# Modernity and Its Fallen Languages: Tanpınar's *Hasret*, Benjamin's Melancholy

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*It is as if we are witnessing the reconstruction of old, ruined streets with broken pavements, their opening up into boulevards. On these new streets, old words in nightcaps and bathrobes will not be able to walk without looking laughable. We await the pleasure of watching new ideas stroll back and forth on these modern avenues.*

—Ahmet Haşim, 1928 ("Lisan")

## Comparative Literature, from Istanbul

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE ÉMIGRÉ FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE DISCIPLINE of comparative literature in the United States began their exiles from Germany in Istanbul: Leo Spitzer lived and worked in the Turkish city from 1933 to 1936, and Erich Auerbach followed him in 1936 and remained through 1947. In retracing this disciplinary history, Edward Said, Aamir Mufti, and Emily Apter, among other eminent critics, have emphasized the German philologists' exile in Istanbul—all of them, in one way or another, revising a commonplace understanding of the discipline as Eurocentric and developing critical methods for a new, expanded form, mode, or practice of comparative literature. The first such gesture—certainly the most memorable and now a canonical moment in postcolonial comparative literary and cultural studies—was made by Said, who observed of Auerbach's *Mimesis* that in the act of redeeming European literature and culture at a time of crisis, the work paradoxically "owe[s] its existence to the very fact of Oriental, non-Occidental exile and homelessness" (8). Mufti, among others, has followed Said in advocating cultural critique as a practice that incessantly questions fixed notions of belonging to home and nation (252). Most recently, Apter turns from Auerbach to Spitzer in search of a new direction for the

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discipline, shifting the emphasis from exilic to "transnational humanism" (*Translation Zone* 44). Her approach perhaps signals an intensified focus on the philological inheritance of what is presumably always already a given for comparative work: professional multilingualism. For Apter, it is not Auerbach, "deprived" by Turkish libraries and isolated (as in Said's account) from the disciplinary coercions of professional research ethics, but Spitzer, learning to read, write, and speak Turkish in a "policy of non-translation," who speaks to a comparative literature "worlded" from its moment of emergence (45, 60).[1]

Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the enormous value of this work on the discipline, the main focus of the general critical conversation thus produced remains on the activities of European expatriates and their direct influence on the literary establishment in Turkey. Modern Turkish language and literature have been and are, in an almost absurdly literal as well as critical-theoretical sense, a kind of absent presence in this project. This is not a matter of critical ignorance or of either casually or deliberately ignoring the obvious or the esoteric. For the stranger, deeper way, I want to suggest, in which Turkey is an absent presence in comparative literature is this: though modern Turkish literature has been and is still generally studied and taught through the frame of a national canon, what we call national language and literature was a problem of comparison in (and for) Istanbul long before Spitzer and Auerbach arrived there. Ottoman and Turkish language and literature, in other words, have been dealing literally with the problem of comparability with Europe at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire was peripherally integrated into the economic and political sphere of global capitalist modernity—and, unlike colonial modernities, integrated without direct European colonial rule.[2]

The republic of Turkey, which emerged from the Ottoman imperial core in 1923, subsequently radicalized the project of state-led social engineering begun by the late Ottoman state, attempting to replace all Ottoman-Islamic social, political, and cultural institutions with new ones modeled on those of the West. Nazim İrem's aphoristic description of this positivistic, rationalistic, revolutionary project—a "late Enlightenment will to modernity in a Muslim setting" (80)—shows us how prominent analysts of Turkish social history have tended to read it.[3] As a professor at the University of Istanbul at the time, Auerbach was plainly, even acutely, aware of the "other history" of comparison that a nascent European "comparative literature" linked itself to during the philologists' periods of Turkish exile. His long letter to Walter Benjamin dated 3 January 1937 shows us just how acutely. To Benjamin's wish "to hear more about the extremely interesting—and certainly worthy of note—experiences, in which you are now involved" (Letter), Auerbach replies with a despairing and even vitriolic description of Turkish republican cultural reforms in general and the reform of the Turkish language in particular. For him, this undertaking—which included the abolition of the Ottoman Turkish Arabo-Persian alphabet and its replacement with Latin phonetic orthography (1928), as well as the purging (from the 1930s onward) of Arabic and Persian words, for which Turkish neologisms were substituted—rendered the new national language uniquely reflective of the dynamics of violent epistemic change. In what we can only describe as a kind of mourning, Auerbach writes, "[N]o one under 25 can any longer understand any sort of religious, literary, or philosophical text more than ten years old and . . . the specific properties of the language are rapidly decaying. . . . The result: Nationalism in the superlative with the simultaneous destruction of the historic national character."

Auerbach was hardly alone in this concern. A colleague of his at the University of Istanbul, the novelist, poet, critic, and pro-

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fessor of aesthetics Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–62), was just one of many prominent (if still largely untranslated) Turkish authors and critics of the period who approached linguistic modernization as a problem of comparison with roots in the nineteenth century. As Tanpınar put it succinctly in a 1959 article entitled "Türk Edebiyatı'nda Cereyanlar" ("Currents in Turkish Literature"), "[T]he change of civilizations [from East to West] manifests itself undoubtedly as a real crisis [*kriz*] in language" (103).[4] For this Turkish comparatist, working at the crossroads of a literary history marked by Poe, Goethe, and Mallarmé, on the one hand, and by classical Ottoman and modern Turkish poets such as Şeyh Galip, Ahmet Haşim, and Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, on the other, a literature written in a language in crisis, in literary forms borrowed from the West, suffers from its "belatedness" in comparison with Europe (105–06).[5] In Tanpınar's work, the "existential uneasiness," or *huzursuzluk*, of not being at one with oneself is fundamentally a problem of comparison, one that repeatedly tempts Tanpınar to solutions in the form of restored origins. From the encyclopedic *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (1942, rev. in 1956; "History of Nineteenth-Century Literature"), regarded as an authoritative account of modern Turkish literature, to the five segments of *Beş Şehir (*1946; "Five Cities"), on historically significant Ottoman cities, this impulse is thoroughgoing if also thoroughly complex and contradictory. It is illuminating for our disciplinary context today, as we look to (or for) comparative literature in an age of globalization and inevitably to (and for) new founding moments.

In this essay, I revisit Istanbul as a discursive scene of both the old and new comparative literatures, to supplement them in their "absent" Turkish presence. Like Auerbach and Tanpınar, I approach modern Turkish literature and literary criticism as an archive of a crisis in language. Yet in so doing I want precisely to resist a thinking of comparability mainly or only as a kind of paralyzing condition of derivation from Europe—a way of thinking variously manifest in the work of both authors and perhaps dangerously latent even in our best efforts to broaden the discipline of comparatism today. Redefining the crisis of language as a moment in the representational order of modernity, I juxtapose Tanpınar's book-length essay *Beş Şehir* with Benjamin's fragment "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (1916; "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man"), suggesting that we may compare the two texts, and describe them as linked, in their engagement with that moment of crisis. Each of these writers approaches modernity as a kind of linguistic Fall, questioning the very possibility of memory in a language undergoing radical transformation. Each writer finally affirms the fallen representational language of modernity, however, and recognizes new possibilities in its reenchantment.

If for Tanpınar Turkish literature continually revisits the question of its uneven relation to the literatures of Europe, then of course neither Turkish literature nor the literatures of Europe can be reduced to that relation or to a kind of (theoretical) victory in that relation's inversion. When *Beş Şehir* is recontextualized next to Benjamin's fragment here, the fragment comes to stand not for a Europe of original signatures but for a Europe specifically, deeply, and similarly absorbed by and in the modern crisis of language. But hierarchical and monolithic comparative categories such as West/East and Europe/Turkey do not simply disappear in the magical moment when we expose them as fictions. Explicitly or implicitly claimed victories for the negation of critical illusion tend more than anything else to erase imperial histories, even perversely affirming the epistemic violence of colonial modernity as liberating.[6] What I hope to offer here instead is a supplementary vision of literary modernity in which neither Europe nor Turkey stands for the telos of the

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modern; rather, each of these placeholders diffuses into the other in a partial narrative of two simultaneously entwined and disparate histories of language in crisis.

I also intend to point to and to supplement an expansive critical literature on Tanpınar in modern Turkish.[7] In a recent book entitled *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark* ("Blind Mirror, Lost Orient"), for example, the critic and essayist Nurdan Gürbilek has posed a substantive challenge to the conservative-nationalist appropriation of Tanpınar as an Ottoman traditionalist ("Kurumuş Pınar").[8] Gürbilek retrieves another Tanpınar instead, one in perpetual mourning for an irrecoverable past, who fails in his traditionalist pursuit of historical continuity. She also suggests a thematic continuity of Tanpınar's figuration of the past with Benjamin's, though she is unwilling to take the comparison too far, citing historical and ideological differences (132). I will reformulate the question of memory in Tanpınar in the context of his writings on the linguistic crisis, shifting the emphasis from what to how one remembers in a language undergoing transformation. If the republican language reforms actively sought to produce an amnesiac hegemonic majority, Tanpınar's writings may be understood as a special archive in which the contradictions of a rationalizing modernity are exposed in unique ways. And if the linguistic crisis, as Tanpınar implies, is an effect of the discursive commensurability of modern Turkish language and literature with western European representational practices, we may indeed compare his writings about and in the crisis of representational language with Benjamin's. Before moving on to read my primary texts, then, I will make a few observations on the historical grounds of this comparability.

## Missed Encounters

United States–based literary criticism today, be it nationally oriented or comparative, is also haunted by the specter of comparison. Indeed, this uneasiness already has a defined discursive and disciplinary history. Benedict Anderson's *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998) is, if not the origin of the current debates, then a touchstone in them, together with Jonathan Culler and Pheng Cheah's 2003 collection *Grounds of Comparison*. Moving to address a "transnationalism [that] has purportedly rendered obsolete the traditionally bounded areas of area studies" (Culler and Cheah, Preface viii), one position in these debates builds on Anderson's argument that proliferation of the institutions of capitalism, in particular print technologies, has given us new "quotidian universals that seep . . . through and across all print-languages, by no means in a unidirectional flow" (Anderson 33). For Anderson, this new global logic of serialization, inasmuch as it is integral to the modern political imagination, makes questions framed by the tension between originality and derivation more or less irrelevant, substantively dispensing with Europe as the ground of comparison (29). Harry Harootunian and Partha Chatterjee, on the other hand, argue in *Grounds* that the homogenizing and universalizing tendencies of global capitalist modernity are nowhere as successfully realized as Anderson makes them out to be.[9] Elaborating on this objection, moving against Anderson's vision of the state of the disciplines, and supporting the "vocation of comparability" (Harootunian and Park), Harootunian proposes a new comparatism grounded in the space-time of the everyday. His approach emphasizes Euro-American modernity and its "outside" as coeval; he focuses on the shared minimal unity of the present structured by the commodity form as the turnkey of comparative cultural analysis ("Some Thoughts" 47). A third major moment in the discursive history of spectral comparison is figured in and by Timothy Mitchell's edited collection *Questions of Modernity*. Bringing together the work of scholars whose expertise is based in different regions of the

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globe (with emphasis on the Middle East and South Asia), this editorial project is one of an increasing number to emphasize rigorously the heterogeneity from which the universalism of Western modernity was produced.

In such debates, a lesson that emerges even from disagreements is that the hierarchically structured relation between West and East, Europe and Turkey, remains persistent as what Mitchell terms a "fiction . . . of the nondisposable sort" ("Stage" 12). Anderson's abstract time line, along which stages of modernity can be located, is a representation immanent to uneven capitalist modernity (14–15). One can nevertheless challenge these schematic fictions, Mitchell suggests, by asking what they suppress (12). Above all, such an approach means looking closely at the notion of linguistic crisis, which lends itself readily and somewhat complicitly to the subordination of Turkish literary modernity as derivative. In place of the apparently descriptive negation implied by linguistic crisis, in other words, we might imagine a kind of structurality, a set of conditions of possibility, for the use of language—conditions that change, when they change, with a violence for which *derivation* is too literally translative, or reductive, a term. Speaking descriptively, we might choose to read the historical crisis of modern Turkish not as a moment of subordination and derivation in crisis but as a displacing economization of language through crisis—through a historical process, that is, beginning in the nineteenth century, with the peripheral incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into uneven global capitalist modernity.

To understand the problem this way is to apply and extend Michel Foucault's analysis of modernity as marked by the abstraction of money and language, by pure signifiers (of exchange). For Foucault, as Rosalind C. Morris has observed, modernity in western Europe is linked to the generalization of the commodity form (18, 46–48).[10] I lack space here to revisit adequately this lengthy and complex exposition (either Foucault's own, or Morris's cogent reading of it), but the central point is that just as money, dislocated from the substance once intrinsically marking wealth, now appears an autonomous medium of exchange, words removed from the material reality whose marks they bore come to function as "designators" of meaning (Foucault, *Order* 169; *Mots* 180). The continuous circulation of signs, Foucault reminds us, will always require a point of fixture, some functionally universal standard of meaning or value in the general system of logic he calls "representation" (67; 81). His analysis shows us how the vision of a network of signs that would be the "neutral," "transparent" arrangement of things was fundamental to the imagination in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century western Europe (57; 71).

It is the consciousness of the modern to know that even—or especially—the universal cannot guarantee absolute mediation, perfect transparency, in representation (208; 221). The "reign" of representation will inevitably be challenged by "the enormous thrust of a freedom, a desire, or a will . . . in the modern experience" (209; 222). The modern works of Sade, Nietzsche, Mallarmé, and Artaud are exemplary for Foucault in that their main goal and focus are to stage this challenge, keeping in play the simultaneous freeing and alienation of modern man ruled by representation.

In Foucault's analysis, the modern reign of representation, along with the modern challenge to it, is best understood not as a moment in which one episteme overwrites another but rather, as Morris observes, as a process by which one episteme "comes to dominate its antecedent." The episteme of representation "survives even after . . . [its] transgression" (47). Foucault's emphasis is, in other words, on representation as the relation between the signifier and the signified, between appearance and reality. Thus, representation structures modern humanity's knowledge of the world (Foucault 363; 375). It is a schema neither of the subjective mind nor

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of the unconscious; rather, it is the organizing principle of any subject's knowledge of the world, as mediated (as Foucault later argued) by new technologies of discipline. Epistemic change, accordingly, is neither a continuous evolution nor a radical rupture: it is a violent displacement. And the chronological posteriority of modernity's "troubled consciousness" is an anterior posteriority, in the sense that it constitutes, and is already anticipated from within by, the reign of representation, which secures itself "with reference to something outside of itself" (Morris 47).

It should be plain that Foucault's analysis develops out of the specific history of western Europe. To make use of Foucault in the context of my study, then, I must ask first whether such a reign of representation also operates in Ottoman and Turkish modernity. Taking into consideration the particularities of the Ottoman and Turkish histories of representation—language standardization, alphabet reform, and mass reproduction—I answer with a conditional yes: we can read the literature of the Ottoman and Turkish nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a special kind of archive manifesting the traces of an economized language. Recâizâde Mahmut Ekrem's novel *Araba Sevdası* (1896; "The Carriage Affair"), for instance, is a brilliant early work of Turkish modernity that we can read as staging representation as the fall of divine, poetic language into arbitrary, communicative exchange.[11] And if the Tanpınar of "Türk Edebiyatı'nda Cereyanlar" describes the crisis of modern Turkish as a paralyzing condition of derivation, we can read his *Beş Şehir* as a late work that reregisters linguistic crisis as a kind of displacement, turning against hierarchical and identitarian comparative reading.

I suggest that the idea of linguistic crisis is not merely a modernist theme but a structural condition of the modern. Accordingly, we can give it a primarily (though not completely) formal definition. A formal definition does not mean that one can simply, horizontally negate the hierarchy implicit in that idea of crisis; after all, uneven incorporation into a global literary circuit of translation is a constitutive element of Ottoman and Turkish literary modernity. But the irregular convergence of western European and Ottoman-Turkish literatures during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be understood only through and as that incorporation—in terms, for example, of the circulatory patterns of dominant European genres (novel, memoir, drama) or literary currents (naturalism, Romanticism, modernism). There are two further points to be made. As Mitchell argues, we must address ourselves to the radical heterogeneity of modernity ("Stage" 24). The other task is to recognize forms of relation and thus, directly or indirectly, of comparability in the structural possibility of representation and its crisis. To do this is to displace the still-conventional (even in the academy) understanding of modernity as European. The crisis of modernity must now also be understood as engulfing Europe.

When we bring together literary works engaged with and in linguistic crisis, how can we describe the relations and nonrelations among different reflections on (of, in) the crisis of language as a domain of contradiction in capitalist modernity? Again, to juxtapose Tanpınar and Benjamin here is not to posit a direct, unmediated connection between the works of two writers as discursive objects or to conflate one such object with another. Neither is it to take refuge in facile incommensurabilities of the sort that reassert the value of narrow disciplinary and national specialization. The idea of a missed encounter, which I propose here as a structural accompaniment to the crisis in language, allows us to use the historical particularity of an overdetermined, uneven global relation as a link, without exaggerating that link by claims for a systematic or otherwise comprehensive literary history (or historiography). Comparison as a missed encounter allows us to recognize connections

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produced by a fundamentally uneven and violently abstracting global modernity; at the same time, it prevents us from conflating or effacing historical differences—between the developments and effects of the Turkish language reforms, for example, and the developments and effects of technologies of reproducibility in Europe—in singular genealogies of the modern.

## *Hasret* and Melancholy

In his foreword to the second edition of *Beş Şehir*, dated 25 September 1960, Tanpınar brings the "problem" of duality and comparison to the forefront. He states that his impulse in this work is toward reconciliation with the Seljuk-Ottoman past for a resolution of the crisis of modern Turkish identity at an individual as well as a social level (iv). He writes as, in his own words, "a man of heart" rather than as an "engineer" and as a person committed to letting "the second time" of the past speak (vi). "There is another time right next to the one in which we live, laugh, enjoy ourselves, work, and make love," he writes, "a time much different, a lot deeper, one that has no relation to the calendar and the clock" ([1946] 80). *Beş Şehir* records the visitations of this different and deeper dimension of time, which is marked by historical displacement and fluctuation, appearing and disappearing according to its own logic and occasion. In Ankara, the first of the five cities of the title, the renowned seventeenth-century Ottoman travel writer Evliya Çelebi returns to life and joins Tanpınar (or Tanpınar's narrator) on a modern city walk. In Istanbul, the memory of an elderly neighbor from Tanpınar's childhood returns in a tableau vivant (deliriously she chants the names of Istanbul's springs, hoping to cure herself of an ailment). In the Ottoman capital Bursa, Tanpınar remembers the fourteenth-century birth of the empire.

Occasionally, the writer makes use of mythic modes common to German Romanticism, drawing from the imperial Ottoman and Seljuk pasts a vision of Turkish history as the evolution of a national spirit.[12] In Tanpınar's teleology, which inverts the mythical historicism of official nationalism, the Seljuk past is comparable with the Gothic period of Europe, whereas the Ottoman period is a kind of golden age, the Turkish Renaissance ([1960] v). The focus of *Beş Şehir* gradually turns from time and memory to language, from what one remembers to how one remembers it, in a language undergoing immense transformation. In Istanbul, Tanpınar writes,

> kaybolmuş bir dünyayı arıyorum. . . . Ben seraptan seraba koşuyorum. Her başına koştuğum pınarda muammalı çehreler bana uzanıyor; bilmediğim, seslerini tanımadığım dudaklar benimle bitmez tükenmez işaretlerle konuşuyorlar, fakat hiç birinin dediğini anlamıyorum; ruhum dudaklarından ayrılır ayrılmaz hiç bir şeyin değişmediğini görüyorum. Belki onlar da bana . . . karşılarına çıkan sert duvarlardan bahsediyorlar; "Biz de senin gibiydik, diyorlar; hiç bir suale cevap alamazsın. Asıl olan içindeki hasrettir; onu söndürmemeye çalış." Ve onun eski bir ocak gibi daima uyanık bulunması için kâh Ferahfeza peşrevini . . . kah Karacaahmed'in servilikle-rini karşıma çıkarıyorlar; Şerefâbâd'ın kırık mermer havuzlarına benzeyen bir yığın adı, bu hazır kalıpları içimdeki hasretle doldurayım diye bana uzatıyorlar. ([1946] 215–16)

> I am looking for a lost world. . . . I am running from one mirage to another. At every spring I run toward, mysterious faces reach out to me; lips I do not know, voices I do not recognize speak to me endlessly, in signals I do not understand. When my soul moves away from their lips, I see that nothing has changed. Perhaps they are telling me about . . . their own hardships. "We were like you," they say. "You will not find the answers to your questions. The only real is the longing inside you. . . ." And to stoke this fire of longing, they make me hear the overture of Ferahfeza . . . or see the cypress groves of Karacaahmed. They give me a pile of names that resemble the broken marble pieces

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> of Şerefabad's pools, ready-made forms that I can fill with the longing inside me.[13]

On a first reading, the dead past seems anthropomorphized, acquiring a face and the power of speech. Closer inspection reveals that the image exceeds any resemblance to the human form. The "faces" are mysterious: their lips are visible as they speak, but their voices are strange, and what they say cannot be understood. This performance of failed anthropomorphization suggests the ambiguity of the past, juxtaposing the past's proximity and natural familiarity with its irreducible distance and difference. The second half of the passage, especially at the interjection of "Perhaps," registers a deeper ambiguity. We could describe this drama of failed anthropomorphism as an abuse of language, or catachresis—"perhaps" standing for something impossible to determine, a fantastic effect, as Paul de Man puts it, of "the positional power inherent in language" (21).

If the passage quoted above shows us in a general way how memory lives in a ghostly language, we should not neglect to examine its textual particularities. We might notice, for example, two emphases, on verbal sound and on the language of proper names. Lips, one of the organs of speech, are the only clearly identifiable features of the faces—a visually expressed aural bias that can be found everywhere in *Beş Şehir,* in images of voice and speech privileging verbal sound as the authentic mediator of the past. Nor is it only human forms that possess the power of speech: throughout the work, the inanimate world of objects, of "ağaç, su, taş" ("tree, water, stone"), speak to Tanpınar's narrator in a marking of fluctuating and occasional time (150). Of the elderly neighbor chanting the names of Istanbul's springs, he writes, "Âdetâ bir kurşun peltesi gibi ağırlaşan dilinin altında ve gergin, kuru dudaklarının arasında bu kelimeler ezildikçe fersiz gözleri canlanır, bütün yüzüne bizim duymadığımız birşeyler dinliyormuş gibi bir dikkat gelir[di] . . ." ("As these words were pressed between her tight, dry lips and under her tongue, which was as heavy as melted lead, her lusterless eyes would liven and her face would concentrate as if she were listening to things we could not hear . . ."; 107). This image suggests that the magical power of proper names is activated only when they are pronounced; the names of the city's springs become waters themselves in the mouth, returning the old woman to life. Indeed, verbalized water sounds, along with the muezzin's call, classical Ottoman music, and the spontaneous speech of inanimate objects, recur throughout *Beş Şehir.* Other forms or categories of imagery are clearly subordinated to this primary orality, as in a remarkable scene set in Bursa, where a landscape painting dissolves into the sound of the fountains (*şadırvan*), through which the other, "different" time of the city is heard (102–05).

How to understand this privileging of verbal sound? On the one hand, and in traditional critical terms, we can see it as consistent with the generic differentiation of poetry from prose in Tanpınar's criticism—a differentiation that grants special privilege to sound in poetry. Poetry for Tanpınar is a sensual form of the sublime, whereas prose is merely description or representation. But, far from an abstract, taxonomic-aesthetic preference, this privileging of speech over writing must be understood in the specific historical and structural context of linguistic modernization. The Turkish alphabet reform of 1928, which replaced Arabo-Persian writing with Latin orthography, and the language reforms of the 1930s, in which Arabic and Persian words were purged from the language and replaced with Turkish neologisms, are momentous events that cannot but be reflected in the written language of the period.[14] A primary linguistic effect of these historical projects was to rationalize writing, to abstract meaning from the written sign. Such an abstraction of meaning certainly could be said to characterize all language systems, but we must imagine

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how an abrupt change of alphabet, justified by the need to catch up with the West, produced a violent disjunction between the reformed Turkish sign and signified. As Ahmet Haşim, Tanpınar's contemporary, wrote in 1928, "There is no doubt that the shape of a word has some influence on the essence of the idea that it carries" ("Harf" 314). In the reform era, the civil writing of the Turkish republic is promoted as a pure vehicle of meaning, promising a passage through cultural revolution into Western scientific reason. And the taxonomic-aesthetic preference for poetic speech is formed along with this new positivism, which Jacques Derrida (in another context) called the "becoming-prose of the world" (287).

It is precisely at this point, with the rationalization and the mechanization of writing, that one mourns the loss of voice and that poetry acquires its special status as bearer of that loss.[15] Ahmet Haşim expressed this in the language of the uncanny:

> For the last three days, while I write, I watch curiously the grappling of alien words [of Persian and Arabic origin] with the new letters on the white page. These words written with letters, the outlets of which were the nose and the throat, cannot find their sounds on the keyboard of the new alphabet to make themselves heard. In a sentence, these words sound like the muffled, ugly screams of people who have lost their voices. ("Lisan" 317)

Words of Persian and Arabic origin, part of the language for centuries, are now alien, their sounds eliminated from the new phonetic writing. Speaking at a dinner for the First Turkish Language Congress of 1932, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk described this freeing of the Turkish language from Persian and Arabic as a war of liberation: "We are going to defeat Ottoman. Turkish is going to be a language as free and as independent as the Turkish nation" (qtd. in Lewis 49). In Tanpınar's work, the muffled sounds of the Ottoman world return as the lost voice of the past, and poetry, along with classical Ottoman music, assumes the status of high art.

The conjunction of violence and freedom in revolutionary futurism is reregistered in inverted form by another key image in *Beş Şehir,* that of the broken marble pools of the imperial Şerefabad Summer Palace in Istanbul, to which Tanpınar's narrator likens his "pile of names" irretrievably lost by their referents. As the narrator delivers his essays on Ankara, Konya, Erzurum, Bursa, and Istanbul, he mimics the elderly neighbor chanting the names of Istanbul's springs, warding off modernity and its generalized language with the singular proper name, that most talismanic of words. Yet something in their invocation as proper names signals their loss of that talismanic power, in a disenchanted *hasret*, or longing for the inaccessible, enchanted past.

In a 1953 essay, Tanpınar dwelled on the loss of the tulip as a canonical poetic symbol:

> [L]âlenin zevkteki yeri kayboldu. O artık hiç bir şeyin sembolü değildir. Ne şâir onun renginde sevgilisinin yanağının rengini hatırlıyor, ne nakkaş çiniye, mermere, yahut parmaklığın iyi dövülmüş madenden dantelâsına onun birlik işaretini, bir "lâmelif" in bükülüşü ile Allah'dan gayrı her mevcudun varlığını ortadan kaldıran sessiz belâgatını geçirmeye çalışıyor; ne de yazı ustası, eski lâm'ların kavsinden onun şeffaf fanusunu tutuşturuyor. Lâle şimdi . . . arkasından tanrısı çekilmiş herhangi bir şekil gibi sadece bir çiçek olarak mevcuttur. ("İstanbul'un" 115)
>
> There is no longer an aesthetic of the tulip. The tulip is no longer a symbol. The poet does not associate its color with that of the beloved's cheek; nor does the frescoist seek to convey on enameled tiles, marbles, and railings its sign of unity, its silent eloquence [communicated] through the bending of the letter *lâmelif*, which obliterates all existents other than God. Nor does the calligrapher hang its transparent globe from the arc of the letter *lâm*. The tulip . . . exists now as an arbitrary figure, whose god has withdrawn—merely as a flower.

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Once the tulip was employed as a symbol of God or likened to the beloved's cheek; in the old Arabo-Persian writing, the tulip's written sign even conformed to the shape of its referent. (Later in this essay, Tanpınar compares the cityscape of Ottoman Istanbul to an ornate book page, likening architectural patterns in urban space to different calligraphic styles.) Here the loss of divine writing is the loss of an enigma, of a magic structured by debt and guaranteed by God. Nothing could convey this point better than the literal meaning of the Ottoman word for metaphor, *istiâre*: "borrowing" (Andrews, *Introduction* 81). Under modernity, this debt economy of poetic language yields to the logic of general equivalence, the tulip returning to its random formal being as the arbitrary representation of a flower. To read this yielding of poetry to general equivalence in modernity as a moment of evolution or of crisis provoking or confirming evolution is, as I have argued, to ignore the yielding's structural anticipation in the displacement of the conditions of possibility for uses of language: an anticipation already written into Tanpınar's view (in *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyati Tarihi*) of Ottoman court poetry as drawn from a toolbox of "hazır madde" ("ready-made materials"; xxxv). In Tanpınar's own work, we can see, these ready-mades—frequently used symbols, such as the gem or the flower—devolve into empty vehicles, failed symbolizations, failed comparisons of the republican present with the imperial past. Their substantive content is now *hasret*: insatiable longing for the lost enchantment of language.

It would be a mistake, however, to read *Beş Şehir* as a narrative of *hasret* as loss. *Hasret* contains for the narrator a kind of reconciliation with, as well as alienation from, modernity's logic of general equivalence. As desacralized or dematerialized language, the language of modernity "merely" represents the world; the binary logic of equivalence separates, while linking, the signifier and the signified. The return of the imperial past in *Beş Şehir* is possible only in this representational language: "muhakkak ki bu eski şeyleri kendileri için sevmiyoruz. . . . [İ]çimizdeki didişmede kayıp olduğunu sandığımız bir tarafımızı onlarda arıyoruz" ("in essence, we do not like the things of the past in themselves. . . . [W]e look in them for a part of ourselves that we think is lost in the internal struggle of the present" ([1946] 215). What is more, Tanpınar affirms that any unified reconstruction of the past inevitably dissipates. Looking out over the city of Bursa—which, as the first Ottoman imperial capital, bears the most auratic name in *Beş Şehir*—the narrator recounts the dissemination of place, and then the memory of place, in language:

> Kendi kendime, ovanın ve etraftaki dağların neresine düştüklerini hiç aramadan, Lâmiî'nin meşhur manzumesinde, her yıl kışı kovmak için bahar ordusunu üç koldan yürüttüğü yerlerin adlarını saymağa çalışıyorum: Abıhayat Yaylağı, Molla Alanı, Saru Alan, Kurt Bılanı, Doğlu Baba, Şakım Efendi pınarı, Kırkpınar, Binyaylak, Karagöl, Hızırbey yurdu, Kuş oynağı. . . . Hayır, hepsini hatırlayamıyacağım, zaten sıralarını da unutmuşum. (102)

> Without searching for their location in the plain or around the mountains, I attempt to recount to myself the names of the places in [the fifteenth-century poet] Lâmii's well-known verse, places through which the army of spring approaches every year in three arms to expel the winter: Abıhayat Yaylaği, Molla Alanı, Saru Alan, Kurt Bılanı, Doğlu Baba, Şakım Efendi pınarı, Kırkpınar, Binyaylak, Karagöl, Hızırbey yurdu, Kuş oynaği. . . . No, I cannot recall all; I have forgotten their sequence too.

In this simultaneous mourning and forgetting of the past, we see how difference inevitably haunts. Lapsed modern language is reenchanted, its signs as "enigma containers" invoking the ghosts of the past (81). The traces of the past are nevertheless too dis-

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persed, too plural to be unified under one name. Through the narrator of *Beş Şehir,* the modern poet Tanpınar bears witness to the de-Ottomanization of Turkish—returning as a medium, a receptacle for the dead voices of the Ottoman world, whose visitations take the fragmentary form of proper names. The modern poet can only relay these signs; unable to decode their messages, he writes in order to echo the murmurs trapped in them.

Walter Benjamin's early, underread essay "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (1916; "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man") anticipates, in linguistic terms, the later, more widely circulated, and ambivalently celebrative analysis of modernity as the decline of "aura" in "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction") as well as in "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire").[16] In what follows, I trace this earlier anticipation, reading Benjamin and Tanpınar through each other and framing Tanpınar's *hasret* in a missed encounter with Benjamin's topos of melancholy.

Though Benjamin's theory of language changes across his body of work, one constant is his resistance to any notion of language as instrumental—as merely a means to the end of communicating truth.[17] In "Über Sprache," Benjamin rejects such communicative instrumentalism as a "bürgerliche" ("bourgeois") concept of language, which holds, "Das Mittel der Mitteilung ist das Wort, ihr Gegenstand die Sache, ihr Addressat ein Mensch" ("[T]he means of communication is the word, its object factual, its addressee a human being"; "Über Sprache" 144; "On Language" 318). Its rejection, in this early essay, takes the form of a partial reenchantment of the word, regranting to nature the language stripped from it by modernity and imputing both spirit (*Geist*) and irreducible spiritual "essence" (*geistige Wesen*) to all beings, in an explicit challenge to the preeminence of human reason (Hanssen 58). Beings, for Benjamin, communicate (*mitteilen*) their spiritual essences not through but in language. Language is neither an essence nor a sensory medium but a medium (*das Mediale*) in an extended sense: that through which a being reveals what of its spiritual essence is communicable in and as language ("Über Sprache" 142; "On Language" 315–16).

To explain the relation between this language of things and human language, Benjamin turns, in the second part of "Über Sprache," to the story of the Creation in Genesis 1. He observes that the creative power of God's word is absolute; at the same time, God endows humanity with the gift of language, in the power to name (149; 323). Although human naming (*erkennende Namen*) thus is an activity secondary to the omnipotence of divine words, it serves to differentiate human beings from other creatures (149; 323). Human language is then an echo of the divine word, translating the language of things into the human order (152; 325), and this translation is at once an ontological action (the mute object is incomplete until it is named) and an ethical action (the naming and named levels of creation are bonded).

Benjamin's understanding of language here does not oppose bourgeois instrumental communication (which presumes to represent the world directly) to metonymic dissemination (in the deferral of representation by the arbitrary character of the sign). We can only call his view of language symbolic: "Es ist nämlich Sprache in jedem Falle nicht allein Mitteilung des Mitteilbaren, sondern zugleich Symbol des Nicht-Mitteilbaren. . . . Diese haben nicht allein eine mitteilende, sondern . . . auch eine mit ihr eng verbundene symbolische Funktion" ("Language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable. . . . Names have not only a communicating function, but . . . also a closely connected symbolic function" (156; 331).[18] The

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end that modernity brings to language's symbolic function is then not a gain but a loss: the Fall, in Benjamin's conception, foreclosing the naming power of human language, translating it into multiple, abstract, and imperfect languages. This fallen state of human language, no longer "benannt . . . aus der einen seligen Paradiesessprache der Namen, sondern aus den hunderten Menschensprachen, in denen der Namen schon welkte" ("named from the one blessed, paradisiac language of names, but from the hundred languages of man, in which name has already withered"), produces modern melancholy (155; 330).

In the later essays "Der Erzähler" (1936; "The Storyteller") and "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" (1939), Benjamin would write of the newspaper as a key agent of this disenchantment of language, further displacing the oral culture of storytelling and substituting for this symbolic function of language the instrumentality of discourse as "an und für sich verständlich" ("understandable in and for itself"; "Erzähler" 390; "Storyteller" 88–89). Work is yet to be done—or, at least, yet to be meaningfully assimilated into the mainstream of comparative scholarship—on the relation of German language reforms of the early twentieth century to the language theories of thinkers like Benjamin, whose scholarly popularization turns on the apparent privilege he granted to mass-media technologies, a privilege easily (too easily) appropriated for the analysis of a late-twentieth-century techne Benjamin did not live to see.[19] But even the canonical Benjamin essays of the interwar period might be read less schematically than they usually are, for the ambivalence contained in the topos of melancholy. For Benjamin, as for Tanpınar, in a world of disenchanted language the modern subject can no longer experience (*erfahren*) in the old, true sense of that term: rather, now, they live in a present tense of successive, uniform, empty intervals, severed from past and future ("Über einige Motive" 212; "On Some Motifs" 179). If we read Benjamin closely, in the poetry of Baudelaire, the novels of Proust, and the tales of Poe, he finds ways to affirm, as well as to lament, the experience of the modern. If Baudelaire's melancholic gaze, in Benjamin's reading, dwells on the horrors of the modern world, it also captures that world's enchantments (199; 169). And whereas Proust fashions from *mémoire involontaire* the only crisis-proof reconstitution of real experience, it is in the empty, homogeneous time of modernity that its "flashes"—"amorphous (*bildlos*) and formless, indefinite (*unbestimmt*) and weighty"—register the loss of the past *as* experience ("Zum Bilde" 347; "Image" 214).

In the autobiographical "Berliner Chronik" (1932; "Berlin Chronicle"), Benjamin wrote:

> Die Sprache hat es unmißverständlich bedeutet, daß das Gedächtnis nicht ein Instrument zur Erkundung der Vergangenheit ist sondern deren Schauplatz. Es ist das Medium des Erlebten wie das Erdreich das Medium ist, in dem die toten Städte verschüttet liegen. Wer sich der eigenen verschütteten Vergangenheit zu nähern trachtet, muß sich verhalten wie ein Mann, der gräbt. Das bestimmt den Ton, die Haltung echter Erinnerungen. Sie dürfen sich nicht scheuen, immer wieder auf einen und denselben Sachverhalt zurückzukommen; ihn auszustreuen wie man Erde ausstreut, ihn umzuwühlen wie man Erdreich umwühlt. (486)

> Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This confers the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. (25–26)

The allegorical language of the modern poet does not restore the lost past in its wholeness but rather represents, in alienation and rec-

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onciliation, the passage of time, in and into modernity. Language here is a medium in the extended sense, which includes and registers, without being able fully to represent, violent transformations of the historical conditions of possibility for its own use. The ghosts of the past here are ruins to which language is compared, not as lingering presences but as absent ones, in an image remarkably similar to that of Tanpınar's pile of names in the broken marble of the Şerefabad Summer Palace. "Once culture and civilization vanish," Tanpınar wrote in "İstanbul'un Mevsimleri ve Sanatlarımız" ("Istanbul's Seasons and Our Arts"), "the angels that used to wait by the side of each letter transform into noble, geometrical figures" (121).

One is tempted to say that Benjamin's linguistic debris mixes with Tanpınar's, revealing both crucial differences and remote continuities, and that this is one (small and not the only) way we might address the urgency to figure new forms, modes, and practices of comparison in and for today's disciplines. That Benjamin and Tanpınar thus appear closer than current structures of vision permit them to be may be a lapse in professional global knowledge (of Tanpınar's works if not of Benjamin's)—a lapse that can be remedied by greater local knowledge of a Turkey now understood everywhere in the liberal wing of our profession to be as crucial to comparative literature as to other, more practical projects for European community. But we have more than that here, something more substantial than inclusion in remedial representation: an invitation to revisit the comparative categories of modernity (West and East, Europe and Turkey) and the disciplinary divisions structured by them.

## Notes

I thank David Damrosch, Sibel Erol, Ursula Heise, Brian Lennon, Martin Puchner, Dermot Ryan, Özge Serin, and Nadir Sohrabi for their feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

1. On Istanbul as a birthplace of comparative literature, see also Apter, "Comparative Exile."

2. Kasaba provides a useful definition of the relevant terms here. "Incorporation refers to a two-fold process: one is the establishment of links between the production processes of an external arena and the loci of production and consumption in the capitalist world economy; the other, is the integration of the political structures of this area into the interstate network of the world system" (4). Peripheralization refers to "the status of a zone in the world economy" (5). Ottoman peripheralization has been studied extensively, especially under 1960s Marxist and 1970s neo-Marxist influences on Turkish history writing. See Keyder 25–40 for a useful macrosociological analysis of Ottoman peripheralization.

3. On the rationalist, positivist roots of the Kemalist revolution, see Kazancıgil and Özbudun.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Turkish into English are mine.

5. See Tanpınar, "Antalyalı Genç Kıza Mektup," considered his manifesto of literary influence. On the concept of "belated modernity," see Jusdanis (esp. the introd. [xi–xviii]).

6. Such affirmation may be one danger, for example, of the model proposed by Benedict Anderson in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, discussed in the following section.

7. For sources in English on modern Turkish literature, see Finn; Evin. See also Irzık and Güzeldere for a selection of recent articles published in English on debates around modern Turkish literature and culture. Walter G. Andrews's *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song* and Victoria R. Holbrook's *The Unreadable Shores of Love* are valuable works in English on Ottoman poetry. Work on Tanpınar in English includes Göknar; Feldman; Oğuzertem; and Atis.

8. Gürbilek focuses on some of the same passages I discuss here, invoking as well the concept of *hasret*—though the Turkish language reforms do not play a part in her account. Her *Yer Değiştiren Gölge* 11–23 is an earlier Benjaminian reading of Tanpınar.

9. Chatterjee objects to Anderson's presupposition of universally experienced "empty homogeneous time," which is "the utopian time of capital," and to his substitution of utopian time for the true heterogeneous time of modernity (166). Harootunian criticizes Chatterjee for seeking alternative modernities in a romantic zone outside the time of capital. Harootunian agrees with Anderson's serialization theory while criticizing his Eurocentrism, noting that colonized space is not simply "shadowed" by European modernity but positively haunted by ghosts that return from the premodern past, interrupting the historical present of the modern ("Ghostly Comparisons" 189).

10. Morris contextualizes Foucault's analysis of money in Marx's analysis of the commodity: the generalization

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of the commodity form is not merely a repetition of the emergence of capital in the free exchange of labor power; rather, it refers to the intensified monetization of merchants' and usurers' capital, which in both European capitalism and the Ottoman Empire precedes capital proper and the institution of wage labor as the dominant social relation. As Marx writes, "[B]oth merchants' capital and interest-bearing capital are derivative forms, and at the same time . . . historically, these two forms appear before the modern primary form of capital" (*Das Kapital 1* 166; *Capital 1* 267). The commodity form, in other words, appears when the producer produces not for immediate use but for exchange; it is common to many diverse "economic social formations" (171; 273). Money, then, is capital's "first form of appearance" (149; 247), though money and capital are not the same thing. Marx continues: "we know . . . that a relatively feeble development of commodity circulation suffices for the creation of all . . . forms [of money]. It is otherwise with capital. . . . [Capital] arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller of his own labor-power" (171; 274). On this point, besides the work cited in n2 on Ottoman peripheralization, see Akyıldız for a monetary history of the nineteenth century that deals specifically with the first Ottoman paper currency (*kaime)*; for an account of Ottoman money that begins in the thirteenth century, see Pamuk.

11. See Parla 105–24 for an influential reading of the novel. Parla argues that the novel registers the Ottoman cultural crisis of representation and communication. In my reading, what is foreclosed in the novel is not the possibility of representation, as suggested by Parla, but that of overcoming representation.

12. See Demiralp 59–74 for an analysis of Tanpınar's concept of history.

13. "Ferahfeza" refers to a composition by the renowned Ottoman classical composer Ismail Dede Efendi (1778–1846). Karacaahmed Cemetery is located in the Üsküdar district of Istanbul; it is known for its centuries-old cypress groves. Şerefabad Palace, also in Üsküdar, was constructed by Murad IV (1612–40), demolished in 1794, and rebuilt several times subsequently.

14. A historical account in English is Lewis. See also Sadoğlu, who begins with the mid–nineteenth century, when standardization programs for Ottoman Turkish (including a debated script change) had already begun.

15. For this reading of the Derrida passage, see Morris 48–49. One might acknowledge here as well Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. His essentialism and ahistoricism notwithstanding, McLuhan produced a valuable analysis of the social and political effects of the phonetic alphabet and print technology.

16. Hanssen suggests that we "address Benjamin's complex language theory—sometimes neglected in favor of more accessible work, such as the technology essay—in order to unlock how modernity's progressive aestheticization of the cultural field occurred at the expense of an unalloyed purity of language" (57). She argues that "Benjamin . . . sought to . . . avert language's reduction to a mere means of communication, the trafficking in worn-out coins, exploited for their exchange-value—whether perpetrated by the jargon of neo-Kantianism or the empty slogans wielded by at least part of modernity's mass media culture" (69). I thank Özge Serin for her insights on Benjamin's "Über Sprache."

17. A later turn in Benjamin's language theory is found in "Über das mimetische Vermögen" (1933; "On the Mimetic Faculty"). In Benjamin's phylogenetic account of mimesis, human beings are endowed with the mimetic faculty of producing and recognizing similarities, and "[d]ergestalt wäre die Sprache die höchste Stufe des mimetischen Verhaltens und das vollkommenste Archiv der unsinnlichen Ähnlichkeit" ("language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarities"; 213; 336).

18. In "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (1921; "The Task of the Translator"), Benjamin writes, "Es bleibt in aller Sprache und ihren Gebilden außer dem Mitteilbaren ein Nicht-Mitteilbares, ein, je nach dem Zusammenhang, in dem es angetroffen wird, Symbolisierendes oder Symbolisiertes. . . . Wenn aber dieser, ob verborgen oder fragmentarisch, dennoch gegenwärtig im Leben als das Symbolisierte selbst ist, so wohnt er nur symbolisierend in den Gebilden" ("In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. . . . Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolized thing itself, whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized form"; 60; 79). Authentic translation aspires to transform human-language symbolization into the symbolization of pure language. In *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*), meanwhile, Benjamin writes that the Romantic symbol, a theological construct that the Romantics introduced into aesthetics, meant more than the representation of the divine: "Als symbolisches Gebilde soll das Schöne bruchlos ins Göttliche übergehen" ("As a symbolic construct, the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole"; 175; 160). He rejects this construct, since it erases the breaks in history, reducing "[d]as Zeitmaß . . . das mystische Nu" ("the measure of time . . . [to] the mystical instant"; 182; 165). Allegory, by contrast, reveals nature in its inevitable decay in time (197; 178).

19. I have in mind here, of course, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit." Early-twentieth-century German language reforms included the standardization of orthography and pronunciation and the replacement of Gothic script (Fraktur, *Eckenschrift*) with Roman letters (*Antiqua*, *Rundschrift*). Waterman is a useful source on German language reforms.

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