

55. Rewriting The American Dream: Ahmet Mithat's Narrative of The New World¹

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APA: Huntürk Yavuz, E. (2024). Rewriting The American Dream: Ahmet Mithat's Narrative of The New World. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, (40), 897-912. <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.1500765>.

Abstract

19th century is a period marked by intensified and structuralized modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire. The declaration of Tanzimat initiated the transformation process on the social and political level. Meanwhile, introduction of the popular Western novel genre into the Ottoman literary system through translation served as an effective literary tool to convey the critiques and new ideas on Westernization to a wider population. The second quarter of the nineteenth century, was marked by the prolific publication of translations from the French and the adoption of European popular genre, the novel. The introduction of the Western novel as a new genre created a new area of discussion on the conduct of translation as well. Ahmet Mithat, a pivotal figure of the Tanzimat period, stands out as one of the pioneers of the novel genre with his novels, adaptations and translations. Being an attractive subject for the translation studies, Mithat's works provide vivid examples of traditional Ottoman translation and text-production practices. Mithat was also the first to produce fictional works on America. These works shed light on how Mithat, and indeed the Ottoman intelligentsia, perceived the New World. This article delves into Mithat's adaptation and/or rewriting of the short story "Amour et Galvanoplastie" by Oscar Michon, published in *Le Figaro* in 1885, and René Lefévre's fictional work *Paris en Amérique* published in 1863 which came out as *Fenni Bir Roman Yahut Amerika Doktorları* (A Scientific Novel or American Doctors) in 1888. By drawing upon André Lefevre's concept of rewriting, I will argue that Mithat rewrites Michon's satirical piece and Lefévre's pro-American fictional novel and thereby recreates an imagined America to his readers from an Occidentalist perspective.

Keywords: literary history, translation as rewriting, 19th century Ottoman Empire, America, Ahmet Mithat

¹ **Statement (Thesis / Paper):** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest is declared.

Funding: No external funding was used to support this research.

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Source: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

Similarity Report: Received - Turnitin, Rate: 8

Ethics Complaint: editor@rumelide.com

Article Type: Research article, **Article Registration Date:** 08.05.2024-**Acceptance Date:** 20.06.2024-

Publication Date: 21.06.2024; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1500765

Peer Review: Two External Referees / Double Blind

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Amerikan Rüyasını Yeniden Yazmak: Ahmet Mithat'ın Yeni Dünya Anlatısı³

Öz

19.yüzyıl, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun modernleşme çabalarının hız kazandığı ve yapıllaştığı bir dönemdir. Tanzimat Fermanı'nın ilanı ile birlikte toplumsal ve siyasi dönüşüm sürecine giren imparatorlukta, Batı karşısında devleti güçlü tutma çabaları gündemini korumuştur. Bu dönemde Batı'da popüler olan roman türü çeviri yoluyla Osmanlı edebi sistemine girmiş ve Osmanlı aydınının Batılılaşma tartışmalarını topluma yayacak etkili bir edebi araç olmuştur. Popülerlik kazanan çeviri edebiyat ile Osmanlı'da çeviri anlayışı da tartışmaya açılmıştır. Tanzimat döneminin önde gelen isimlerinden olan Ahmet Mithat ise roman türünde çeviri ve telif en çok eseri kaleme alan yazarların başında gelmektedir. Osmanlı çeviri geleneğini şekillendiren Mithat, bu yönüyle Çeviribilim çalışmalarının da en çok ele alınan yazarlarından biri olmuştur. 19.yüzyıl Osmanlı edebi sisteminde Amerika ile ilgili ilk kurgu eserleri kaleme alan da yine Ahmet Mithat'tır. Bu eserler bize Mithat'ın ve aslında Osmanlı aydınının, Batı'nın bir parçası olan Yeni Dünya'yı Osmanlı karşısında nasıl konumlandığı hakkında önemli bilgiler sunmaktadır. Bu makalede, Mithat'ın iki Fransız yazarın eserinden "ilham alarak" kurguladığı 1888 yılında yayınlanan *Fenni Bir Roman Yahut Amerika Doktorları* kısa romanı, André Lefevere'nin yeniden yazım kavramı çerçevesinde incelenecektir. Mithat, Oscar Michon'un 1885 yılında Le Figaro gazetesinde yayınlanan, Amerika'daki bilim ve ilerleme çabalarını iki bilim adamının parodisi üzerinden anlatan "Amour et Galvanoplastie" öyküsünü, kahramanlarını ve olay örgüsünü koruyarak, "daha komik ve eğlencelisini" yazma iddiasıyla yeniden kaleme almış ve Amerika'yı tanımayan okuyucularına kısaca ve kolayca Amerika'yı ve terakkiperverliğini tanıtmak için René Lefebvre'nin 1863 yılında Amerikan demokrasi ve devlet anlayışına bir övgü olarak kaleme aldığı *Paris en Amérique* adlı bilim kurgu romanından öğelerle bir önsöz yazmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: edebiyat tarihi, yeniden yazım olarak çeviri, 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Amerika, Ahmet Mithat

³ **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Çıkar Çatışması: Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

Finansman: Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

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Kaynak: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Benzerlik Raporu: Alındı – Turnitin, Oran: %8

Etik Şikayeti: editor@rumelide.com

Makale Türü: Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 08.05.2024-**Kabul Tarihi:** 20.06.2024-**Yayın Tarihi:** 21.06.2024; **DOI:** 10.29000/rumelide.1500765

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

This article aims to examine Ahmet Mithat's first fictional work about America, *Fenni Bir Roman Yahut Amerika Doktorları* (A Scientific Novel or American Doctors), within the framework of André Lefevere's concept of rewriting. Mithat, one of the most significant figures of the Tanzimat era and a prominent author in the emerging novel genre in the Ottoman literary system, has faced criticism regarding the quality and purpose of his works both during his time and by later literary critics. However, his extensive body of work offers significant insights into both Mithat as a writer of the Tanzimat period and the intellectual perspective of the era towards the West. The 19th century marked a period when modernization in the Ottoman Empire was inevitable, and reforms became institutionalized and accelerated. Ottoman intellectuals showed various reactions to these efforts. In Tanzimat literature, the novel, which also carried an educational mission, served as a tool to depict the West through both positive and negative examples for readers. In *American Doctors*, Mithat not only introduces the genre of science fiction, which had become popular in the Ottoman Empire through Jules Verne's books, but also satirizes the American progress-mania. He achieves this by adapting Oscar Michon's short story "Amour et Galvanoplastie" published in *Le Figaro* in 1885 and Édouard René Laboulaye Lefébvre's novel *Paris en Amérique*, published in 1863, which quickly gained popularity both in the United States and Europe. In the preface of his novella, Mithat explains that he uses Lefébvre's novel to quickly acquaint his readers with America. Lefébvre's novel presents a narrative that exalts American democracy, the education system, and the cult of the self-made man. However, Mithat decontextualizes these adapted sections and rewrites America with an Occidentalist perspective for his readers. This article will first provide a historical framework by discussing Ottoman modernization and the transformation within Tanzimat literature. It will then examine the understanding and function of translation in the Ottoman context. By employing Lefevere's concept of rewriting, this study will analyze how Mithat's adaptation functions and how he employs a rewriting strategy to portray America from an Occidentalist perspective.

1. Introduction

From the 18th century onwards, the Ottoman Empire underwent a series of reforms and modernization attempts in political, military, and social areas in response to the changing dynamics of the global landscape. Once politically, economically, and militarily more competitive than Europe, the Ottoman Empire found itself lagging behind as Europe made continual progress. The process of religious reform and secularization paved the way for scientific development; industrialization and trade increased economic welfare, and as a consequence, new mercantilist capitals emerged (Berkes, 1975, p.175). Europe, now a significant challenge to the Empire, necessitated the reassessment of traditional institutions, military power, production methods, and political order. The Ottoman perception of the West had to change.

The 19th century witnessed relentless debates and attempts aimed at empowering the Empire vis-à-vis the West without losing the Ottoman identity. The Westernization/modernization process had a concrete effect in the administrative reforms of the 1839 Tanzimat Edict, which was an attempt to structure the modernization of the government and systematically adopt European science and technology. The 19th century was a period marked by intensified and structured modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire. The Tanzimat (Reorder Edict) period initiated a transition phase on both social and political levels. The debates over how to maintain Ottoman identity vis-à-vis the West remained a central concern. Meanwhile, the introduction of the popular Western novel genre into the Ottoman literary system through translation served as an effective literary tool to convey critiques and new ideas on Westernization to a wider population.

The new era of Westernization also permeated the Ottoman literary atmosphere. “The period was marked by a concerted effort to impose innovation from the top, fierce debates around the purpose of literary genres, and an increasing simplification of language and writing” (Asil, 2020, p.105). These internal debates were largely influenced by European ideas that were flowing into the Ottoman literary system through translation. The adoption of translation played a crucial role in the significant cultural, literary, and institutional transformations and reforms within Ottoman society, marking the beginning of the literary Tanzimat period in Ottoman culture. The second quarter of the nineteenth century was thus marked by the prolific publication of translations from the French and the adoption of the European popular genre, the novel. Voltaire, Alexandre Dumas fils, Georges Ohnet, and Chateaubriand were among the most translated French authors (Sevük, 1993; Kaplan, 1974; Uyanık, 2013; Karadağ, 2012; Demircioğlu, 2009; Altuğ, 2018).

Ahmet Mithat, a pivotal figure of the Tanzimat period, described as a “forty-horsepower writing machine”, stands out as one of the pioneers of the novel genre with his novels, adaptations and translations. He was a central figure of the debates of his time and contributed to the discussions through his numerous works. Cevdet Perin (1946), İsmail Habib Sevük (1993), Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (2013) examines Mithat's literary works and criticizes him for lacking artistic concerns as an author. Orhan Okay (2017), in his canonical work on Ahmet Mithat's perception of the West gives a detailed analysis of his approach to different aspects of the Western society, institutions, economy, ideology and science. Okay's profound work still forms the basis of Ahmet Mithat studies within the context of Ottoman modernization. Nükhet Esen (2006), Carter Findley (1989), Fatih Andı (2006), and Fatih Altuğ (2018) are among the contemporary scholars who focused on Mithat and his function in Ottoman literary and intellectual history. Mithat was also an attractive subject for the translation studies. His works provide vivid examples of traditional Ottoman translation and text-production practices.

Saliha Paker (2014) draws a framework for studying the Ottoman literary text by focusing on the various methods of text production in the Ottoman tradition. Işın Bengi-Öner (1990), in her unpublished dissertation, elaborates on the concept of equivalence in Ottoman translation context by examining Ahmet Mithat's translations in various forms. Cemal Demircioğlu (2009) utilizes Ahmet Mithat's ideas on translation in order to define Ottoman concept of translation and different translational practices in his unpublished dissertation project. These works provide an elaborate framework for the study of Ottoman translation history and approach to text. Ahmet Mithat, the first Ottoman littérateur and the sine qua non of the Tanzimat period undoubtedly played a significant role in the formation of the novel in the cultural repertoire of the period. İsmail Habib Sevük (1993) regards Ahmet Mithat as the first story and novel writer. *Hasan Mellah*, written as a tit for tat for Alexander Dumas Père's *Count Monte Kristo* (translated into Ottoman Turkish by Theodor Kasap in 1874) was the first original (teelif) literary work in novel genre. Sevük (1993) defends that Ahmet Mithat represents the “popular novel” and aesthetic and artistic concerns are hard to find in his writings. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (2013) notes that Western-style stories appeared in Ottoman literature with Ahmet Mithat's *Kıssadan Hisse* and *Letaif-i Rivayet* and he predominantly shaped the literary taste of his time. He finds Mithat highly didactic in style, depicting him as a very eager teacher, who dedicated his life to elevating his society.

Carter Findley (1998) comments on Mithat's versatility as “the jack of all trades and master of none” (p.20) whereas Cevdet Perin (1946) depicts his books as “a bonmarché of ideas and emotions” (p.103). Mithat was at the center of many important debates of his time, ranging from Female education to political economy; the defense of Islam to the simplification of Turkish language; and from modernization to Ottoman identity.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Translation and Rewriting in the Ottoman Context

The introduction of the Western novel as a new genre created a new area of discussion on the nature of translation. The distinction between the original (telif) and translated (terceme) was interwoven when compared to the modern perception of the two terms in the Ottoman literature. Saliha Paker (2014) notes that the Ottoman practice of translation serves as a broad term encompassing both word-for-word and loose translation and various forms of rewriting methods. Traditionally, the original (telif) was a literary work based partially on translation and the writer's personal contribution. In terceme (translation), literal translation and the translator's personal ideas intertwine. As a matter of fact, the novel was not a literal translation of the source text, rather it was a new version created by the choices of the translator (Altuğ, 2018). "As legitimate as the author, the translator could add to the text, cut, or omit certain parts that he found necessary thus rewriting the source text as an active agent who rejects and accepts the ideas created by the others according to his cultural context" (2018, p.85). Thus the text in translation was dynamic and continuously generating new meanings with the collaboration of the reader.

Ahmet Mithat's translational strategy reflects the traditional Ottoman approach to the text. He states that he does not confine himself to the source text; rather, he appropriates the text to align it with the moral codes of his society, rewriting the source text and adapting it to the Ottoman cultural context. Thus, he plays an active mediating role between two cultures (Demircioğlu, 2009, p. 31). Bengi-Öner scrutinizes Mithat's published literary works to categorize his translations and discovers that he employs various methods in presenting his work. She finds that in some of his works, Mithat presents himself as the translator, naming a source text and author; in others, he presents himself as the author while mentioning the source text. In some instances, he solely presents himself as the translator without providing any information on the author or the source text (2006, p.340). In *American Doctors*, Mithat presents himself as the author yet references two source texts for his novella.

This multilayered approach to text highlights the complexity of the translation process, which cannot be limited to a simple transfer of a text from one language to the other. Mithat's strategy of rewriting and adapting the source text for his target audience is not a mere attempt to make the text more entertaining for his readers. Mithat's appropriations attaches certain cultural, educational and ideological functions to the text in its new target context. André Lefevere (1992), pointing out these various actors at play during the verbal transfer, deconstructs the traditional translation process and defines it as a form of rewriting the source text instead of a word for word transfer:

Whether they produce translations, literary histories or their more compact spin-offs, reference works, anthologies, criticism, or editions, rewriters adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time (p.7)

For Lefevere, rewriting is an inevitable part of translation as the translation process is directly or indirectly shaped by the cultural, political, and ideological context of the period in question. Lefevere argues that whether consciously or not, the translator appropriates the source text to align it with the expectations and ideology of the target culture or the translator. Translation is not a mere linguistic transfer for Lefevere, instead, it is a complex transformative process in which various factors such as patronage and poetics are at play. Translation as rewriting serves as a practical instrument for shaping

the target reader's mindset. Thus, including translation, all acts of rewriting are ideological by nature. Translators "intentionally or unintentionally" manipulate the original texts with their linguistic and cultural preferences thus transforming the original to function in a specific society for a specific interest (Lefevere 1992, p.xii).

Lefevere's conceptualization of rewriting provides a structural framework for the exploration of Ottoman translation practices in a larger context of Westernization. Translation was not a one-way linear transfer of European modernization to the Ottoman society, it was rather a sophisticated process. The Ottoman literati utilized European novel as an influential tool to disseminate their ideas on Ottoman modernization and progress. The translation process very often puts on a didactic nature in which the Ottoman author/translator indoctrinates his views on his readers through positive and negative examples of the Western civilization and moral values offering an Ottomanized version of modernity and progress. To put it in Ahmet Mithat's words; "If we try to Europeanize only for the sake of becoming European, we shall lose our own character. If we, on the other hand, add the European civilization to our own character, we shall not only preserve, perpetuate and maintain our character but also fortify and refine it" (Ringer ve Charrière 2020, p.5).

In *American Doctors*, Mithat's strategy of presenting himself as the author while referencing two source texts highlights his active role in mediating between the West and the East. This approach allows him to frame a convincing narrative blended with Ottoman values and perspectives, thereby creating a new, hybrid text that speaks to his readers' needs and sensibilities.

2.2. Constructing the European "Other"

Ottoman intellectuals, grappling with the challenges of Western imperialism and modernization, often sought to define their identity in relation to the West. This involved a complex negotiation where Western influences were selectively adopted and reinterpreted to fit the Ottoman socio-cultural context. The novel, as a Western literary genre, was domesticated with traditional Ottoman literary elements and functioned as a means of forming a modern Ottoman identity by creating a binary opposition similar to that used by Orientalists. Through the novel as a literary form, Mithat and his contemporaries engaged in a critical dialogue with Western ideas, striving to modernize Ottoman society while preserving its unique cultural identity. One way of preserving Ottoman identity and its religious and core values was to dissociate un-Ottoman elements in the Western character by drawing a thick line through othering.

Occidentalism is the Eastern counterpart to Orientalism, where the West is portrayed through a set of simplified and often negative stereotypes. Occidentalism, involves the depiction of the West as morally corrupt, spiritually empty, and excessively materialistic (Buruma and Margalit, 2005, p.20). Carter Findley (1998) asserts that Europeans, in defining themselves, have engaged in the process of "othering" the Middle East and North Africa through a binary opposition which formed the basis of Orientalism. The continuance of this "othering" relied on the existence of inevitable polarities, such as male-female, Europe-East. The encounter of these opposing poles has led to the proliferation of diverse ideas and images. The exploration of Western perceptions of the East by Ottoman writers of the Tanzimat period has a significant contribution to the formation of Occidental counter-discourse.

Xiaomei Chen, in her book *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (1998) defines that Orientalism, in its binary nature, also brings forth Occidentalism. Thus, as the East constructs the "Western other," it makes use of local sources in the process. According to Xiaomei Chen

(1995), Occidentalism has emerged as a parallel notion to Orientalism, characterized as a discursive practice wherein the Orient actively engages in the construction of its Western counterpart. This process enables the Orient to actively participate and self-appropriate with local creativity, even in the face of being appropriated and shaped by Western entities. According to Partha Chatterjee (1993), "anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial (or semi-colonial) society" (p.117). Chatterjee emphasizes that this domain has two layers: the first is the material external layer, and the second is the spiritual internal layer, and at the latter, nationalism reaches its highest degree. Anti-colonial nationalism aims to facilitate a shift towards modernity in language, governance, gender roles, and societal practices through a non-Western form of modernization (Chatterjee, 1993).

In the 19th century, this perspective can be seen in the works of Eastern writers and intellectuals who sought to challenge the imperialist narratives imposed by the West. At the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman intellectual, by forming an unusual united front against Europe's representations of the Orient, dismantled the Orientalist discourse's grand claims about religion, artistic, and cultural production, as well as its interpretations regarding the Eastern public and private life, which were made ignorantly and distortingly (Çelik, 2020, p.19). Zeynep Çelik marks the late nineteenth century and early republican era as a period largely shaped by a counter-discourse to European Orientalism. Namık Kemal⁴, one of the prominent intellectuals of the period, wrote an article titled "Europe Doesn't Know the East" in 1872. Kemal, criticizes the Western perceptions and misrepresentations of the East. He argues that Europeans, in their orientalist depictions, fail to grasp the true essence of the Eastern world, often portraying them with ignorance and prejudice (Çelik, 2020, p.59). Ahmet Mithat shares his disappointment with European perception of the Eastern women in his prominent work *Avrupa'da Bir Cevelan* (1889). He objects the European understanding of the East from a similar perspective that of Namık Kemal. Another significant literary figure of the period, Ebuzziya Tevfik⁵ highlights Western obsession with progress in an article with the same title two decades after Namık Kemal. In "Europe Doesn't Know the West", Ebuzziya Tevfik writes a short critique of a piece published in a French newspaper by Ernst Mayer claiming that a newspaper has been published in the Ottoman empire and circulated all over the Turkic world. Ebuzziya explains that there is obviously no basis for this claim and Mayer probably misled by the European sources as informants. He points out the necessity of producing decent Ottoman sources of information for the Europeans.

The Ottoman Empire, obviously, did not experience a colonial historical past with the West. While territories once under Ottoman rule may have entered Western colonization, the structural center of the Ottoman administration maintained its independence. However, from the early 19th century onward, the Ottoman Empire rapidly lost territories and failed to keep an independent status as it faced political, military, and technological inferiority against the West (Berkes 1975;Ortaylı 2005;İnalçık 2006). Fatih Altuğ (2018) asserts that

With the advent of the 19th century, the Ottoman center transformed into the periphery of the modern imperial system created by actors like England, France, and Russia[...]The previous subordinate nations and non-Muslims, due to their proximity to the global empire, rose in the hierarchy, while the dominant nation, both internally and externally, weakened. The method devised by the Ottoman ruling elites to compensate for this upheaval and to reestablish order and dominance was to reorganize the state as a modern empire (p.71).

⁴ Namık Kemal (1840-1888) is a prominent Ottoman intellectual, poet, and playwright, known for his support for social and political reform. He is also regarded as a forerunner of Turkish nationalism and played a key role in the Young Ottoman movement, promoting ideas of liberty, justice, and modernization.

⁵ Ebuzziya Tevfik (1849-1913) was a renowned Turkish poet, playwright and founder of the modern printing press.

In his article titled "Post-Colonial Literature and Notes on Post-Tanzimat Turkish Literature," Laurent Mignon (2003), supporting the definitions of Chatterjee and Chen, discusses post-colonial theoretical approaches in the literary field. Mignon, like Findley and Altuğ, asserts that the Ottoman Empire did not have a colonial past, distinguishing it from colonized countries. However, he notes that the economic and political dependence on the West, especially in the 19th century and the early years of the Republic, was not significantly different from that of colonial countries. He suggests that this period can be evaluated within the same theoretical framework.

Mignon (2003) argues that in a colonized country, intellectuals attempt to establish a connection with pre-colonial cultures to create a new national literature. To achieve this, they must confront the colonial period and the culture of the colonizer. In the field of literature, adopting the language of the colonizer and/or appropriating certain literary genres and discourses produced by their culture is a crucial aspect of this confrontation. The colonizer is the "other," and intellectuals from the third world engage with this "other" to define their cultural identity. Thus, during the Tanzimat period, the introduction of the Western genre novel into the Ottoman literary repertoire through translation provided Ottoman intellectuals with an area to reimagine and reconstruct the West through an Occidental lens. Ahmet Mithat utilizes western genre, novel and the new land, America, as a sight for his portrayal of good and bad modernization.

Carter Findley in his article titled "Ahmet Mithat in Europe" elaborates on Mithat's participation in 1889 Orientalist Congress in Stocholm. Findley contextualizes Mithat's observations and engagements at the conference with Chen and Chatterjee's conceptualizations and addresses Mithat as an Ottoman Occidental. However Fatih Andı (2006) claims that Mithat cannot be regarded as an Occidentalist although he was hesitant and extremely careful with the Western values, knowledge and sometimes technology (2006, p.262). Andı avoids labeling Ahmet Mithat as an Occidentalist yet acknowledges Mithat's alteritist approach to the West, which indeed forms the basis of Occidental discourse.

3. A Scientific Novel or American Doctors

The New Land, America, remained as an exotic place in the Ottoman mind for a long time. This exoticism stemmed from its portrayal as a fantastical landscape inhabited by 'savage' populations and characterized by a wild geography. Despite rare accounts of the discovery of America authored by Ottoman writers in the early sixteenth century, Ottoman intellectual interest for America increased only around the mid-nineteenth century.⁶

Chateaubriand's *Atala or the Loves of Two Indian Savages in the Desert* (1801) is an early work of fiction on America published in France, gaining popularity and inspiring adaptations across various genres. Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem's⁷ translation of "Atala", the first fictional work introduced into the Ottoman literary system, marked a significant milestone. On the other hand, by the time the novel published in the Ottoman Empire, America had already transformed into an industrialized country and the native tribes faced either assimilation or forced migration.

⁶ As an example, American dragoman John P. Brown complains about the Ottoman image of the New World and recalls an audience with the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs where he has to confront rather absurd kinds of "savage" questions about the native Americans which apparently annoys him a lot.(see "A Very Interesting Letter from the Orient", *Scioto Gazette*, 06.10.1842)

⁷ Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem (1847-1914) was another prominent Turkish poet, novelist, translator and playwright of the Tanzimat period.

Ahmet Mithat, followed Rezaizade and published two fictional works on America. *Rikalda yahut Amerika'da Vahşet Alemi* (Rikalda or Savage World in America, 1889) is a novel about a native American tribe in which Mithat discusses civilization through the encounter of the colonizer and the colonized. The burlesque novella titled *Fenni Bir Roman Yahut Amerika Doktorları* (A Scientific Novel or American Doctors, 1888) satirizes American scientific progress and materialism. Although both works are presented as "original," Ahmet Mithat reveals the source texts that inspired him to write a novel in the forewords of his novels.

Promising a "more humorous and entertaining" version, Mithat rewrites and enlarges the story of Oscar Michon into a science-fiction novella titled "A Scientific Novel or American Doctors" in 1888. The novel occupies a significant place in the history of Turkish literature as it stands out as the first original example of science-fiction and literary work on America.

Fenni Roman, or scientific novel as a genre, is an embodiment of the Ottoman Empire's efforts in reform and modernization, as well as its desire to follow Western scientific and technological advancements. Seda Uyanık (2013) characterizes the genre as "Ottoman science fiction," highlighting its development in response to the conditions existing within the empire (p. 25). Fenni novels gained wider acceptance among Ottoman readers due to their focus on science and technology, alleviating concerns about moral issues deemed dangerous and irrelevant to the Ottoman audience. İsmail Habib Sevük (1993) notes that one of the most translated and highly regarded Western authors in this genre was Jules Verne. "Verne's novels were popular both for providing scientific and geographical knowledge to children and youth and for their suitability to be on the shelf of the respectable family libraries" (p.145). On the other hand, Ahmet Mithat's initial step into original science fiction can be evaluated as aiming not only to convey the state of science in America to his readers but also to arouse interest and entertain them (Asil, 2020; Uyanık, 2013).

The story "Amour et Galvanoplastie" was published in Le Figaro's Literary Supplement in 1885. The barely one page story satirizes American obsession with progress through two ambitious scientists. Doctor Bowley is researching on different poisons, killing animals via narcotics and bringing them to life afterwards. He is also a member of the Society of Dissection which separates the cadaver into parts to examine it. Bowley, curious to understand the physical and mental condition of the starving people, stops eating for weeks. Michon (1885) summarizes Bowley's engagement with science as "completely useless to him and his people" (p.138). On the other hand Doctor Gripping is obsessed with galvanoplasty and dreaming about turning big creatures into nickel. These two scientists are neighbors and although they do not understand each other's work, they still enjoy being friends.

One day, determined to experience death and coming back of the soul, Doctor Bowley decides to try experimental narcotics on himself. He only shares this plan with his assistant, Dodll. Dodll will wake him up with "traditional ways" as slapping and massaging on the stomach after forty-eight hours (Michon, 1885). After taking the poison, Bowley soon loses consciousness and regains it after couple of minutes. Though conscious, he is totally death physically. Enjoying his condition, he soon starts to observe what is happening around him. His colleagues from the Society of Dissection arrives immediately and asks permission to dissect Bowley's body. At the same time Dodll, exciting to write even more voluminous piece on the experience, decides to extend the experiment without informing Bowley. Bowley also witnesses Gripping's wedding proposal to his wife and her acceptance which is the point he totally loses the control of the things happening around him. Bowley soon bursts in anger and unfortunately found himself at Gripping's galvanoplasty pool who steals Bowley's body from the

cemetery for the purpose of his galvanoplasty experiment. He regains the control of his body with the electric battery and notices that half of his feet turned to nickel. Without asking anything about Gripping or his wife, he immediately finds Dodll and tells about his experience which Dodll records by writing. In the end, Bowley forgives his wife and Gripping although Gripping never forgives him for failing his experiment of galvanizing a human body.

In Mithat's *American Doctors*, the author, in a similar manner, takes his readers to a land of absurdity where positivism reaches its top level. In Ahmet Mithat's (1888) words "The physicians are excessively mad with discoveries and research in America" (p.13). He informs the reader that his narrative will satirize this madness in the new land. Ahmet Mithat takes the theme, characters, and plot from Oscar Michon and he enlarges his version with detailed descriptions of the characters and the science they are engaged in. Mithat creates a dichotomy between Bowley and Gripping, familiar from his other novels. He portrays Gripping as young, quite handsome, and someone who evokes admiration:

[...] And then our Doctor Gripping...you would have liked him very much if you had seen him[...]Doctor Gripping is a man who is likable in terms of his appearance, clothing, countenance, health, and manner of speaking; and his dressing and toilette are to such a degree that even women cannot find any fault with them (Mithat 1888, p.20).

On the other hand, Mithat depicts Gripping in a terrifying ugliness: "Don't even ask us about his appearance, nor do we tell you. Indeed, even if he were really handsome, what beauty could be imagined on a bald, hairless head like a turnip?" (Mithat, 1888, p.30)

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (2013) emphasizes that the art of novel requires the reader to be alone with the book itself, however, Ahmet Mithat always remains as the third person along with the two. Seda Uyanık (2013) refers to the presence and guidance of Mithat throughout the book as a part of traditional story-telling practice (p.125). Mithat, just like a Meddah, Ottoman story-teller, tells his story and to attract his audience adds local elements to it. He depicts Bowley and Gripping in a European physical look with fair hair and complexion, yet he portrays Mrs. Bowley as an American Layla of Majnun. Although Michon provides no information on the name, appearance or beauty of Mrs. Bowley, Mithat makes her visible by giving her a name, July, and describing this beautiful French immigrant in detail:

The great Doctor has such a woman of the age of twenty-two, her stature and beauty is remarkably proper...To describe how beautiful Madame July Bowley is, we would have to be painters and paint her portrait. For how can we describe her stature and charm with just a simple "beautiful" or "elegant"? [...]Especially the natural whiteness on her face, surrounded by her raven-black hair, increases her beauty even more. Her dark eyebrows and eyes, combined with a small nose and mouth, and the poise of her lips and chin complemented by small, tightly spaced white teeth adding more charm to her face, are not things that can be adequately described with pen alone. These beauties must be portrayed in a painting (1888,p.30).

Throughout the story, Mithat portrays American loose morality through the persona of July Bowley. July requests from her neighbor Gripping to make a half-naked bust of her and secretly paying visits to Gripping's house for this purpose. When Gripping confesses his feelings to July and proposes to her in front of Bowley's death body, unlike Michon's story, July Bowley, although hesitating for a second, changes her tears for Dr. Bowley into laughter with Gripping's love confession, and accepts the marriage proposal by saying, "It is a great happiness for me that you consider me worthy of marriage" and she adds "Now, you can freely make my full statue instead of half" (p.84-85). In Michon's (1885) story, however, Mrs. Bowley rejects Gripping's proposal by saying, "How can you say such things while my husband's body is still warm," yet with Gripping's insistence, she asks for permission from her husband's body and -as the latter cannot physically object-accepts the proposal. When Bowley returns

with nickel feet, Mrs. Bowley says to Gripping, in a contrite manner, "Perhaps next time, we might be happier" and she takes back her promise. In *American Doctors*, July is depicted as an unfaithful woman to her deceased husband and Mithat emphasizes that frequently: "If you had seen Madam July at the table, you wouldn't have guessed that her husband had died that day. On the contrary, judging by her friendly conversation and treatment with Gripping, you would have considered her to be a new bride" (p.88)

Ahmet Mithat acknowledges and appreciates scientific developments and progress in America. He describes two scientists who has devoted their entire lives to scientific discoveries to such an extent that it becomes the center of their lives. Doctor Bowley is so dedicated to science that he even uses his own body for scientific knowledge. On the other side, Gripping turns his apartment into a home-laboratory with all kinds of different devices which Mithat visualizes for his readers:

When you enter Doctor Gripping's apartment, instead of seeing a fireplace with a mirror and clock in front of it, you will see an eight-horsepower engine perfect locomotive, the funnel of which is connected to the fireplace chimney (p.30).

Ercüment Asil (2020) asserts that Ottoman reformists aimed to embrace European scientific rationality with its methodologies and institutions. Therefore they frequently emphasized the distinctions between this scientific approach as "fen" and the traditional "ilim". Fen became associated with productivity as oppose to the theoretical, religious, or moral knowledge of İlim. Mithat, a promoter of fen, also praises American rationality and also introduces the modern science to his readers by adding details of their research. While he acknowledges and appreciates American progress, he characterizes Americans as a society driven mad by progress, portraying them as excessively materialistic and lack of moral values. Throughout the story no matter what happens to the characters, they prioritize their science over all. Doctor Bowley, a member of the Society of Dissection, cuts the death body of his colleagues in parts for the sake of science or Gripping cannot hide his disappointment when Bowley comes to life because his experiment will fail. Bowley's assistant Dodll waits until Bowley's body is put to grave so that his observations will be more detailed and will produce more pages of publication although he dangerously risks his colleague's life. Amidst all these scientific obsession, July is personified as an indifferent character who is more interested in the gilded part of science. Although technically she is not unfaithful to her husband, in Mithat's rewriting, she is very easy to sway and can lie to her husband when necessary.

4. Ahmet Mithat's Preface and *Paris in America*

Prefaces that are written by authors or translators can be seen as sections where the translator's visibility and voice are maximized, and the purpose of the translation text is directly or indirectly expressed (Karadağ, 2012). According to Rodica Dimitriu (2009), prefaces are significant in both interpreting the literary work and providing source for researchers in translation studies, which she categorized as "explanatory, normative/prescriptive, and informative/descriptive" (p.193).

Ahmet Mithat, before commencing the story of *American Doctors*, gives an informative/descriptive preface on America. He mentions the need to read volumes of books to understand America thoroughly, but assures the reader that he will quickly and easily provide a detailed depiction of her to save them from this effort. In the preface where Mithat gives information to the reader, although he mentions the necessity of reading volumes of books, he introduces America by rewriting the parts of the book he took from René Lefévre's *Paris en Amérique/Paris in America*. However, Mithat, through rewriting

Lefébvre's narrative, decontextualizes it from a pro-American context and recontextualizes in Ottoman modernization context as an example of American materialism and moral decay.

The novel *Paris in America* presents a fictional narrative of a journey to the United State, to a community located somewhere in New England. In this fantasy tale, the protagonist M. Lefébvre, who shares the same name as the author, receives a pill from a spirit that transports him to America—a fantastical journey the author could never undertake in reality. The book gained immense popularity not only in France but also in the United States, with thirty-four French editions and eight English translations (Gray, 1994).

Édouard René Lefébvre de Laboulaye, recognized as the first pro-American figure in France, served as Professor of Comparative Law at Collège de France and was the first French scholar to lecture American History classes at the same university (Gray, 1994, p.3). Disappointed with the French politics after the 1848 European revolutions, Lefébvre turned to the United States as a model for establishing a constitutional, well-structured French government that protects all liberties.

The essence of Lefébvre's novel is based on American Democracy. Democracy enables American institutions to perform smoothly and limited government ensures the freedom of citizens as well as economic prosperity. The narrative begins with the protagonist M. Lefébvre encountering a mystical figure named Jonathan Dream, who offers him a fantasy trip to the United States. After swallowing a pill provided by the spirit Jonathan Dream, the protagonist falls asleep at his home. Upon awakening the next day, everything in the room appears as it did the night before. However, soon he realizes that he is in America—"unknown, alone, in a country without government, armies, or police, amidst a seemingly savage, violent, and covetous people, feeling utterly lost" (Lefébvre, 1863, p.12). Struggling to comprehend how he ended up in this lawless land, Lefébvre gradually comes to understand the American system and appreciates life-enhancing technologies. While the book occasionally criticizes Americans' obsession with progress, the protagonist admires how this society, apparently left to its own devices without police or gendarmes, maintains peace and order, and avoids riots or revolutions:

How is it that in the United States, where all heads are turned by liberty, where no one speaks of public order, the internal peace is never disturbed ? In this turbulent democracy, in this crowd abandoned to itself, without police and without gendarmes, why are there neither riots nor revolutions ? America has not, like us, a hundred thousand functionaries ranged in battle array, an admirable administration, which prescribes everything, anticipates everything, directs everything, and regulates everything. It has not, in the face of this compact organization, a docile, commanded, repressed, directed, and regulated people; yet, notwithstanding, it is tranquil and prosperous. Liberty, guaranteed in its full exercise by law, punished in its excess by justice — this is public order to the Americans. Their narrow intellect has never risen to that tutelary centralization which makes our unity and glory. Among this primitive people, public order has not been separated from liberty; it has not been personified ; it has not been surrounded with formidable ramparts and ever-loaded cannon. No hierarchic administration, no repressive police, no inviolable functionaries, no privileged tribunals ; nothing of that scholarly mechanism which, among civilized nations, breaks all resistance and crushes all individuality (Lefébvre, 1863, p.130).

Contrary to Lefébvre's portrayal of America's democracy, freedom, and legal system, Ahmet Mithat offers a different depiction in *American Doctors*. Lefébvre describes religious diversity in America through a large street full of different churches and religious complexes. Though there are so many different religions, they still live in harmony and do not attack each other:

The first church is St. Paul, the Catholic Chapel ; the second, the Ursuline Convent ; the third, the Episcopal Church; the fourth, the Capuchin Convent; the fifth belongs to the Baptists, the sixth to the Dutch Reformed, the seventh to the Lutherans, the eighth to the colored Methodists, the ninth is the

Jewish Synagogue, and the tenth the Chinese temple. You see it yonder with its multiplied roof and little bells. Once there, you have only to go down the street ; you will find the Mennonites ; after the Mennonites, the Reformed Germans ; after the Reformed Germans, the Friends or Quakers ; after the Quakers, the Presbyterians ; after the Presbyterians, the Moravians ; after the Moravians, the white Methodists ; after the white Methodists, the Unitarians ; after the Unitarians, the Unionists ; after the Unionists, the Tunkers. Then count four churches; that which calls itself preeminently the Christian Church, then the Free Church, then the Swedenborgian Church, and lastly the Universalist Church ; this will give you in all twenty-three churches ; the twenty-fourth, which is nearly at the middle of the street, is the Congregationalist[...] In France, where the State has scarcely four sects (I do not count Algeria), the administration has its moments of difficulty; but here, how does it set to work to apportion the church moneys and put an end to the quarrels among thirty churches [...] (p. 155-56)

In *American Doctors'* Preface, Ahmet Mithat (1888) adapts Americans invent new religions daily for no reason, with some establishing churches while others fail to gather enough believers and disappear. Mithat regards the diversity of churches as "irreligion":

Today, in Europe, those who adhere to religious wisdom observe with sorrow the gradual decline of Christianity and the rise of irreligion in its place. In this regard, America differs from Europe. Irreligion is commonplace there. Consequently, in America, hundreds of thousands, even millions of people, are driven by the madness of inventing new religions, to the extent of claiming prophethood. Many of them, like the Mormons, have even gone so far as to establish churches. However, many others, unable to find a sufficient number of followers, have abandoned their claims to prophethood. We have come across an author who, entering into this comparison, considers it a deficiency that Americans have not yet claimed divinity and writes that it is hoped they will eventually reach that stage through progress-mania (1889, p.557).

In both the preface and the novella, Mithat dwells on the questionable morality of American women, whereas Lefébvre praises female education and empowerment in his novel. Women can have proper education and become doctors or teachers, they can choose their husbands and can exist in society as an independent individual. In the novel, Lefébvre's protagonist is shocked to see female workers going on strike for their working conditions, a situation that would be very unusual in France. Three women enters the office of the newspaper owner demanding their strike to be advertised on the paper:

The door opened abruptly. Three women, young and elegantly dressed, approached us ; the oldest, who was under twenty-five, addressed us in a tone at once modest and self-reliant :

"Sir," said she to Humbug, " we are deputed by the lady coat-makers, to ask you to advertise that we are on a strike, and that we shall hold a meeting next Monday, to seek the means of shaking off the oppression from which we suffer; we wish to regain and secure our rights [...]We will teach these gentlemen tailors, and the whole world, what five hundred women can do, who have taken it into their heads not to yield. It is a lesson which will do good to monopolizers and tyrants — a lesson which will make the despots of the Old World turn pale on their thrones (p.85).

Although Mithat was an advocate for female education and empowerment, the concept of women workers striking would have been a radical notion, likely beyond the conception of a Tanzimat-era intellectual. Instead, he depicts the female workers not on strike, but advertising guns and he comments on the pervasive culture of advertising in the United States:

In America, you may encounter a very beautiful girl on the street. "Oh my God, how beautiful she is!" you exclaim in amazement. After your astonished gaze meets the girl's eyes, she approaches you with a charming smile and asks, "Monsieur, what would you like?" As you stand there unsure of what to say, the girl, with utmost politeness, says, "It's all right, Monsieur. I thought you were going to ask where the finest hunting rifles are sold. Here, Monsieur, whenever you need the best rifle, please choose the products from this factory," and she gives you the address of a factory (p.12).

In *Paris in America*, the protagonist gradually sheds his prejudices and adapts to life in America, concluding the novel with positive sentiments towards the country. Lefébvre, a staunch supporter of America, praises democracy and freedom through the character Mr. Truth, asserting that Washington has exemplified honest governance of a free people. Lefébvre contends that science and technology have elevated America's prosperity, but he attributes the primary cause of this progress to American democracy. An active citizen, protected by limited government and guaranteed freedoms, is the dynamo powering the American machine, according to Lefébvre. In the story's conclusion, he argues that Americans, in their free environment, can develop technologies that advance their lives, improve living conditions, and enrich themselves. Lefébvre asserts that science can only thrive in a free environment. Science, together with national prosperity, also serves as a way of accumulating individual wealth and prestige in Lefébvre's perspective. He often exemplifies individual entrepreneurship of the Americans whereas Mithat prefers to focus on materialist aspect of science and rather futile function of American concept of innovation:

If you envision America as a country that swings from one extreme to another in all aspects of life, you will fully appreciate and enjoy the references and allusions to America in this story (p.13)

5. Conclusion

Mithat decontextualizes *Paris in America* and "Amour et Galvanoplastie", and rewrites it from an Occidental perspective. Mithat's modifications to the original content reflect his own biases and preconceptions about American and Western society which is largely shaped by the Occidental views of the period. Whereas he acknowledges the rational thinking and institutionalization of scientific research, he also emphasizes peculiarities, moral decay, and an excessive materialism which controls the American society. Mithat, prefers to be skeptical on what the New World offers and selectively rewrites the source text in accordance with his formulation of Ottoman modernism.

Ahmet Mithat's novella *American Doctors* serves as a crucial example of the dynamic intersection between Ottoman and Western literary traditions during the Tanzimat period. By adding traditional story-telling elements in his text, Mithat, in a sense, domesticates the novel genre. Mithat's narrative not only critiques American materialism and moral decay, reflecting Occidental perspectives, but also embodies the broader cultural and ideological exchanges that characterized the late Ottoman Empire's modernization efforts. Through translation and adaptation, Mithat effectively recontextualizes Western scientific rationality and progress within the moral and cultural framework of the Ottoman society, thereby mediating between two distinct worlds.

By selectively adapting and rewriting his source texts, Ahmet Mithat engages in a form of cultural mediation that both challenges and reaffirms Ottoman identity. This process of rewriting, as conceptualized by André Lefevre, points out the active role of the translator as a cultural mediator. Mithat's incorporation of Occidental elements allows for a critical reflection on Western influence. In doing so, Mithat not only broadens the scope of Ottoman literature but also provides a critical commentary on the implications of Westernization, making "American Doctors" a seminal work in understanding the complexities of cross-cultural translation and literary modernization

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