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Grammatology and Turkish Literary Modernity. Nergis Ertürk. Oxford: Oxford UP., 2011. h/bk 216 pp. ISBN 978-0199746682. Price $72.00.

The processes of mechanization, standardization, and homogenization we have been exposed to for an elongated period of time have yielded consequences more far-reaching than we think. The effects are imprinted in the depth of our existence, shaping our view of ourselves, our view of each other, and the world around us. We have grown intolerant of anything that falls in-between and that gives out a mixed, impure color; we have become unwilling to accept any foreignness or otherness that we encounter and any threat that can shake our fragile sense of self, our illusory sense of stability, and singularity. We conceive of life in a linear continuum, the body as a healthy, proper entity, and the self as a one, singular being. We want to sustain one look, one robust body, one personality, one mood, and one identity — all to the exclusion of the inherent diversity and multivalence of what we call human life.

Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey is closely related to the cultivation of the modern to the exclusion of difference for the sake of national homogeneity. Nergis Ertürk discloses the inherent complexities of writing that were systematically repressed and domesticated during Turkish nationalization and linguistic modernization. She investigates the period between 1850-1950, when Ottoman modernizing efforts and Republican nationalizing forces brought about changes and radical amendments in language. According to Ertürk, the most overlooked price of language reforms was the language's severance from its dynamic, heterogeneous, and multi-vocal substructure in the pursuit of the creation of an (impossibly) unified, pure, and homogenized nation. Drawing upon Derrida's theory of writing, Ertürk explores how writing becomes a target, a deadly threatening institution, with its potential for illegibility and foreignness — its inherent elusiveness as the incommensurability of signifier and signified — during the time of Reformist regulation. Ertürk argues that language reforms of this period were not simply an indispensable part of the modernization process, implemented to keep up with the Western standards. More than that, these reforms originated from a fear of language's capacity for the inclusion of otherness, "of 'illegible' social other(s) within the social body itself' (5). This is why Ertürk calls the attempt to purify Turkish

language from its inherent heterogeneity a "mad fantasy," the creation of a pure "ontology freed from death" (5).

In Part I, she traces the emergence of phonocentrism, which can be described as "the radicalization of a fear of writing," to the mid-19th century Ottoman communications revolution when the Ottoman Turkish language came under the influence of capitalist modernity (12). The inclusion of modern forms of communication such as newspapers, printing, and translation cast language into an interrogative light with a desire to expand its potential; this process exposed "a foreignness inherent in the 'native' language itself" (43). What followed the Ottoman transformation of writing practices in the last quarter of the 19 th century was the Republicans' more radical project of semiotic reorganization of language, which assumed a repressive character because of a fear of language's potential for disorder. According to Ertürk, Turkish nationalism did not involve a simple imitation of or assimilation to the modern ideals, but a "violent" pursuit of purification. With phonetization and vernacularization, writing's extra-Turkish features — its Arabic and Persian influences as well as its inclusion of ethnic languages — were represented as "death," the threatening shadow of the other on the life of the new nation. Ertürk exemplifies Turkish nationalism as a domesticating discourse through Ömer Seyfettin's literary writings, and writes that "Seyfettin's project for a Turkish national literature is nothing less than the serial 'othering' of all extra-Turkish linguistic difference as death, in the mad attempt to murder the very possibility of the non-national" (85).

By questioning Seyfettin's instrumentalization of literature for nationalist ends, Ertürk argues that fiction harbors a multiplicity of meanings and voices that escape confinement of such intentional appropriation. It is exactly from this point that she reconceives Turkish literary modernism as fiction whose anonymous voice (without the will or knowledge of the author) communicates the contradictions and tensions of phonocentrism. Contrasting with efforts to frame modern Turkish literature *vis-à-vis* European genres and currents, or oriented around the author's intentional response to the external reality of the time, Ertürk adopts a perspective that engages in "literature's other-writing against its all too easy identification as self-same community" (182). She does not view authors as representatives of the historical shift, but approaches their works as an effect of the shift in the history of writing itself. The works, notwithstanding their authors,

foreground the irreducible uncanniness of the reformed language, opening up the Turkish language to the traces of its excluded others. Thus, literature, for Ertürk, is not simply mimicry — the direct transcription of the external to the world of fiction; it harbors a potential for exploring what is traditionally left out, what lies beyond and outside the center, to the unawareness of the author.

Ertürk offers close readings of two Ottoman Turkish novels in Part I and several works of modern Turkish literature in Part II. Her analyses of Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem's *Araba Sevdasi (The Carriage Affair)* (1896); and Ahmed Midhat's *Müşahedat (Observations)* (1891) stand as "a special archive" to perceive the contradictions and deflections underlying phonocentric efforts (68). Ertürk subsequently devotes separate chapters to the study of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü (The Time Regulation Institute)* (1961); Peyami Safa's *Matmazel Noraliyan̓ın Koltuğu (Mademoiselle Noralia's Armchair)* (1949); and Nazım Hikmet's poems "Makinalaşmak İstiyorum" ("Mechanization") (1929), "Şeyh Bedrettin Destanı" ("The Epic of Sheik Bedrettin") (1936), and "Taranta-Babu'ya Mektuplar" ("Letters to Taranta-Babu") (1935). As "conservative modernists," Tanpınar and Safa's writings reflect something beyond their political conservatism and Republican partisanship. Although they talked in favor of a homogenized language and national identity, what they wrote stood at odds with their politics when the violent effects of the unifying effort surfaced in the language. As an impersonal aspect of their writing, all these writers including Nazım Hikmet recorded the alienation of writing in their fiction in the space of disowned uncanniness and difference.

In *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey*, Ertürk's approach to modern Turkish literature is not filtered through the author's intention, but through writing's autonomous register of the foreignness of language. While Seyfeddin's work shows us that literature is open to manipulations, and can be incorporated into a national sectarianism, Tanpınar, Safa, and Nazım Hikmet's writings demonstrate that literature has the potential to meditate "between the abstract reality of a hollowed out Turkish national legacy and its ghostly reminders" (106). It offers a platform where the "spectralized Turkish subject" can find an outlet to reflect on and respond to the state's imposed regulations. Hence, literature exists within the social while at the same time locates itself at the periphery. It has the capacity to inhabit both the ideality of appearances and the apparitions of reality.

By taking advantage of literature's dual quality, Ertürk offers a "double reading" of fiction, focusing on the extreme measures taken for the control of writing in the establishment of national unity, while unearthing on the other hand the capacity of that "strange institution called literature" to explore what is left behind and what escapes confinement during the efforts to homogenize language — it "harbors the possibility of another order of things" (28).

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