypes, supported by the dialogic potential of contemporary cyberspace. Literature thus becomes an instrument for understanding the Other and for personal transformation, while reading is conceived as an act of change. These ideas will be further developed in the following chapters through the thematic analysis of contemporary Turkish novels.

Chapter II, *Theories of Orientalism*, continues the previous discussion, which highlighted the fact that *World Literature* asserts an ideal of universality and openness, yet remains deeply shaped by historical power relations and mechanisms of cultural legitimation. It

introduces the theoretical framework of Orientalism, as formulated by Edward Said. This approach is particularly relevant insofar as it enables an understanding of "East" and "West" as cultural and discursive constructions rather than stable realities. They function instead as categories through which difference and hierarchy are organized.

Within this framework, literature and writers originating from spaces situated between these two poles—such as Turkish authors—occupy an ambivalent position. They are often read through the tension between local authenticity and the universalizing expectations of the Western canon.

From a complementary perspective, René Guénon describes East and West as two fundamentally different modes of thought, opposed in their relation to knowledge, progress, and tradition. In his view, the East is associated with balance, synthesis, and the interiorization of knowledge, while the West is defined by action, continuous change, and an emphasis on material and scientific progress. The differences between them are presented as so profound that mutual understanding appears difficult, if not impossible. At the same time, this framework can itself be understood as a discourse on civilizations—one that organizes cultural difference into stable oppositions between "East" and "West." From this perspective, both East and West function not only as historical realities but also as conceptual constructs sustained by a specific philosophical discourse that operates as a form of intellectual institution.

Edward Said reinterprets Orientalism as a discourse of power through which the West does not merely describe the East but actively produces and regulates it symbolically, politically, and culturally. Orientalism thus becomes a form of intellectual and institutional domination, closely linked to colonial history and asymmetrical power relations. In postcolonial theory, these representational mechanisms continue to operate in the present, becoming visible in globalization, cultural policies, and identity discourses. Orientalism is also understood in Foucauldian terms, as a discourse—that is, a system of knowledge that produces "truths" while shaping political, academic, and cultural institutions. Literature and cultural studies are therefore involved in these processes, being influenced both by globalization and by the logic of the global book market and symbolic power structures.

Building on previous discussions of *World Literature* and Orientalist theory, this chapter further examines how representations of the East continue to be filtered through power relations, stereotypes, and Western cultural expectations, as it also is also the case in successful contemporary literature. It analyzes modern forms of representing the East in global literature, particularly in novels by writers of Eastern origin published in Western contexts. Although these works often appear to promote cultural openness, they may also reproduce Orientalist stereotypes adapted for

Western audiences—such as tensions between tradition and modernity, or religion versus individual freedom.

Literature about the East thus becomes an ambivalent space: between cultural visibility and the risk of simplifying complex realities. This phenomenon is closely linked to the logic of the global book market and to the need for international recognition, which influence both the selection and reception of literary works, as well as their narrative form. In this context, literature may either reproduce dominant ideologies (Orientalism, Islamophobia, stereotypes) or critically interrogate them. The conclusion is that the representation of the Other remains a highly contested field, in which identity, power, and narrative are continuously negotiated.

The following chapters will analyze contemporary Turkish literature in light of these theoretical perspectives, focusing on the social and cultural issues addressed by the selected authors: Burhan Sönmez, Ahmet Altan, Zülfü Livaneli, Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, and Dafne Suman.

Chapter III, *Social Relevance*, undertakes a form of biographical criticism in order to highlight the connection between the writers 'lives and their works—a key criterion for understanding contemporary Turkish literature as it is examined in this study.

Subchapter 1, *Freedom of Expression and Artistic Creed*, seeks to demonstrate that this group of authors shares experiences of political repression and exile, and that they collectively engage in a struggle for freedom of expression. Persecuted in their home country, they often achieve international recognition, as well as artistic freedom and critical appreciation in exile. At the same time, their works repeatedly express a sense of loss and longing for the homeland, positioning them as representative of individuals who have had little agency in the face of political power. Accordingly, these writers address sensitive topics such as the Armenian genocide, which frequently generates official condemnation and accusations of Westernization, perceived as culturally corrupting. The East–West divide is thus sustained from both sides, producing tensions that are further explored in their novels, where literature becomes a space for constructing a bridge between the two cultural spheres.

Despite the risks involved, these authors feel compelled to narrate what must not be forgotten—historical events of immense violence and rupture that have shaped or destroyed individual lives. Literature thus becomes a means of rewriting history through narrative. Positioned between multiple identities, these writers form a kind of collage of national pluralism, which they reconfigure through writing. Their novels place strong emphasis on the search for the self, identity, and processes of becoming.

Thus, **Subchapter 2**, *The Persecution of Turkish Writers and Its Impact on Literary Works*, outlines the biographical circumstances that have shaped these narratives, examining individually how each author's personal experience has been transposed into literary form. Most of the novels discussed here will be further analyzed through hermeneutic, narratological, thematic, and comparative approaches in the following chapters.

Chapter III, *The Reconfiguration of the Cultural Imaginary*, comprises three subchapters. **Subchapter 1**, *Collective Cultural Amnesia and Narrative Therapy*, examines one of the central themes found across the novels of all the Turkish writers analyzed in this study: cultural amnesia, understood as a specific phenomenon within Turkish society. Through their literary works, these authors feel compelled to awaken dormant forms of collective consciousness and to retrieve historical events that have been overlooked or suppressed—not necessarily to indict those responsible, but rather to honor the victims. In their view, a fuller understanding of the past enables a deeper comprehension of a people's identity.

As Paul Ricoeur observes, the commemoration of historical events establishes a relationship between a community and its foundational moments, allowing it to maintain a link with its own origins embedded in those events. In this sense, foundational events become constitutive of social memory and, through it, of collective identity.[6] At the same time, Ricoeur emphasizes that both individual and collective identity are narratively constructed: we live and define ourselves through the stories of the past transmitted by social memory, rather than through direct recollection. From this perspective, Turkish society appears to lack orientation, insofar as it remains disconnected from the foundational events of its own history.

All the authors analyzed address this issue, with each devoting at least two novels to the themes of memory and identity. The following sections will examine, for each writer, the works that most directly address the problem of cultural amnesia. Supported by extensive textual evidence, the analysis aims to demonstrate the sustained centrality of memory and the past in their narratives. Storytelling thus acquires a therapeutic function, conceived as a form of collective healing: by bringing traumatic events to the surface and narrating them—much like a psychoanalytic process—they may open the possibility of constructing a more stable future, both for Turkish society and for other communities marked by similar experiences.

Labyrinth by Burhan Sönmez is entirely devoted to this theme. Through the story of a man who loses his memory, the novel in fact reflects on a collective condition: a society that cannot fully

[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Eseuri de hermeneutică*, translated by Vasile Tonoiu, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 280.

function or develop coherently due to its lack of access to the past. Across the authors studied, storytelling becomes a primary means of survival—a function particularly evident in prison narratives such as *Istanbul Istanbul* and *I Will Never See the World Again*. In *The Silence of Scheherazade*, the protagonist isolates herself in a tower and, over forty years—surviving beyond a hundred years of age – lives under the condition that she cannot die before telling her story.

Elif Shafak repeatedly characterizes Turkish society as suffering from collective amnesia and argues that art and literature can function as bridges between ethnically or politically divided communities. These communities live under the influence of inherited narratives passed down from previous generations, which they unconsciously reproduce. Ricoeur calls it the "abuses of memory."[7] Richard Kearney similarly argues that narratives shape human perception of the world, to the extent that individuals come to understand reality through the stories they inherit.

From this perspective, storytelling and retelling sustain conflict, and collective identity becomes a form of "imagined community." This leads Shafak to question the ownership of narratives: whose stories are these, and should they be transmitted to future generations if their repetition perpetuates conflict? On the other hand, silence offers no possibility of healing historical trauma. For victims, commemoration constitutes recognition of their existence, while narrative repetition sustains the hope that past injustices will not be repeated. In this sense, acknowledging guilt becomes an act of justice for the victim—an initial step toward liberation and healing.

Maurice Halbwachs[8] also argues that individual memory depends on belonging to a social group and can only be sustained within a community that shares the same frames of reference and lived experiences. Complete recollection cannot exist outside a shared collective framework through which memory is activated and given meaning within a continuous narrative of past experiences. Memory is therefore a social phenomenon: its persistence depends on cohesion and solidarity within the community.

Within this framework, the narratives of the writers analyzed illustrate how stories sustaining identity conflicts are passed down across generations. At the same time, these writers mobilize narrative in an attempt to reactivate the dormant memory of Turkish society by confronting it with a truth that may be liberating.

In this context, Elif Shafak addresses in The Bastard of Istanbul—the novel that led to legal and personal difficulties and ultimately to her departure from Turkey—a topic largely absent from official historiography, namely the Armenian genocide. Through its dialogic structure, the novel

[7] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, translated by Irinel Antoniu, Amarcord Publishing House, Timișoara, 2001, p. 77.
[8] Maurice Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, translated by Irinel Antoniu, Institutul European Publishing House, Iași, 2007.

seeks to soften a century-long conflict by suggesting that those separated by imposed identity ideologies may nonetheless be connected through shared human experience.

Memory remains a central motif in Shafak's work. She warns those who privilege forgetting that future generations will inevitably seek truth. The suppression of truth produces forms of suffering that accumulate over time. The fate of the protagonist in *The Island of Missing Trees* reflects a fractured community suspended between two forms of disappearance: dying through uprooting or through psychological collapse – as it becomes increasingly difficult to inhabit a homeland marked by historical violence and loss.

In her debut novel, *The Silence of Scheherazade*, Dafne Suman already signals, through its title, a central concern of contemporary Turkish writing: collective amnesia. Turkish people refuse to engage with the past, while it is precisely storytelling and the articulation of memory that would function as a form of survival, echoing Scheherazade's survival through storytelling. Starting from the historical event of the Great Fire of Smyrna in September 1922, the novel addresses all those who were displaced, massacred, and consigned to oblivion. This concern extends into other major themes: identity formation, uprooting, and violence. The narrator meticulously documents the atrocities to which people were subjected, including those inflicted upon the Greek population, so that the victims will not be forgotten.

Collective amnesia is also revisited in her second novel, *At the Breakfast Table*, where a family's life is examined through the lens of unspoken stories that affect its lineage across generations, up to the third generation. The author reiterates the idea that a people without a past gradually fades, becoming trapped in illness and suffering, and losing the possibility of building a coherent and grounded future. The narrative becomes fully intelligible only when the narrator, Nur, uncovers the hidden secrets of the family's past. That revelation ultimately carries a therapeutic force.

Burhan Sönmez's novels, many of them drawing on his own life experiences, explore memory loss in *Labyrinth* and the experience of torture in *Istanbul Istanbul*. The latter offers a detailed portrayal of the suffering endured by prisoners confined to a single cell, with some episodes evoking the imagery of Christ's crucifixion. Exile becomes the central theme of *Stone and Shadow*, whose protagonist spends his entire life searching for his mother whose protagonist spends his entire life searching for his mother, condemned to a life without a home. The pain, loneliness, and helplessness of forced displacement, together with the uncertainty of belonging, recur throughout Sönmez's fiction and clearly reflect the experience of the Kurdish writer himself, who now lives in the United Kingdom.

Perhaps no writer expresses the imperative of preserving memory more powerfully than Orhan Pamuk. His novels reconstruct Istanbul's past with remarkable visual richness, bringing the city's social and cultural history vividly to life. In *Istanbul*, he pays tribute to his beloved hometown, while *The Museum of Innocence* becomes a tribute to the objects that keep memory alive. Everyday objects acquire the power to recover forgotten stories and reconstruct the past. At the same time, Pamuk revives narratives whose beauty deserves to endure, while revealing the lasting influence of memory and myth on human consciousness.

In *Serenade for Nadia*, Zülfü Livaneli offers a lucid meditation on both individual and collective memory, reflecting on how forgetting—whether voluntary or imposed—can itself become a form of symbolic violence. Through the intertwined stories of Professor Maximilian Wagner and the narrator Maya, the novel explores the moral obligation to preserve the memory of suppressed historical tragedies, including the sinking of the Struma and a love destroyed by war, fascism, and exile. Livaneli also draws attention to the suffering of marginalized communities, particularly Armenians and Crimean Tatars, while criticizing the indifference of the state toward their fate. Beyond its psychological and political dimensions, the novel develops a philosophical reflection on memory itself: forgetting does not heal but condemns its victims to a second death. This idea recurs throughout the novel, which ultimately functions as an act of restorative remembrance.

Disquiet calls on readers not to forget the tragedies of the recent past and encourages empathy toward refugees and victims of religious violence. The novel brings into focus another largely overlooked tragedy—the genocide of the Yazidis committed by ISIS. The author exposes the same pattern of indifference within Turkish society toward the suffering of minorities and the complicity sustained through silence.

Ahmet Altan writes from prison in his autobiographical collection of *essays I Will Never See the World Again*, as well as in the novel *Lady Hayat*. His narratives aim to preserve the memory of individual lives, to denounce political abuse, and to remind readers of who they are, in order to prevent the disappearance of a people. A concern with history and the passage of time is also evident in *The Ottoman Quartet*, a sweeping fresco of society at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Altan traces the destinies of individuals in detail, depicting the mentality of the age—from the imperial palace to street revolutionaries, against the backdrop of violent political transformations. He draws attention to the present that is still shaped by authoritarian logics reminiscent of the sultanic order.

The contemporary Turkish writers under discussion share a sustained concern with collective memory and the recovery of the past. They argue that cultural amnesia weakens society, while literature can function as a form of healing for historical trauma and awakening. Their novels are driven by the idea that a society can regenerate itself through reading, remembrance, and critical awareness (lege et memento).

Living between East and West, these writers are shaped by both cultural spaces, and their work reflects a "double" identity in constant movement between tradition and globalization. A central concern of their fiction is identity constructed through narrative, that is, shaped by the stories through which individuals and communities understand themselves. Margaret R. Somers argues that identity is not fixed but produced through social narratives – so-called "narrative identities."[9] Individuals do not construct their identities in isolation; rather, they are embedded in pre-existing social and historical stories. These narratives shape how people understand both the world and themselves, so that identity emerges from an evolving network of interconnected stories. Somers proposes a relational and historical approach that resists rigid categories (ethnic, cultural, national), emphasizing instead fluid, multiple, and context-dependent identities. Turkish writers illustrate Somers's theory insofar as their characters are shaped by social, political, and cultural narratives. Literature demonstrates how identity is shaped by collective narratives, such as historical, religious, and political discourses.

Elif Shafak criticizes identity politics that reduce authors to cultural labels (e.g. "Muslim writer," "Turkish writer"), arguing that writers are often constrained to produce work solely in accordance with their assigned cultural identities, which in turn limits artistic freedom and creativity. Both contemporary Turkish literature and Somers's theory support the idea that identity is narrative and socially constructed; that culture survives through the preservation and reinterpretation of stories; and that freedom emerges when rigid categories are transcended and identity is understood as a dynamic process. Storytelling thus becomes a means of communication across generations, a way of bridging opposites, of connecting East and West, and of fostering healing while overcoming *harese* (a term used by Livaneli in *Disquiet* to describe the harm humans inflict upon themselves). Literature functions as an antidote to emotional numbness and moral stagnation. It creates the possibility of reflection and transformation, which may ultimately contribute even to the regeneration of the planet.

[9] Margaret R. Somers, „The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach", in *Theory and Society*, vol. 23, nr. 5, 1994.

Subchapter 2, *Multiculturalism and Identity Conflicts*, similarly to the previous section, examines how the theme of identity is explored in Turkish fiction, a recurring concern across their works. From this perspective, the novels of each writer are analysed with identity as their central thematic core. Alongside well-established markers that define collective identity, each author also brings forward less visible aspects that highlight the possibility of connection between communities that once coexisted peacefully but now find themselves in conflict.

At least three of Elif Shafak's novels engage with identity conflicts: *The Bastard of Istanbul, Honour, and The Island of Missing Trees*. As part of migrant or transnational literature, these works foreground the alienation of the individual, who no longer fully belongs to any single space or community. While this condition may acquire a cathartic dimension within the painful process of separation, it also suggests that individuals ultimately belong to the wider world and remain connected through their shared humanity. At the same time, the desire to return to one's origins remains a powerful force shaping individual identity.

Food is a recurring motif in Shafak's fiction and it emerges as a central metaphor for identity—a highly complex construct. Identity is likened to a recipe in which multiple ingredients (nationality, name, language, religion, values, and so on) are blended, each contributing its own trace. Since it is difficult to define, identity is thus represented through culinary imagery, allowing the reader to reconstruct a constellation of tastes, memories, and emotions that together evoke a broader cultural universe.

Moreover, through the motif of food—universally shared and culturally familiar—Shafak finds a way to soften tensions, break boundaries, and ease conflict. A shared table has traditionally symbolized friendship, conviviality, and storytelling, an idea also echoed in Burhan Sönmez's *Istanbul Istanbul*, where the paradise imagined after the torment of prison torture is depicted as a scene in which people sit together at a table, sharing stories and enjoying food in abundance. The earth itself is the primary source of nourishment, and Shafak, through an analogy with the world of trees embodied by the fig tree in *The Island of Missing Trees*, suggests that human beings cannot thrive under any conditions, nor can they simply be transplanted into entirely different environments and expected to adapt without rupture.

Dafne Suman's novels are built on a narrative pattern that closely resembles that of Elif Shafak, focusing on the recovery of lost identities in order to reveal hidden connections between individuals and to reconcile opposing forces. In a similar vein, Suman emphasizes the genetic inheritance of ancestral narratives, which becomes a defining feature of human identity that must be acknowledged for a balanced and conscious existence.

Through the exploration of human complexity, familial and territorial bonds, and above all through the capacity of literature to travel across borders and address the Other, both authors seek to contribute to the dissolution of the long-standing East–West divide. This reconciliation is often mediated through characters such as Iskender, Asya, and Scheherazade, as well as through processes of globalization, cultural exchange, and mobility, a phenomenon carefully examined by Orhan Pamuk in *The White Castle*, where the two protagonists gradually come to mirror and ultimately blur into one another through shared experience.

Pamuk, like many of his contemporaries, expresses a strong attraction toward the West while simultaneously articulating, in an ostensibly objective and non-partisan manner, anxieties regarding the loss of cultural identity. His fiction introduces new ways of conceptualizing identity, including identification with objects that constitute the museum-like space of individual life, different perceptions of time across cultures, and varying relationships to the divine. That indefinable element which constitutes the "soul" of a people or a culture is perhaps most succinctly expressed by Pamuk through the phrase "the poetry and delicacy of one's own life."[10] Other novels by Pamuk, such as *My Name is Red, Snow*, and *The New Life*, are also subject to literary analysis within this chapter devoted to identity.

Zülfü Livaneli explores the theme of identity in *Serenade for Nadia* and *Disquiet*, insofar as it gives rise to profound conflicts that affect multiple generations. The former seeks to bring to light the 1942 tragedy of the Jewish refugees aboard the Struma, a historical event largely neglected by official historiography, while the latter engages with the issue of religiously inflected identity conflict through the genocide of the Yazidis committed by ISIS. Both novels foreground the traumas experienced by individuals in their struggle to preserve identity and the need to reconnect with their ancestors by recovering suppressed or forgotten narratives.

Disquiet engages with one of the central logics of the contemporary "war on terror," particularly questions of belonging and displacement, alongside the construction of certain characters as "sub-human" and "rightless subjects,"[11] in Peter Morey's formulation. Customs and superstitions constitute another significant aspect of identity, explored in both Shafak's and Livaneli's novels. In *Disquiet*, the author exposes how religious principles are distorted in the service of particular interests, turning belief systems into forces for which individuals may even be willing to kill.

[10] Orhan Pamuk, *Viața cea nouă*, translated from Turkish by Luminița Munteanu, Polirom, Iași, 2011, pp. 139-140. (personal translation)
[11] Peter Moorey , *Islamophobia and the Novel*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2018, p.156.

Livaneli is likewise concerned with the relationship between East and West, but unlike Sönmez, who conceives identity as a continuous process of becoming, Livaneli suggests that the individual risks losing coherence when excessively exposed to another culture. He highlights the consequences of the intersection between the two civilizations, through which individuals become alienated and lose self-confidence. In contrast to Pamuk, who oscillates between the two worlds, Livaneli appears to remain more firmly oriented toward the East, through his affinity for poetry and storytelling. Like his contemporaries, he ultimately affirms the power of language to transform lives—to persuade, to dominate, to influence, and to heal.

The problem of transmutation and uprooting is developed across Burhan Sönmez's novels, in which his characters repeatedly dream of returning home. Returning to a former identity may entail the reactivation of past suffering, as the theme of identity is closely intertwined with cultural amnesia. The writer nevertheless proposes a liberating perspective on identity, understood as the freedom to become anyone within the context of globalisation. However, this possibility is conditioned by the loss of memory; otherwise, the individual remains persistently drawn towards a return to origins, to parents, and to home. In addition, Sönmez introduces a spiritual dimension to the search for identity, suggesting that fulfilment may ultimately be achieved through a return to the Creator. Voice emerges as a defining feature of individual identity, and Sönmez positions himself as a voice for those who have been unable to tell their stories.

By writing novels, authors themselves engage in a process of self-discovery; through language, they create connections between individuals and across different spaces, which coexist in concentric circles whose continuous movement generates the pulse of life.

The conclusions of this chapter confirm Amin Maalouf's argument that many modern conflicts are generated in the name of identity. Turkish writers highlight in their fiction the absurdity of divisions between people who share the same territory, history, language, and traditions. Characters and communities oscillate between the need for belonging and the desire to be recognised beyond ethnic, religious, or national labels. Literature reflects the tension between East and West, and between tradition and modernity, while simultaneously seeking reconciliation between conflicting groups by emphasising the elements that unite them: shared territory, a common language, spiritual beliefs and worldviews, genealogical ties, traditions, customs and superstitions, as well as collective narratives and memory.

Authors affirm the power of storytelling to transform mentalities, challenge prejudice, and prevent the repetition of historical traumas. Myths and narratives shape perceptions of the Other, which is why literature can fulfil both an educational and a healing function.

Lynn Margulis's theory of endosymbiosis is employed as a metaphor for cooperation between communities and cultures. Hichem Djaït advocates intercultural solidarity in response to the effects of what he calls "uncontrolled modernity"[12] on humanity. Kevin Robins similarly argues that progress is only possible through cultural receptivity, reciprocity, and the exchange of experiences.[13] Literature thus proposes a model of coexistence based on collaboration and interdependence rather than competition and conflict. Ultimately, both critical and fictional perspectives converge in support of coexistence, cooperation, and relationality. The relationship with the Other must be grounded in recognition, empathy, and responsibility, rather than stereotypes and prejudice. Reading enables a "memory exchange" between cultures, offering the possibility of learning from the experiences of other communities without directly living them. The shared conviction of these writers is that stories can heal past traumas, build bridges between cultures, and foster unity.

Chapter 3, *Cultural Metaphor and the Symbolic Universality of the Imaginary*, explores how Turkish writers use metaphor to bridge apparent divides such as us and them or East and West. The analysis draws on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's influential argument in *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphor is far more than a linguistic device. Rather, it structures our conceptual system and shapes the ways in which we think, perceive, and act.

Through these metaphors, Turkish writers address their readers with an implicit appeal for reconciliation and unity. They encourage Turkish society to reconnect with the ethnic communities from which it has become separated, promoting a vision grounded in togetherness—or "with-ness," in Christian Moraru's terms in *Reading for the Planet*. Because metaphor speaks through a shared symbolic language, it has the capacity to transcend cultural boundaries and foster openness to different ways of seeing the world.

The opening of the literary canon begins at the cultural level. Within this framework, the spiral emerges as a particularly powerful metaphor, conveying both the dynamic nature of literary works and their ability to reach readers across the world. Like a seed, it plants an idea that gradually unfolds, expanding until it permeates the reader's imagination and consciousness. Elif Shafak's choice of the *ammonite* reinforces this symbolism. As an embodiment of the spiral, it evokes longevity, continuous transformation, evolutionary growth, and a profound connection with the ancestral past.

[12] Hichem Djaït, *Europe and Islam*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, p. 173.
[13] Kevin Robins, „Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe", in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (ed.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage, London, 1996, pp. 60–86.

The chapter also examines several recurring metaphors, including the *fig tree, the mulberry tree, the Judas tree, the pomegranate*, and the *clock*. Together, these images symbolize kinship, human relationships, and communal belonging. By contrast, the city is explored as a metaphor for the unique identity of both individuals and peoples. More specifically, the image of the unconquered city expresses the collective belief that the spirit of a people can never be fully subdued. The *fortress* ultimately becomes a symbol of heaven, of humanity's highest spiritual values, and, ultimately, of God Himself. Shared across diverse civilizations, this metaphor articulates two deeply transformative ideas. Despite conflict, opposition, and historical divisions, humanity ultimately forms a single whole. At the same time, every individual within that whole remains irreducibly unique. This dual perspective echoes Christian Moraru's concept of *cosmodernism*: "I am like you," yet at the same time, "I am different." Such metaphors offer a framework for understanding how apparent opposites can be reconciled. In doing so, they point toward cooperation rather than conflict and suggest the possibility of pursuing the common good without sacrificing cultural identity.

Gilbert Durand argues that symbols possess an intrinsic significance that transcends individual cultures, giving them a universal dimension. The metaphors discussed throughout this chapter therefore engage a shared symbolic imagination, making them accessible to readers regardless of their cultural background. Their universality also reinforces one of the chapter's central arguments: the traumas depicted by contemporary Turkish writers are not confined to particular individuals or communities but speak to experiences that can be recognized as fundamentally human. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the universal appeal of contemporary Turkish literature derives, in part, from its use of symbolic imagery. As Rudolf Wittkower observes in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, such symbols migrate across artistic traditions and cultural boundaries, continually reshaping the ways in which people imagine, interpret, and understand the world.

Chapter 4, The Aesthetics of the Novel, argues for the aesthetic value of the novels examined in this study, treating literary merit as the primary criterion for inclusion in the literary canon. The chapter is divided into two main sections—The Aesthetics of Contemporary Turkish Literature and The Aesthetics of Classical Turkish Literature—each further organized into several thematic subsections.

The discussion begins by revisiting Harold Bloom's understanding of aesthetic value through the lens of Tudor Vianu's aesthetic theory. Vianu argues that the value of a literary work ultimately rests on its originality, which can only be understood within the broader historical development of art. Consequently, aesthetic evaluation is necessarily retrospective, as a work's significance becomes fully apparent only over time. Building on these premises, the chapter examines the artistic

originality of contemporary Turkish literature and its place within *world literature*. While international recognition undoubtedly contributes to a work's visibility, it does not in itself guarantee aesthetic value. The analysis therefore focuses on the genuinely innovative contributions that contemporary Turkish writers have made to both Turkish and *world literature*. To contextualize these contributions, the chapter first outlines the historical development of Turkish literature. This overview demonstrates that Turkish literature does not merely imitate international literary movements. Instead, it appropriates, adapts, and synthesizes them through the distinctive lens of Turkish history, culture, and lived experience, producing works that are both original and internationally recognized. Rather than simply following global literary trends, contemporary Turkish literature creates a distinctive synthesis of realism, modernism, postmodernism, and magical realism, integrating them with Turkish history, psychology, and local symbolism. It is precisely this creative synthesis that gives it both originality and lasting relevance within *world literature*.

Returning to Tudor Vianu, the first subsection presents several aesthetic principles that underpin literary value, with the aim of subsequently identifying them in the works of each Turkish author. Vianu argues, for instance, that the value of a literary work depends both on the principle of majority (e.g., the preservation of the Turkish context and local lived experience, referring to works that at a given historical moment "obtain the suffrage of an entire community")[14] and on the principle of exclusivity (the inclusion of minority perspectives). The novels of the Turkish writers examined in this study give voice to marginalized communities (Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Yazidis, homosexuals, women, and others) and thus assume a clear social and political function. Each author is discussed from this perspective, with a focus on how literary representation intersects with questions of identity, memory, and exclusion.

Burhan Sönmez addresses themes such as torture, exile, Kurdish identity, and freedom of expression. In *Istanbul Istanbul*, he condemns the abuses of the Turkish regime, while *Labyrinth* explores trauma and memory as central dimensions of individual and collective experience. Elif Shafak foregrounds minority and marginalized voices, consistently advocating for what she describes as "bringing the periphery to the center," thereby granting visibility to those excluded from dominant narratives. Her work engages with issues such as the Armenian genocide, identity, homosexuality, violence against women, and religious conflict. For Shafak, literature functions not only as an aesthetic practice but also as a medium of social and political dialogue. Orhan Pamuk similarly engages with sensitive aspects of Turkish history, including the Armenian genocide. His novels

[14] Tudor Vianu, *Opere*, vol. 13, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, p. 468.

explore tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the condition of women in Turkish society, demonstrating that literature can exert a tangible political impact. Ahmet Altan focuses on marginalized groups and the restriction of individual freedoms. In *Lady Hayat*, he addresses themes of homosexuality and personal liberty within an oppressive political context, emphasizing the limits imposed on individual expression. Dafne Suman revisits the memory of the Pontic Greeks, a community expelled from Turkey, bringing attention to the suffering caused by war, exile, and the loss of identity. Her work functions as a literary recovery of suppressed historical memory. Zülfü Livaneli explores the historical tragedies of the Crimean Tatars and the Yazidis, addressing themes such as deportation, religious persecution, and human trafficking. His novels consistently promote empathy toward the victims of history and encourage a reflective engagement with past injustices.

In conclusion, contemporary Turkish writers clearly exemplify the principles outlined by Tudor Vianu. Their works are widely appreciated by readers, yet they also give voice to marginalized groups, transforming literature into a means of defending human rights and preserving historical memory.

The critic distinguishes between subjective and objective aesthetic criteria for evaluating a literary work and identifies two underlying norms: the norm of duration (a valuable work continues to influence the reader after reading and retains its significance upon rereading) and the norm of intensity and depth (valuable works provoke strong emotions and bring about profound changes in the way one thinks and perceives the world). In addition, a significant work endures over time and continues to act upon the reader even after the reading has ended (consecutive duration), while its value increases when it reveals new meanings with each rereading (repetition-based duration). Works of high value are also characterized by emotional intensity and depth, reshaping the reader's perspective on the world. As these are subjective criteria, which can only be demonstrated through individual reader perception, the discussion includes several personal examples of literary reception.

Dafne Suman introduces originality through the theme of transgenerational trauma and psychological inheritance. Her novels explore how the past shapes the present lives of both individuals and communities, inviting reflection on memory and healing. Orhan Pamuk demonstrates depth through the reinterpretation of myths and archetypes (Oedipus, Rostam and Sohrab), as well as through his exploration of philosophical and religious themes such as fate, identity, the relationship with God, and the tension between East and West. His writing transforms the reader's perspective on both the world and personal identity. Burhan Sönmez creates novels of strong emotional intensity through the representation of suffering, torture, and sacrifice. He employs religious and existential symbols (death, sacrifice, God), which give his work an additional layer of depth. His literature

invites reflection on freedom, suffering, and the meaning of existence. Zülfü Livaneli stands out through the intensity of scenes inspired by historical tragedies. His novels combine historical documentation with a humanist message and a sense of hope, offering a profound perspective on good and evil and producing a moral transformation in the reader through empathy and reflection. Elif Shafak is distinguished by the originality of her narrative construction, blending realism with the fantastic, the mystical, and the symbolic. She addresses difficult themes such as violence, discrimination, and identity, generating a strong emotional impact. Her work fulfills the "norm of depth," as it invites readers to understand and accept alterity, thereby promoting dialogue and healing. Ahmet Altan is notable for the elegance and refinement of his style, as well as the complexity of his narrative structures. His work explores the relationship between history, everyday life, and love, lending his novels a strong human depth. His literature sensitizes the reader and highlights the transformative power of love and truth.

In conclusion, for Vianu, a work of value is not limited to a momentary emotional effect; it persists in the reader's memory, maintains its force upon rereading, and transforms the reader's perspective on the world. This study therefore aims to show that the novels examined meet these criteria. Vianu also argues that literary value can be explained through rational and objective criteria, not only through emotion or spontaneous inspiration. He rejects the idea that a work is valuable solely because it arises from "pure inspiration" or produces uncontrolled emotional responses. Aesthetic evaluation must be grounded in knowledge and analysis, rather than subjective or "mystical" reactions, thereby opposing the view that artistic value is purely intuitive or scientifically inexplicable. Accordingly, **Subchapter 2**, *The Aesthetics of Classical Turkish Literature*, examines the objective criteria defining classical Turkish literature in order to compare it with contemporary literature and highlight the originality of modern authors. Classical Turkish literature is characterized by unity, harmony, tradition, elements of everyday life, and symbolic imagery (e.g., the garden), according to an article by Yakup Yeşilyaprak, *An Overview on the Determinants of Classical Turkish Literature Aesthetics*.[15]

In **Subchapter 2.1**, *The Aesthetics of Unity*, the principle of unity (Wahdat al-Wujūd) is defined as a central concept of Islamic aesthetics, according to which all existence is a manifestation of God. This vision promotes the idea that everything is interconnected, and that conflicts between human beings are ultimately unnecessary and contrary to universal harmony. Turkish literature places love at its conceptual core, presenting it as a force of unification and a path toward knowledge

[15] Yakup Yeşilyaprak, „An Overview on the Determinants of Classical Turkish Literature Aesthetics", in *Epistémè*, vol. 29, 2023, pp. 125–142.

of the divine. Contemporary writers continue this tradition, depicting love as a means of transcending human limits and as a journey toward the absolute. Love is frequently represented in multiple forms—spiritual, sacrificial, impossible, or transformed into love for humanity. The suffering inherent in love is often understood as essential for inner transformation and for approaching divine truth. Literature thus becomes a space in which the relationship between human beings, love, and God is explored as a universal experience. Several novels grounded in this principle are discussed as illustrative examples.

Subchapter 2.2, *The Aesthetics of Everyday Objects*, argues that objects and artistic creations are not merely decorative elements but materialize memory and love, thereby acquiring durability and aesthetic value. In this sense, contemporary writers continue a principle of classical Turkish aesthetics while adapting it to modern sensibilities. Several novels structured around this aesthetic framework are analyzed.

Subchapter 2.3, *The Aesthetics of Harmony in Classical Turkish Literature*, is based on the ideas of order, balance, and perfection, inspired by the Islamic conception of divine harmony. In the novel, harmony is reflected through stylistic mastery and the artistic use of language. Aesthetic value is closely linked to the originality and expressive force of language, a view also supported by Harold Bloom. Translation, however, cannot fully reproduce the musicality and subtlety of the original language, as a degree of untranslatability always remains, making it impossible to entirely replicate the author's intention, style, and linguistic aesthetics. The relatively late standardization and historical development of the Turkish language are important factors in understanding the aesthetics of contemporary Turkish literature. For this reason, a separate section is dedicated to translation (**Subchapter 2.3.2**, *Translations*), in order to highlight the obstacles that may arise in the reception of literary works, and in particular the difficulties related to the aesthetics of language, which is the most resistant to transfer from one language to another. Literary translation is therefore not merely a technical exercise but an act of creation in its own right, requiring artistic sensitivity and stylistic competence. It involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural transfer, as the meanings and connotations of a text are deeply rooted in its original context. The translator thus functions as a cultural mediator, who must be familiar with both the source and target cultures and adapt the text without altering its essence. Inevitably, the translation process involves compromises between fidelity to the original and accessibility for the target readership. The analysis suggests that the beauty of language may be perceived differently depending on the language in which a work is read. For each author, the study also discusses the role of translations and their close collaboration with translators, in order to highlight the careful attention given to every word so as not to diminish the

beauty of the language. While in poetry the relationship between lines, rhyme, and rhythm creates musicality, in the novel this "order and discipline" is achieved through narrative structure.

In Subchapter 2.3.2, *The Structure of the Novel*, it is shown that Turkish writers preserve the frame narrative technique but reinvent it through original and increasingly complex narrative forms. These authors are shaped by the oral tradition and by childhood storytelling, which they continue and transmit through literature. Storytelling thus functions as a means of organizing and connecting experiences, memories, and ideas. A strong concern for the architecture of the novel can be observed both at the formal level (structure, chapters, frame narratives) and at the thematic level (symmetries, dualities, oppositions). Contemporary Turkish literature combines the tradition of storytelling with modern, coherent, and carefully constructed narrative structures.

The narrative structure of Orhan Pamuk's novels, for example, is one of the most fascinating aspects of his work. He combines Eastern narrative traditions with Western postmodern techniques, resulting in complex, layered, and often metafictional constructions. Pamuk's writing is characterized by a polyphonic structure, a feature also found in Elif Shafak, Burhan Sönmez, and Dafne Suman. He frequently employs multiple narrators, each offering a different perspective on the same story, creating both ambiguity and psychological depth, and even granting voice to non-human entities. He pays particular attention to symmetries and alternative constructions across temporal planes such as past and present, memory and reality, fiction and historical document, a feature present in almost all Turkish writers discussed in this study.

Elif Shafak's narrative structure is one of the most recognizable features of her writing: polyphonic, fragmented, temporally alternating, and organized around a symbolic core. She rarely writes in a linear or conventional manner, preferring instead composite narrative architectures. Her most common structures are dual, developing parallel temporal lines and contrasting geographical or conceptual spaces (East vs. West, England vs. Turkey, Cyprus). These narrative strands constantly shift between past and present, eventually converging in ways that reveal hidden connections and call for unity. Burhan Sönmez demonstrates a consistent concern for narrative architecture built on circular or spiral structures, alternating temporal planes, and embedded frame narratives. His storytelling avoids linearity, favoring instead an organization based on memory, reflection, and symbolic mirroring, in which each narrative fragment contributes to the meaning of the whole. Structure is not merely a compositional device, but an expression of the novel's central themes – identity, the relationship between reality and imagination, life and death, captivity and freedom – revealing a carefully controlled and highly rigorous construction. Zülfü Livaneli's novels are characterized by broad narrative structures built through alternating temporal layers and embedded

storytelling within a frame narrative, in the tradition of Eastern narrative forms. His works combine historical investigation with individual destinies, gradually reconstructing the past through a present-oriented perspective. The structure is balanced and carefully organized, with each secondary narrative contributing to the central conflict and to reflections on memory, identity, and moral responsibility. Dafne Suman employs a complex narrative design based on frame stories, multiple perspectives, and overlapping temporal planes. Her novels gradually reconstruct the past through fragments of memory and individual histories that converge into a carefully orchestrated whole. The structure is tightly controlled, with each detail contributing to the revelation of character identity and the recovery of collective memory, while the integration of other artistic or documentary forms gives the narrative a polyphonic and visual dimension.

Ahmet Altan's novels are built on a predominantly fragmentary narrative structure, based on the alternation between a relatively stable narrative frame and inserted autonomous stories or secondary accounts that gradually reconstruct the past. The structure is not formally experimental but rather layered and episodic, with chapters that can function independently while still converging toward a shared thematic core. A frame narrative is frequently present, in which a central narrator mediates access to other stories, while time is treated flexibly through flashbacks and returns to the present. The emphasis falls more on the density of ideas and the accumulation of perspectives on the same reality than on a strictly geometric or symmetrical formal architecture.

In conclusion, the novels examined tend toward a polyphonic and often fragmentary construction, in which meaning emerges through the superposition of multiple narrative voices and the alternation of perspectives. A recurring element is the use of the frame narrative, through which the main storyline is supported and expanded by secondary stories integrated into a complex yet coherent architecture. At the same time, the structure of the novel becomes a means of reflecting on reality rather than merely organizing it, with emphasis placed on the text's capacity to propose a worldview rather than simply represent one. Thus, the unity of these works is given less by linear plot development and more by thematic convergence and the internal coherence of narrative perspectives.

Returning to the analysis of the elements that determine the aesthetic value of classical literary texts in Yeşilyaprak's study, the fourth principle is *the aesthetics of the garden*. In Ottoman culture, gardens played an important role, reflecting political authority while also offering pleasure in nature and spaces for romantic encounters. In the novel, although the garden is not foregrounded in the same way as in poetry, Turkish writers consistently privilege a space that inspires them and to which they appear deeply attached: Istanbul. *The aesthetics of the city* is defined through a

predominantly affective and symbolic representation, in which the city becomes more than a narrative backdrop, being endowed with the qualities of a living character, often feminized. Writers depict it as a layered space, composed of multiple overlapping "Istanbuls," where different temporalities, cultures, and identities coexist, giving it a fragmented yet paradoxically coherent structure. The city functions as a space of memory, nostalgia, and historical tension, but also as a site of aesthetic fascination capable of suspending chronological time and producing an almost mythical experience of dwelling. At the same time, Istanbul becomes a symbol of the ambivalence between East and West, tradition and modernity, generating both beauty and melancholy. This dual nature gives rise to an urban aesthetic based on contrast, plurality, and intense emotion. (**Subchapter 2.4**, *The Aesthetics of the City*)

The aesthetics of popular tradition in the analyzed literature is based on the organic integration of myths, legends, rituals, superstitions, and folk beliefs into the realist construction of the novel, thereby producing an effect akin to magical realism specific to the Turkish cultural space. Writers transform these elements of collective imagination into aesthetic instruments, preserving "local color" and enriching the fictional world without disrupting its realist coherence. A constant intertwining of the rational and the irrational, the everyday and the supernatural, can be observed, where popular beliefs are not mere decorative elements but active forces shaping the destiny of characters and the unfolding of events. Overall, contemporary Turkish literature reconfigures popular tradition as a fundamental aesthetic source, reinterpreting it in modern narrative forms and demonstrating the continuity between archaic imagination and contemporary literary sensibility. (**Subchapter 2.5**, *The Aesthetics of Popular Tradition*)

Analyzing how each of these principles is reflected in traditional Turkish literature reveals a strong attachment to tradition, yet one reinterpreted in a contemporary key, characteristic of the writers' oscillation between East and West, between tradition and modernity. This tradition is particularly evident at the formal level, through the search for innovative modes of expression visible in narrative structure, storytelling techniques, and thematically highly relevant—and often pressing—concerns. The issues addressed are contemporary, yet also universal, engaging emotional and existential conflicts that can be experienced by any reader worldwide. These aspects are accompanied by a dense cultural layer and a richness of information that continually asserts itself within the text. The writers pay attention to the smallest details, revealing the presence of master storytellers whose narrative resources appear inexhaustible. Across all the novels analyzed, similar structural concerns can be identified, both in terms of content and formal realization, reflecting a

pursuit of unity and harmony within the literary creation, in accordance with the aesthetic principles previously discussed.

Chapter VI, *Canonical Emergence – Conclusions*, synthesizes the process through which the canonical emergence of Turkish literature takes place and assesses its potential to enter the literary canon. The chapter revisits the overall argumentative trajectory of the study, outlining its premises, methodological path, and the objectives pursued in each chapter.

The analysis of the novels by contemporary Turkish writers reveals a series of shared ideas, the central one being a rejection of rigid categorization and fixed identity labels. These writers seek to capture the complexity of the human condition and to represent the individual in their uniqueness, without reducing them to fixed geographical, cultural, or ideological affiliations. In this sense, their literature becomes a space of expressive freedom, where identity is fluid and meaning is constructed through dialogue between multiple perspectives rather than through conceptual closure. At the same time, a consistent concern can be observed for coexistence and reconciliation between cultures—between East and West, tradition and modernity—tensions that are organically integrated into both the structure and themes of the novels. The writers do not reject cultural belonging; rather, they transform it into a source of reflection and creativity, without turning it into a factor that could limit aesthetic value.

State of the current research

Studies on contemporary Turkish literature have shown that writers such as Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak have managed to move beyond the local context and enter world literature. However, some critics still hesitate to state explicitly that their work fully belongs to world literature, and even more so to argue that it qualifies for inclusion in the literary canon. Simla Doğangün concludes, after an in-depth analysis of two of the author's novels, that "both Shafak and her works are situated at the crossroads of the local and the global."[16]

Başak Çandar discusses Pamuk and Goytisolo as both national and global writers, arguing that "both Pamuk and Goytisolo denationalize the history and culture of their native countries and thus complicate the notion of cultural negotiation that underlies the idea of *world literature*, which assumes fixed national points in the elliptical trajectory."[17] Çandar notes that the dependence of *world literature* on the national framework is, a priori, questionable. In other words, she challenges

[16] Simla Doğangün, „Elif Şafak and Her Fiction: Cultural Commodities of the Global Capital", in Burcu Alkan, Çimen Günay-Erkol (ed.), *Turkish Literature as World Literature*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2021, p. 218.
[17] Burcu Alkan și Çimen Günay-Erkol (ed.), *Turkish Literature as World Literature*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2021, p. 13.

the idea that world literature is merely the sum of national literatures or that its value and existence are inevitably tied to the nation. Instead, she suggests that *world literature* can also be understood through other criteria, such as the circulation of texts, translation, international reception, and intercultural dialogue, rather than exclusively through national belonging.

In *Turkish Literature as World Literature*, a volume that aims "to develop definitions and boundaries of world literature from a geographical and cultural perspective, a space of transit both literal and metaphorical, while introducing a 'national' literature in its 'literary universality'", the authors open the way for broader discussions regarding the status of contemporary Turkish literature. They argue that "As more and more works reach out from their national literary space, it will be possible to assess the evolving position of Turkish literature as world literature. We hope this volume contributes to the steadily increasing number of discussions and inspires even more literary translations of Turkish literature, as well as further scholarly interest toward a more complex world literature system."[18] In this context, *Emergența canonică. O cercetare asupra romanului contemporan turc* represents a continuation of these discussions on Turkish literature.

Results

The analysis conducted within this research shows that contemporary Turkish literature is often interpreted in *World Literature* studies through an emphasis on the international circulation of texts, translation, and mechanisms of global visibility, while aesthetic dimensions and canonical criteria of evaluation are frequently relegated to a secondary position. In this context, the findings point to the need to reintroduce the aesthetic criterion as a central element in assessing the status of literature within the global literary space.

It is observed that the international success of Turkish writers is influenced not only by the literary value of their works but also by contextual factors of a political and geopolitical nature, which may lead to a distorted or incomplete reception of Turkish literature. In this respect, Harold Bloom's theoretical perspective, centred on the aesthetic autonomy of the literary canon, provides a framework for re-evaluating contemporary Turkish literature beyond criteria of visibility and global reception.

At the same time, the analysis confirms the usefulness of David Damrosch's model, which understands *world literature* as a dynamic system based on the global circulation of texts and the plurality of cultural centres, without entirely excluding the notion of aesthetic value. From this

[18] *Ibidem*, p.15.

perspective, contemporary Turkish literature can be interpreted as part of a global literary system characterised by mobility, interconnection, and the continuous re-evaluation of legitimising criteria.

The analysis of the selected corpus of authors reveals significant convergences not only at the thematic level, but also in terms of literary and ethical positioning. The results indicate that what appears at the thematic level (trauma, identity, memory, and the relationship with political power) in fact functions as a form of convergent literary action, through which authors construct their works as practices of symbolic resistance, engaging in a struggle for freedom of expression. A literature of trauma thus emerges, as well as a therapeutic and cathartic literature.

It is also observed that, although these writers do not constitute an institutionalised group and do not belong to a common literary programme, their works display an emergent internal coherence that can be described as a form of diffuse literary movement. This movement is not explicitly organised, but it produces convergent effects in terms of the aesthetic and ethical direction of the literature under analysis. In this context, the research highlights the tendency of the analysed authors to reject rigid categorisation within fixed cultural or geopolitical frameworks, such as the East/West or centre/periphery dichotomies, opting instead for a liminal literary positioning characterised by identity mobility and interpretative openness. This form of positioning is conceptualised in the study through the notion of the “djinn space”, defined as a space of cultural indeterminacy, continuous transformation, a space of cultural indeterminacy, continuous transformation, and avoidance of fixed canonical or geographical categorisation.

The findings thus indicate that contemporary Turkish literature cannot be reduced to a sum of individual works, but must be understood as a set of convergent literary practices that generate an emergent form of collective coherence. This coherence functions simultaneously as a form of symbolic resistance and as a potential vector of integration into the literary canon, insofar as the analysed works meet its aesthetic criteria.

Research Methodology

The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach specific to contemporary literary studies, based on a combination of established methods of textual and interpretative analysis. The main methods employed are thematic analysis, narratological analysis, literary hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and the comparative method. These tools allow for the investigation of narrative structures, thematic configurations, discursive strategies, and modes of aesthetic and ideological construction within literary texts.

In addition to these methods, the research integrates theoretical perspectives specific to contemporary literary studies, namely literary canon criticism, world literature theory, cultural studies, and the sociology of literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

The study is grounded in literary canon theory, particularly Harold Bloom's perspective on the centrality of aesthetic criteria, correlated with contemporary approaches to the canon as a dynamic system of selection and legitimation. At the same time, it draws on world literature theory, especially David Damrosch's model, which emphasizes the global circulation of texts and the relationships between cultural centres and peripheries.

The analysis also incorporates postcolonial criticism (Edward W. Said, René Guénon, Aamir R. Mufti, etc.), used to examine East–West relations, cultural representations, and dynamics of symbolic power within the global literary space.

For understanding identity construction processes, the research draws on identity studies (Anthony D. Smith, Amin Maalouf, Paul Ricoeur, Margaret R. Somers, Kevin Robins, etc.) and hybridity theory (Homi K. Bhabha), which allow for the interpretation of literary positioning between fixed cultural categories and the analysis of intermediary "in-between" spaces.

In addition, tools from the sociology of literature, cultural studies, and psychology are employed to analyze literature as a social and cultural phenomenon, as well as the relationship between literary production, historical context, and the dynamics of the literary field.

Research Corpus

The research corpus consists of novels by contemporary Turkish authors Burhan Sönmez, Ahmet Altan, Zülfü Livaneli, Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, and Dafne Suman. The selection is based on their relevance within contemporary Turkish literature, their international visibility, and the presence of recurring themes relevant to the analysis of canonical legitimation mechanisms and identity construction.

Sources and Materials Used

The research is based on literary texts published in their original editions and in authorized translations. In addition to the primary corpus, secondary sources such as scholarly articles, critical studies, and specialized volumes have been used. Online resources from credible academic and publishing platforms have also been consulted.

Criteria for Text Selection

The selection of texts is based on the international recognition of the authors and the thematic relevance for the analysis of processes of canonical legitimation. Works addressing themes such as trauma, cultural memory, identity, exile, and the relationship between the individual and structures of power have been selected.

Research Limitations

The research is limited to a restricted corpus of authors representative of contemporary Turkish literature, which does not allow for the generalisation of conclusions at the level of the entire literary production. The analysis focuses on the aesthetic, thematic, and discursive dimensions of the texts, without constituting an exhaustive sociological or historical-institutional investigation.

Researcher Positioning

The research is conducted from an analytical and interpretative perspective that privileges the understanding of literature as a space of negotiation between identity, memory, and cultural power. The study explores how literary texts engage with the relationship between the individual and the collective, as well as cultural positions situated between East and West, avoiding rigid categorical fixations and favouring a perspective of "in-between" spaces.

Ethical Considerations

The research relies exclusively on public sources, consisting of published literary texts, publicly available interviews, and academic materials accessible online. No primary data were collected through direct interaction with human subjects. Consequently, no informed consent was required, and all materials were used in compliance with academic citation standards and copyright regulations.