



**Between Nostalgia and Sufi Presence:  
Modernity, Uneasiness, and the Search for *Ḥuḍūr* in Ahmet Hamdi  
Tanpınar's (1901-1962) *A Mind at Peace***

*Nostalji ile Tasavvufî Huzur Arasında:  
Modernlik, Huzursuzluk ve Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962)*

**Adile Sedef DÖNMEZ\***

**Abstract**

This article examines the Turkish experience of modernity through the concepts of nostalgia, uneasiness (*huzursuzluk*), and authenticity in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novel *Huzur* (A Mind at Peace). While the novel has frequently been interpreted as a literary reflection on the cultural and psychological tensions of early Republican Turkey, this study proposes a reading that situates Tanpınar's exploration of *ḥuḍūr* (peace) within a broader Sufi conceptual framework. The modernization project of the Turkish Republic was built upon a radical temporal rupture that reconfigured the relationship between past and present. This deliberate distancing from the Ottoman past generated profound tensions in collective memory and individual identity, particularly among Istanbul's intellectual elite. In Tanpınar's novel *Huzur*, these tensions manifest themselves as nostalgia, existential uneasiness, and an unresolved search for authenticity. In classical Sufi thought, however, *ḥuḍūr* refers to a spiritual state of presence before God (*huzurda olmak*), attained through remembrance (*dhikr*) and the purification of the heart (*qalb*). From this perspective, the pervasive uneasiness experienced by Tanpınar's characters may be understood as a condition of spiritual estrangement and inner dispersion. Rather than attaining a state of *ḥuḍūr* grounded in presence, inward composure, and metaphysical continuity, the characters remain suspended between an aestheticized longing for the Ottoman past and the cultural dislocations produced by modernity. By re-reading the novel *Huzur* through the conceptual lens of Sufi metaphysics, this article argues that Tanpınar's narrative reveals a deeper spiritual dimension of modern alienation. The novel's portrayal of nostalgia and uneasiness reflects not merely a historical crisis

\* **ORCID:** 0009-0003-1961-0976. PhD Candidate, Koç University Department of History,  
**E-mail:** addonmez20@ku.edu.tr.

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but also a metaphysical dislocation, the loss of a spiritual horizon capable of reconciling past and present. The central research question guiding this study is: How does Tanpınar's *Huzur* represent the experience of modernity through the intertwined dynamics of nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity, and how can these dynamics be illuminated through the Sufi concept of *huḍūr*?

**Keywords:** Sufism, divine presence, Turkish modernity, Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, nostalgia, uneasiness, authenticity.

## Özet

Bu makale, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'ın *Huzur* romanı üzerinden Türk modernlik tecrübesini nostalji, huzursuzluk ve otantiklik kavramları etrafında ele almaktadır. Roman çoğu zaman erken Cumhuriyet döneminin kültürel ve psikolojik gerilimlerini yansıtan bir edebî metin olarak yorumlanmış olsa da, bu çalışma Tanpınar'ın *huzur* kavramına yaklaşımını daha geniş bir tasavvufî kavramsal çerçevede yeniden değerlendirmeyi önermektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin modernleşme projesi, geçmiş ile şimdi arasındaki ilişkiyi yeniden kuran keskin bir zamansal kopuş fikri üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Osmanlı geçmişiyle kurulan bu bilinçli mesafe, özellikle İstanbul'un entelektüel çevrelerinde kolektif hafıza ile bireysel kimlik arasında derin gerilimler doğurmuştur. *Huzur* romanında bu gerilimler nostalji, varoluşsal bir huzursuzluk ve çözüme kavuşmayan bir otantiklik arayışı olarak tezâhür eder. Buna karşılık klasik tasavvuf düşüncesinde huzur, yalnızca psikolojik bir sükûnet hâlini değil, kulun kalbinde Tanrı'nın huzurunda bulunma bilincini ifade eden ruhânî bir durumu anlatır ki bu hâl zikir ve kalbin tasfiyesi yoluyla elde edilmektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, Tanpınar'ın karakterlerinde sürekli hissedilen huzursuzluk, böylesi bir mânevî huzurun yokluğu olarak da okunabilir. Romanın şahısları hakikî huzura erişmekten ziyade, bir yandan Osmanlı geçmişine duyulan estetik bir nostalji ile öte yandan modernliğin yarattığı kültürel kopuşlar arasında asılı kalmış görünürler. Bu makale, *Huzur* romanını tasavvuf metafiziğinin kavramsal ufku içinden yeniden okuyarak Tanpınar'ın anlatısının modern yabancılaşmanın daha derin ve ruhânî bir boyutunu görünür kıldığını ileri sürmektedir. Romanda nostalji ve huzursuzluk etrafında şekillenen duygu dünyası yalnızca tarihsel bir krizin ifadesi değil, aynı zamanda geçmiş ile şimdiyi uzlaştırabilecek mânevî bir ufkun yitimiyle bağlantılı metafizik bir yerinden edilme hâlini de yansıtır. Bu çalışmayı yönlendiren temel araştırma sorusu şudur: Tanpınar'ın *Huzur* romanı modernlik tecrübesini nostalji, huzursuzluk ve otantiklik arasındaki iç içe geçmiş dinamikler üzerinden nasıl temsil eder ve bu dinamikler tasavvufî huzur kavramı aracılığıyla nasıl yeniden anlaşılabilir?

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk modernleşmesi, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur*, tasavvuf, ilahi huzur, nostalji, huzursuzluk, otantiklik.

## 1. Introduction

“We live in a very uneasy (*huzursuz*) world. Because man is not at peace with himself... Because we are in doubt of everything. And finally, we don't feel God in our backs as strongly as we felt before.” (Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Hep Aynı Boşluk*)<sup>1</sup>

In Sufi terminology, *huḍūr* refers to the state of spiritual presence, in which the seeker becomes consciously aware of being before God. Its opposite is *ghayba*, the condition of absence, where the heart is distracted from the divine reality.<sup>2</sup> The spiritual path is often

1 This statement was Tanpınar's answer to why he named his novel *Huzur*, translated to English by Erdağ Gökner with the title *A Mind at Peace*. See, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Hep Aynı Boşluk: Denemeler, Mektuplar, Röportajlar, Şark ve Garp Tanpınar'la Huzur Hakkında Bir Konuşma* (İstanbul:

Dergah Yayınları, 2016), 173; Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind At Peace*, trans. Erdağ Gökner (New York: Archipelago Books, 2008).

2 D.B. Macdonald, “Hâdra,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online*, ed. P. Bearman, (Leiden: Brill).

described as a movement from *ghayba* toward *huḍūr*, a state cultivated through remembrance (*dhikr*) and inner awareness. The word *huḍūr*, often translated as tranquility, inner peace, or serenity, therefore occupies a distinctive place within the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup> Against this long spiritual genealogy, however, the concept acquires a markedly different resonance in twentieth-century Turkish literature. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's (d. 1962) novel *Huzur* (*A Mind at Peace*, 1949) places this idea of tranquility at the center of its narrative precisely at a historical moment when such serenity appears increasingly unattainable.<sup>4</sup> Although the title promises harmony, the world of the novel is permeated by anxiety, uncertainty, and cultural dislocation, conditions that evoke a collective experience of *ghayba*. Written in the shadow of the Second World War and in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, *Huzur* portrays individuals searching for inner harmony within a historical moment marked by civilizational rupture and the erosion of inherited cultural and spiritual frameworks.

This article examines how Tanpınar's *A Mind at Peace* articulates the experience of Turkish modernity through the intertwined themes of nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity while simultaneously engaging, often implicitly, with the Sufi concept of *huḍūr*. It argues that the novel constructs a phenomenology of modern Turkish subjectivity shaped by the temporal rupture produced by the transition from empire to republic. Through the figures of Mümtaz, İhsan, and Suad, Tanpınar stages competing philosophical responses to this

rupture: nihilistic rejection, tragic consciousness, and the search for cultural continuity. However, the tranquility promised by the title remains fragile and incomplete. The characters' longing for harmony frequently takes the form of nostalgia for the aesthetic and cultural universe of the Ottoman past, its music, literary traditions, and urban memory, while simultaneously revealing the disappearance of a deeper metaphysical horizon that once structured this cultural world.

The uneasiness articulated in the novel emerges from this broader experience of historical rupture. Modernization frequently transforms the relationship between past and present through the production of new forms of historical consciousness.<sup>5</sup> In many societies, the transition to modernity is accompanied by a temporal rupture that redefines collective memory, cultural identity, and the ways individuals situate themselves within history. The experience of modernization in the Turkish Republic, established in 1923 following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, was profoundly shaped by such a rupture.<sup>6</sup> Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the early Republican regime sought to establish a new political and cultural order grounded in secular nationalism and Western-oriented modernization.<sup>7</sup> In this process, the Ottoman past was frequently reconfigured as a closed historical period, while the Republic presented itself as the beginning of a new historical era.

For many members of Istanbul's late Ottoman intellectual milieu, however, this rupture

3 Zübeyir Karataş, "Kur'an'da Huzur ve Güven Ortamı", *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11, 21 (2022): 242-262.

4 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1949); Tanpınar, *A Mind At Peace*, trans. Erdağ Gökner, introduction.

5 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, (London: Verso Publication, 1995), 1.

6 Mehmet Kendirci, "Time as an Instrument of Building Citizenship in Turkey in the Late Ottoman and the Early Republican Era," *Études Balkaniques*, 2 (2017): 326-344.

7 Eric Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 167-170.

generated a profound sense of cultural and existential dislocation.<sup>8</sup> The Ottoman world embodied a complex civilizational framework shaped by aesthetic traditions, intellectual practices, and spiritual worldviews deeply influenced by Islamic and Sufi thought.<sup>9</sup> The sudden reconfiguration of this historical continuity, therefore, produced a sense of loss that could not easily be resolved within the new temporal framework of the Republic. One of the most significant emotional responses to this disruption was nostalgia. In contexts of rapid historical transformation, nostalgia often reflects more than a sentimental attachment to the past. It signals a deeper disorientation produced by the weakening of established frameworks of meaning. The resulting gap between past and present may generate a persistent sense of uneasiness regarding both individual and collective identity. Tanpınar's *Huzur* offers one of the most sophisticated literary explorations of this condition.

*A Mind at Peace* was first serialized in 1948 in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. Structured as a modernist psychological novel, the work consists of four sections—"İhsan," "Nuran," "Suat," and "Mümtaz"—each named after a central character whose emotional and intellectual presence shapes Mümtaz's inner world. The chapters move from anxiety to intimacy, from aesthetic contemplation to metaphysical crisis, while simultaneously foregrounding distinct thematic layers, including war, memory, love, cultural continuity, and existential uneasiness.<sup>10</sup> Set on

the eve of the Second World War, the novel unfolds within an approximately twenty-four-hour temporal frame, yet through extensive flashbacks, particularly in the "Nuran" and "Suat" sections, it reconstructs the emotional and intellectual experiences of the preceding year. This fractured temporality, together with its stream-of-consciousness passages and intense interiority, places the novel firmly within the broader tradition of modernist fiction.<sup>11</sup>

The narrative is deeply embedded in the social and cultural geography of Istanbul, whose neighborhoods, waterside mansions, music, and Bosphorus landscapes function as active elements shaping the consciousness of the characters. At the center of the novel stands Mümtaz, a sensitive young intellectual in his twenties who was orphaned at an early age during the turbulent final years of the Ottoman Empire. Marked by traumatic loss and emotional displacement, he searches for continuity, belonging, and emotional wholeness in a rapidly torn world. His love for Nuran, a refined, educated, and somewhat older divorced woman with a daughter, becomes intertwined with his longing for aesthetic and spiritual harmony. Although Nuran gradually reciprocates his affection, the suicide of Suat prevents their union and transforms their relationship into one marked by renunciation and melancholy. Suat, by contrast, embodies the novel's nihilistic and existential dimensions: alienated from life and consumed by obsessive feelings toward Nuran, he represents the destructive psychological consequences of spiritual and moral dislocation.<sup>12</sup>

8 Nazım İrem, "Turkish Conservative Modernism: Birth of a Nationalist Quest for Cultural Renewal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, 1 (2002): 87-112.

9 Reşat Öngören, *Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf: Anadolu'da Süfîler, Devlet ve Ulemâ* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2021), 62-65.

10 Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış: Ahmet Mithat'dan Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'a* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1975), 158-159.

11 Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*, 158-159; Murat Lülecî, "Multiple Modernities and Multiplied Minds: Stream of Consciousness in Modern Turkish Novel," *The Journal of International Social Research* 7, 32 (2018): 163.

12 Tanpınar, *A Mind At Peace*, trans. Erdağ Göknaç, introduction.

Another central figure is İhsan, the intellectual mentor who raises Mümtaz after he is orphaned and seeks to cultivate him into a cultured, morally grounded individual. İhsan strongly recalls Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (d. 1958), Tanpınar's own teacher and one of the foremost intellectual figures of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. Through İhsan, the novel articulates a vision of cultural continuity that seeks neither simple nostalgia nor radical rupture, but rather a synthesis between Ottoman aesthetic inheritance and Republican modernity. Indeed, all four principal characters are shaped by Istanbul's emotional and cultural atmosphere, and the city itself emerges as a mnemonic and affective space in which questions of identity, temporality, and historical continuity are constantly negotiated. The character's longing for harmony frequently takes the form of nostalgia for the cultural and aesthetic universe of the Ottoman tradition. The music of classical Ottoman composers, the poetry of earlier literary traditions, and the spatial memory of Istanbul's historic landscapes evoke a sense of continuity with the past while simultaneously emphasizing the impossibility of fully recovering it. Tanpınar enriches the feeling of nostalgia through citing Ottoman poems, Sufi rituals, traditional music, and Ottoman palaces. The combination of nostalgia and the necessity of change creates characters that are in-between westernization and their own traditions, and the tragedies created in the inner worlds of the characters as a consequence of this duality.

A substantial body of scholarship has examined Tanpınar's work in relation to the experience of modernity in Turkey.<sup>13</sup> Existing studies frequently focus on his ambivalent

13 Nurdan Gürbilek, "Kurumuş Pınar, Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark: Tanpınar'da Ophelia, Su ve Rüyalarda", in *Modern Türkiyede Siyasi Düşünce V* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 405.

engagement with modernization, his relationship to the Ottoman past, and the tensions between tradition and Westernization in the early Republican period.<sup>14</sup> Scholars have explored themes such as nostalgia, temporality, cultural authenticity, and the crisis of the modern subject.<sup>15</sup> While these approaches have generated valuable insights, they have rarely examined the concept of *hıdūr* within the intellectual horizon of Sufi thought. By situating Tanpınar's novel within this broader spiritual framework, this study seeks to reinterpret *A Mind at Peace* as a meditation on the loss of a metaphysical orientation that once structured Ottoman intellectual life. Examining the novel through the lens of the Sufi understanding of *hıdūr* illuminates the spiritual dimensions of Tanpınar's critique of modernity and reveals how the search for inner tranquility becomes intertwined with broader questions of cultural continuity, identity, and historical consciousness.

14 Orhan Pamuk, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar ve Türk Modernizmi", *BİLAR*, 1994; Sibel Irzık, "What If One Day Things Go Mad?: The Unruly Objects of Tanpınar's Modernism," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, 2 (2017): 198-214; Kürşad Ertuğrul, "A Reading of the Turkish Novel: Three Ways of Constituting the 'Turkish Modern'," *International Journal for Middle East Studies* 41, 4 (2009): 635-652.

15 Devrim Sezer, "The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity in Turkish Communitarian Thought: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Peyami Safa on Europe and Modernity", *History of European Ideas* 36, 4 (2012): 427-437; Olgun Gündüz, "Türkiye'nin Batılılaşma Serüveninde Özgün bir Portre: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar", [An authentic portrait in Turkey Journey of Westernization: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar], *Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3, 3 (2002): 13-28; Yunus Balcı, *Tanpınar Trajik Bir Şair ve Şiiri* (İstanbul: 3F Yayınevi, 2008); Elif Türkislaınođlu, *Türk Düşünce Dünyasında Tanpınar*, (İstanbul: Hece Yayınları, 2015), 104; Tahir Abacı, *Gerçekçilik Açısından Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar* (İstanbul: İkaros Yayınları, 2015), 92; Ercan Çankaya, "Reflections of Conservatism and Nostalgia in Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's Representation of Istanbul", (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2015), 78-79.

## 2. Conceptual Framework: Divine Presence (*ḥuḍūr*) in Sufi Thought and the Modern Mind Not at Peace

In classical Sufi thought, *ḥuḍūr* (presence) signifies the state in which the heart becomes consciously aware of standing before God. Etymologically derived from the Arabic root *ḥ-d-r*, meaning “to be present,” the term *ḥuḍūr* in Sufi discourse signifies the experiential realization of God’s nearness in the heart.<sup>16</sup> While God’s presence (*ḥaḍra*) is universal and ontologically encompassing, *ḥuḍūr* refers to the mystic’s awareness of that presence. It denotes an awakened attentiveness in which the seeker’s inner faculties, heart, intellect, and soul are gathered in the awareness of the divine. es-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) argues that genuine contemplation and spiritual insight become possible only through *ḥuḍūr al-qalb*, the attentive presence of the heart.<sup>17</sup> Only a heart that is fully present can move toward the Qur’ānic ideal of the *qalb-i salīm*, the purified heart capable of receiving divine truth. In this sense, *ḥuḍūr* reflects a condition in which the apparent divisions between matter and meaning, body and spirit, are overcome through the consciousness of being in God’s presence. Opposed to this state is *ghayba*, the condition of spiritual absence in which the heart is distracted by the multiplicity of the world.<sup>18</sup> The spiritual path is therefore often described as a movement from disper-

sion toward presence, from forgetfulness to remembrance, from fragmentation to inner unity.

At its deepest level, *ḥuḍūr* denotes the gathering of the heart around a single center. Classical Sufi authors describe it as a state in which the heart ceases to be divided by competing attachments and attains a condition of inner stillness, often associated with the Qur’ānic notion of *sakīnah* (divinely bestowed tranquility).<sup>19</sup> The Qur’ān states, for example, *Then Allah sent down His sakīnah upon His Messenger and upon the believers* (Q 9:26), and similarly, *He sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers* (Q 48:4). Another verse famously declares, *Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find tranquility* (Q 13:28). *Ḥuḍūr* therefore implies a life in which spiritual awareness is no longer confined to moments of worship but becomes reflected in one’s entire mode of being. In practice, Sufi traditions cultivate this state through disciplined remembrance, contemplative vigilance, ethical purification, and devotion. In this sense, *ḥuḍūr* represents both the culmination of the spiritual path and the sign of spiritual maturity, ultimately leading to a state of inward presence and peace, the moment when the heart becomes fully attentive to God.

The semantic field of *ḥuḍūr*, however, was not confined to mystical discourse alone. In the broader Ottoman intellectual and political culture, the term also carried a distinct institutional meaning associated with the notion of presence before authority.<sup>20</sup> The same word that in Sufi literature signified the believer’s inward attentiveness before God could also designate the act of appearing in the presence of the sovereign. This layered

16 Mehmet Hanefi Sanır, *Tasavvuf Anlayışında Gaybet ve Huzur*, ed. Ömer Tay, (Ankara: İksad Yayınları, 2022), 64.

17 Ebû Nasr Serrâc Tûsî, *el-Lüma'*, çev. Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz (İstanbul: Erkam Yayınları, 2016), 74.

18 Sanır, *Tasavvuf Anlayışında Gaybet ve Huzur*, 14; Avni İlhan, “Gaybet,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1996, XIII: 410-412. In classical Sufi literature, *ghayba* is sometimes understood as a state in which the heart becomes so absorbed in divine inspirations (*wāridāt*) that the seeker loses awareness of worldly perceptions and the states of others. See, Abdülkerim Kuşeyrî, *Tasavvuf İlmîne Dair: Kuşeyrî Risalesi*, çev. Ersan Güngör (İstanbul: İlk Harf Yayınevi, ۲۰۱۳), 145.

19 Sanır, *Tasavvuf Anlayışında Gaybet ve Huzur*, 64.

20 Mehmet İpşirli, “Huzur Dersleri,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1998, XVIII: 441-444.

meaning reveals how spiritual vocabulary often migrated into the language of governance and scholarship within Ottoman civilization. Thus, the idea of *hüdür* simultaneously evoked metaphysical proximity to the Divine and the ceremonial presence before temporal authority. One of the most visible institutional manifestations of this semantic continuity was the tradition known as the *Huzur Dersleri* (Imperial Presence Lectures). Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who taught literature at Istanbul University, was undoubtedly familiar with the historical and cultural connotations of the term *hüdür*. In the Ottoman context, *Huzur Dersleri* referred to the annual scholarly theological discussions held in the presence of the sultān during the month of Ramadan, during which leading scholars debated questions of Qur'ānic exegesis. Given Tanpınar's deep engagement with Ottoman intellectual history, it is plausible that the title of his novel *Huzur* also resonates with this long-standing tradition. While Tanpınar never explicitly states such an intention, the layered semantic field of the word *hüdür*, which denotes both inner spiritual tranquility and the state of appearing before a higher authority, suggests that the title may quietly echo this historical institution. The cultural world in which such meanings once coexisted, however, underwent a profound transformation with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

The Turkish Republic, founded on 29 October 1923, emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire with a powerful sense of temporal rupture. Republican elites framed the new regime as a decisive break from the Ottoman past, presenting the empire as a closed historical era while positioning the Republic as the embodiment of the future.<sup>21</sup> Guided

21 Elisabeth Özdalga, "Secularism", in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, eds. Metin He-

by Westernist–modernist ideals, the new one-party state sought not only to restructure political and economic institutions but also to reshape society's cultural and intellectual foundations.<sup>22</sup> Capitalism, the nation-state, parliamentary governance, and, most centrally, secularism were adopted as the pillars of this transformation. The Kemalist project thus aimed to produce a new social subject whose identity, daily practices, and cultural outlook would align with a Western model of civilization.<sup>23</sup>

In the early years of the Republic, this vision was expressed through an iconoclastic reform agenda symbolized by the slogan "smashing the idols," which sought to eliminate Ottoman and religious institutions from public life.<sup>24</sup> Major reforms followed rapidly, such as the abolition of the Caliphate and the centralization of religious affairs in 1924, the closure of religious courts and Sufi lodges in 1925, the introduction of Western dress codes, the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, the removal of Islam as the state religion in 1928, and the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet.<sup>25</sup> These reforms were framed within the concept of *inqilāb*, denoting radical transformation or fundamental restructuring, through which

per, Sabri Sayarı (London: Routledge Publication, 2012), 207.

22 Nilüfer Göle, "The Quest for the Islamic Self," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1997), 83.

23 Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey" in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1991), 22; Wolfgang Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East* (London: Zed Books, 2001), 60.

24 Zafer Toprak, "Nazım Hikmet'in 'Putları Kırıyoruz' Kampanyası ve Yeni Edebiyat", *Toplumsal Tarih*, 261 (2015): 35-36.

25 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2002), 79.

the Kemalist regime attempted to redefine the temporal, cultural, and political foundations of the new Turkish nation by orienting it decisively toward a secular and Western-oriented future.<sup>26</sup> This forced detachment from the past created a significant relationship between the Republican people and the Ottoman Empire. This was especially apparent among the Istanbulite elite, who experienced the Ottoman Empire to the fullest.<sup>27</sup> Nostalgia is an important concept to reflect on in light of this altered relationship. Nostalgia, in its simplest sense, connotes longing for a lost time. The desynchronization between place and time, one of the main reasons for this sentimental feeling, creates a gap between the past and the present. This break, inextricably linked to nostalgia, is one of the main underlying motives for how Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar conveys the problems posed by modernity.

Seen from this perspective, the persistent search for *hüdür* resonates strikingly in the cultural atmosphere depicted in Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novel *Huzur*. Set in the transitional decades between the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the consolidation of the Turkish Republic, the novel portrays Istanbul's inhabitants as suspended in a profound spatial-temporal disjunction.<sup>28</sup> They continue to inhabit the physical spaces of an imperial city whose cultural and historical rhythms have already receded into the past.<sup>29</sup> This dislocation produces a pervasive

sense of unease, a collective experience of restlessness that contrasts sharply with the classical Sufi understanding of *hüdür* as inner tranquility. The peace that once animated the city's spiritual life now appears only as a distant memory, recalled with nostalgia and melancholy, like the lingering scent of a vanished fragrance. The abolition of the Sufi lodges (*tekkes*) and the prohibition of many Sufi practices in the early Republican period further intensified this cultural rupture, seemingly removing the institutional spaces through which spiritual serenity had once been cultivated.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, numerous Sufi figures and intellectual circles of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods continued to insist that the experience of divine presence could not be reduced to institutional structures alone.

Even amid the closure of lodges, the suppression of ritual practices, and the broader secularizing reforms of the Republican era, they maintained that the bond between the human heart and God ultimately transcended political authority and historical rupture.<sup>31</sup> Tanpınar's narrative, however, portrays a generation struggling to rediscover this presence amid the ruins of a lost cultural order. The character of İhsan stands as a rare figure of equilibrium within this restless world, a man

26 Jale Parla, "The Wounded Tongue: Turkey's Language Reform and the Canonicity of the Novel," *Modern Language Association* 23, 1 (2008): 27-40.

27 Lüleci, "Multiple Modernities and Multiplied Minds," 163.

28 Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, "Chronometrics in the Modern Metropolis: The City, the Past and Collective Memory in A.H. Tanpınar," *MLN* 130, 5 (2015): 1150-1178.

29 Charles Steward, "Temporal Topology in the Post-Ottoman World," *Social Analysis* 61, 1 (2017): 129-142.

30 For the emotional atmosphere created by the closure of the Sufi lodges and the adaptive responses of the Sufis, see Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "A Shelter for the Spirit: Ken'ân Rifâ'î's Practical Theology and Adaptive Sufi Praxis in Early 20th-Century Istanbul," *Religions* 16, 8 (2025): 1039-1057; Also see Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "Sufi Practices and Urban Spaces: Everyday Experiences of Sheikh Ken'ân Rifâ'î (1867-1950) in the Late Ottoman Istanbul," *Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies (OMAD)/Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12, 32 (2025), 21-47.

31 See, Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "Agents of Transition from Empire to Republic: Veled Çelebi İzbudak (1869-1953) and the Sufi Bureaucratic Dynamics of Late Ottoman Modernization," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35, 3 (2025): 781-808.

who embodies a form of inward composure reminiscent of classical *huḍūr*. However, his serenity seems fragile, like a delicate flower amid a crowd consumed by anxiety and historical disorientation. In Tanpınar's modernist imagination, therefore, *huḍūr* persists less as a stable spiritual condition than as a haunting possibility, obscured by the shadows of loss, memory, and cultural transition.

### 3. Nostalgia, Un-easiness and Authenticity: Modernity and the Loss of *huḍūr*

From the perspective of this article, the concepts of nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity are examined within what may be described as the problem discourse of modernity.<sup>32</sup> Rather than treating these notions as merely psychological states, this study approaches them as experiential consequences of the disruptions produced by the modern condition. Modernity, in its most general sense, refers to the transformation of social life that emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century onward and gradually reshaped political, institutional, and cultural structures across the globe. Modernity, in this sense, introduced new forms of social organization that progressively displaced traditional frameworks of meaning and authority.<sup>33</sup> Classical theories of modernity frequently defined this transformation through the dissolution

of inherited institutions and the establishment of new structural and cultural orders oriented toward rationalization, progress, and secularization.<sup>34</sup>

Such transformations, however, rarely unfold as purely institutional processes. In societies where modernization was implemented through radical state-led reforms, as in the early Turkish Republic, the transition to modernity often produced profound tensions between the past and the present. The modernization project required the redefinition of historical time: certain elements of the past were reclassified as remnants of a superseded order, while others were selectively incorporated into the emerging narrative of the modern nation. However, the material and cultural presence of the past, its monuments, aesthetic traditions, and architectural landscapes, continued to inhabit everyday life. These remnants functioned as persistent reminders of a historical world that had not entirely disappeared. Within this fractured temporal landscape, nostalgia emerged as one of the most significant emotional responses to the disruptions of modernity.<sup>35</sup> Nostalgia did not simply express a sentimental longing for earlier times; it also reflected a deeper search for authenticity in a world where inherited frameworks of meaning appeared increasingly fragile. The desire to recover an authentic cultural self often drew intellectuals toward the aesthetic and spiritual traditions of the past. However, this search for authenticity rarely resulted in the restoration of a lost world. Instead, it frequently intensified the awareness of a historical discontinuity that could no longer be easily reconciled. Between

32 The problem discourse of modernity refers to a critical intellectual framework that approaches modernity not as a linear process of progress, but as a condition marked by tension, rupture, and contradiction. Rather than treating modernization as purely beneficial, this discourse emphasizes the social, cultural, and psychological dislocations produced by rapid transformation, secularization, industrialization, urbanization, and changing temporal regimes. See, Couze Venn and Mike Featherstone, "Modernity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, 2-3 (2006): 457-465.

33 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 1.

34 S.N. Eisenstadt, "Modernity and Modernization," *Sociopedia.isa*, 2010, 1.

35 Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge, "Nostalgia: Past, Present, Future," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, 5 (2008): 304.

nostalgia for the past and the quest for authenticity in the present emerged a pervasive sense of uneasiness. This uneasiness may be understood as a condition produced by the divided self, suspended between competing temporal horizons and struggling to reconcile inherited cultural memory with the demands of a rapidly transforming modern order. In this sense, uneasiness represents not merely a psychological state but a broader existential condition characteristic of societies undergoing accelerated processes of modernization.

From a Sufi perspective, such uneasiness may also be understood as the loss of *ḥudūr*, the state of inner presence and spiritual tranquility that arises when the self is oriented toward the remembrance of the Divine.<sup>36</sup> In classical Sufi thought, the heart attains serenity (*iṭmi'nān*) only when it is freed from fragmentation and restored to a state of inward unity.<sup>37</sup> When this metaphysical orientation weakens, the self may experience profound restlessness and dislocation. Read through this lens, the tensions between nostalgia, authenticity, and uneasiness reveal not only the sociocultural dilemmas of modernity but also the traces of a deeper spiritual disruption. The theoretical discussions of nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity presented in this part, therefore, serve two purposes. First, they illuminate how these concepts emerge within the broader discourse on the crises of modernity. Second, they provide the conceptual framework through which the subsequent analysis of Tanpınar's *Huzur* will examine how these interrelated conditions shape the novel's representation of modern Turkish subjectivity.

36 Mehmet Ali Çalgan, "Stres Çağında Huzuru Yakalamak: Hadisler Işığında Dindarlık-Huzur İlişkisi", *İslami İlimler Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 9 (2021): 54-68.

37 Salih Çift, "Tasavvufta Sekine Kavramı", *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15, 2 (2006): 1-14.

#### 4.1. Nostalgia and the Search for a Paradise Lost: The Experience of Temporal Dislocation From Late Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic

Nostalgia is widely understood as a distinctly modern phenomenon that expresses a collective sense of loss produced by historical rupture. It is defined as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed," and the term was inspired by Odysseus's long journey to reach his native island, Ithaca, and reunite with his wife, Penelope.<sup>38</sup> At its core lies the gradual separation of past and present. Nostalgia emerges when the past becomes fixed as an image within the consciousness of the present, generating a desire to restore a lost continuity of time and place. The term itself derives from the Greek words *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (pain) and was first coined in the seventeenth century by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer (d. 1752), who described nostalgia as a form of homesickness so intense that it approached pathology.<sup>39</sup> Beyond its early medical usage, however, nostalgia gradually came to designate a broader cultural condition produced by modernity.<sup>40</sup> It makes visible the tension between temporal distance and spatial proximity: the material remnants of the past, monuments, ruins, and historical landscapes, remain physically present while belonging to a time that appears irretrievably lost. In this sense, objects become crucial carriers of memory.<sup>41</sup> Even in decay, they attract the

38 Sedikides et al., "Nostalgia: Past, Present, Future", 304-307.

39 Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 54.

40 Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 18.

41 Büşra Çopuroğlu, "Cities of Notalgia, Collision of Past, Present and Memory in Space in Nostalgia, The Black Book and Ignorance" (Master's thesis, Yeditepe University, 2017), 2; Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*, (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2010), 6;

nostalgic imagination because they transform material space into a repository of historical consciousness.

This tension between time and space is central to Tanpınar's *A Mind at Peace*, a novel fundamentally shaped by Istanbul, where nostalgia is inseparable from the city's historical and cultural fabric.<sup>42</sup> The city's monumental architecture, the geography of the Bosphorus, and the lingering traces of the Ottoman past repeatedly evoke a temporal layer that does not coincide with the present.<sup>43</sup> Ottoman monuments function not merely as historical artifacts but as spatial reminders of a cultural world that continues to inhabit the modern city while belonging to another time.<sup>44</sup> The resulting disjunction between time and space generates a sense of duality that manifests itself as ambivalence, loss of belonging, and uncertainty about cultural identity.<sup>45</sup> In this atmosphere of temporal fragmentation, nostalgia reflects a deeper search for continuity in a world where the relationship between past and present has been profoundly unsettled.

In Tanpınar's intellectual world, this temporal rupture becomes particularly visible. Time appears divided between what is perceived as the "old" and the "new."<sup>46</sup> However, Tanpınar does not simply lament the disappearance of the past. Rather, he attempts to preserve what might be called the identity of culture as a hidden or secret time that persists beneath the surface of historical change. Tanpınar's understanding of time thus challenges the

rigid temporal framework imposed by modernization. Although modernity may be conceived as a long historical process, modernization in many non-Western contexts was experienced as a condensed and urgent moment of transition, one that demanded rapid synchronization with Europe. Time was no longer perceived merely as lived duration or historical continuity; it became a measure of civilizational distance, delay, and belatedness. This is precisely the anxiety voiced by İhsan in *A Mind at Peace*, when he observes that different forms of life inhabit different temporal rhythms: "The time of the growing child is different than that of the ill. We're outside universal time. What I mean to say is that we must change our pace of time. We must catch up to the world."<sup>47</sup> Through İhsan's words, Tanpınar reveals that modernization does not simply introduce new institutions or ideas; it reorganizes the very experience of time by producing a sense of lateness and the compulsion to accelerate.

This observation reflects a distinctly modernist awareness of temporal disparity, in which Turkey appears historically "belated" relative to European societies.<sup>48</sup> Such a perception emerged in the narratives of progress that positioned Europe as the normative center of historical development while locating non-Western societies within a temporal framework of delay. In this context, modernization came to be experienced as an effort to overcome an assumed historical lag through the acceleration of social, political, and cultural transformation. Tanpınar's reflections

Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay*, 55.

42 Mehmet Aydın, "Kayıp Zamanın İzinde" Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, (İstanbul: Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2010), 120

43 Çopuroğlu, "Cities of Notalgia," 3.

44 Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, 8.

45 Ayşen Arıöz Ete, "Modernlik Çözümlemelerinde Nostaljik Perspektifler", (Master's thesis, Kırıkkale University, 2002), 16.

46 Ete, "Modernlik Çözümlemelerinde Nostaljik Perspektifler", 230, 239.

47 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 119.

48 As Avner Wishnitzer has demonstrated in his study of changing temporal regimes in the late Ottoman Empire, the spread of standardized and disciplined notions of time fundamentally reshaped perceptions of historical progress and social synchronization. See, Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks: Alla Turca Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 3.

capture the psychological and existential dimensions of this condition, revealing how the pressure to synchronize with an external temporal model generated uneasiness, fragmentation, and an unstable relationship between past and present. Tanpınar also insists that historical continuity cannot be severed entirely. The cultural and emotional worlds inherited from the Ottoman past continue to inhabit the present, even as modernization seeks to reorganize social life according to new temporal frameworks. Nostalgia, therefore, emerges in the novel as an awareness of living among the remnants of a civilization whose presence persists despite historical rupture. Much of the criticism directed toward the present arises from the perception that a cultural world formed over centuries is gradually disappearing. Mümtaz expresses this anxiety in a striking passage:

As for the corpses in my head, they're certainly just as manifest in you. You know what's really depressing? We're their sole guardians. If we don't give them a modicum of our existence, they'll lose their only right to life. Poor forefathers, maestros of music, poets and everyone else whose name and influence has reached our day, they wait with such longing to enrich our lives... and accost us in the most unexpected places.<sup>49</sup>

In this passage, nostalgia appears as a responsibility toward cultural inheritance. The past survives only insofar as it continues to inhabit the consciousness of the living. In the novel, this nostalgic sensibility emerges through both material and symbolic forms.<sup>50</sup> Architectural monuments, the geography of the Bosphorus, and the aesthetic world of Ottoman classical music function as vehicles through which the past remains present

49 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 201.

50 Ete, "Modernlik Çözümlemelerinde Nostaljik Perspektifler", 16.

within the modern city. At a deeper level, this tension between past and present may also be interpreted through the Sufi understanding of *ḥudūr*. In classical Sufi thought, *ḥudūr* signifies a state of inward presence and spiritual composure attained when the heart remains connected to a deeper metaphysical continuity. When this continuity is disrupted, the self may experience fragmentation and restlessness. From this perspective, the nostalgia that permeates Tanpınar's novel reflects both a cultural longing and a spiritual uneasiness arising from the weakening of this inner orientation. Meanwhile, nostalgia in *A Mind at Peace* does not entail a rejection of the present. The novel repeatedly emphasizes that nostalgia coexists with an awareness of the present moment. As Nuran asks Mümtaz, "Why don't you live in the present, Mümtaz? Why do you either dwell in the past or in the future? The present hour also exists." Mümtaz had no intention to deny the present hour.<sup>51</sup>

This exchange suggests that Tanpınar's understanding of nostalgia emerges through an effort to render the present meaningful by restoring continuity between contemporary existence and the cultural and spiritual inheritances of the past. For Tanpınar, the Turkish intellectual shaped by centuries of Ottoman civilization could scarcely detach himself from this historical legacy. The novel thus explores the uneasiness of a consciousness suspended between past and present while searching for a mode of inhabiting modernity capable of preserving cultural continuity.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, the novel stages a debate between opposing intellectual positions. Suad represents a positivist outlook that demands a radical break with the past and openly rejects religious belief, echoing

51 Ete, "Modernlik Çözümlemelerinde Nostaljik Perspektifler", 207.

52 Elif Türkislağolu, *Türk Düşünce Dünyasında Tanpınar*, (İstanbul: Hece Yayınları, 2015), 104.

certain Nietzschean critiques of tradition.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, Suad never participates in the novel's nostalgic scenes and consistently dismisses attachments to the past. Against this position, Tanpınar gestures toward the possibility of a synthesis between Ottoman cultural heritage and the Republican present.

Tanpınar's reflections on cultural continuity appear clearly in his references to the city's architecture.<sup>54</sup> Within the novel, nostalgia is most powerfully conveyed through the spatial and cultural landscape of Istanbul, the city's architecture, the geography of the Bosphorus, and the lingering traces of the Ottoman past. At the same time, nostalgia is embodied in individual figures, most notably in Nuran. For Mümtaz, Nuran becomes inseparable from the memory of the past. She herself refers to her lineage as connected to the Mevlevî order through her father and to the Bektâshî tradition through her mother, evoking the Sufi heritage that once formed an essential dimension of Ottoman cultural life. Although the Sufi orders were officially banned in 1925, Nuran symbolically carries this spiritual lineage into the Republican era. In Mümtaz's perception, she is not merely a beloved figure but also a living embodiment of a cultural and spiritual continuity that links the present to the Ottoman past. Throughout the novel, Nuran is depicted as reminding Mümtaz of the past

and the beauty he ascribes to it. Although she sometimes resembles the women in the paintings of Renoir, Ghirlandaio, or Venetian painters, and stirs physical desire, Mümtaz prefers the Nuran he sees in classical music, for this Nuran produces reflections of past presences, as if she were a golden key that unlocks all the past times.<sup>55</sup>

Due to these two enabling forces that clung tightly to Mümtaz's identity, Nuran became an enigmatic being returning to live as the mortal substantiation of the historical, the sublime, and the vital; she became a spectacular presence vanquishing time through urge and beauty; and through her, he deciphered the logic of his aesthetic and emotional realms. Being next to Nuran, embracing her, and loving her assumed the quality of a force transcending the limits of her person.<sup>56</sup>

Through this association, Nuran becomes more than a romantic object of desire. She emerges as a symbolic mediator between past and present, embodying both the aesthetic refinement of Istanbul and the spiritual inheritance of the Sufi traditions that once animated the city's cultural life. Mümtaz's love for her therefore reflects not only personal attachment but also a deeper longing for a form of harmony in which cultural memory, spiritual tradition, and modern existence might once again converge.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, in *A Mind at Peace*, nostalgia does not

53 The Nietzschean critique of modernity refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) critique of European modernity as a condition characterized by nihilism, the decline of metaphysical certainty, and the dissolution of religious and moral foundations inherited from the past. Nietzsche regarded the collapse of transcendent values as one of the defining crises of modern civilization, producing a fragmented consciousness detached from older forms of meaning and continuity. See, Jacek Dobrowolski, "Nietzsche and Modernity," *Athens Journal of Philosophy* 4, 2 (2025): 83-100.

54 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, "Nesilleri Terbiye Eden Mimari," in *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar Ebediyet'in Huzurunda*, eds. Ümit Meriç, Selma Ümit Karışman, (İstanbul: Etkileşim Biyografi, 2006), 127.

55 Ayşe Özge Kocak Hemmat, "The Past as an Object: Orientalist Fantasies," *Middle East Literatures* 20, 2 (2017): 232-251.

56 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 237-238.

57 Tahir Abacı, *Gerçekçilik Açısından Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar* (İstanbul: İkaros Yayınları, 2015), 92; Ercan Çankaya, "Reflections of Conservatism and Nostalgia in Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's Representation of Istanbul," (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2015), 78-79; When-chin Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arab Novel: Nation-State: Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 8.

simply express a sentimental attachment to the Ottoman past but functions as a reflective mode through which the relationship between past and present is reconsidered. Through the landscapes of Istanbul, the geography of the Bosphorus, and the cultural memories embedded in architecture, music, and everyday life, Tanpınar presents the past as a living presence within the modern city. These material and spatial remnants transform nostalgia into an active search for cultural continuity rather than a passive longing for what has been lost. In this sense, nostalgia becomes a means of confronting the uneasiness produced by the temporal rupture of Turkish modernization. By revisiting the aesthetic and spiritual horizons of Ottoman civilization, including the Sufi sensibility that once shaped the cultural life of the city, Tanpınar suggests that the problem of modernity in Turkey cannot be resolved through the rejection of the past but through a renewed engagement with it. In this sense, nostalgia becomes a means of confronting the crisis of modernity itself: not by escaping it, but by seeking a form of cultural and spiritual orientation through which the uneasiness of modern existence might once again approach *ḥuḍūr*.

#### 4.2. Un-easiness and the Tragedy of Men: Spiritual Dislocation and the Crisis of Modernity

If nostalgia in *A Mind at Peace* represents a search for cultural continuity, the other side of Tanpınar's narrative is the profound unease produced by modernity itself. Modern social theory frequently interprets modernity as a condition marked by fragmentation, acceleration, and the erosion of inherited cultural frameworks. Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) was among the earliest philosophers to diagnose this condition, portraying modern culture as a symptom of decline in which the

dominance of rationalism, mass democracy, and commercial society gradually emptied culture of its deeper metaphysical and spiritual foundations.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, modernity produces what Nietzsche famously described as a crisis of meaning, the collapse of traditional value systems and the emergence of nihilism following the "death of God." In contrast to this condition of spiritual dislocation, pre-modern religious traditions often conceived human existence through concepts of inner presence and metaphysical orientation. Within Islamic intellectual history, and particularly in Sufi thought, the notion of *ḥuḍūr*, the state of spiritual presence before God, designates a condition in which the self attains inner coherence through remembrance, awareness, and proximity to the divine. From this perspective, the uneasiness characteristic of modernity can also be understood as the erosion of such metaphysical frameworks of presence.<sup>59</sup> Later sociological analyses likewise emphasize the destabilizing character of modern life and its fragmented perception of reality. Anthony Giddens, in particular, underlines the radical discontinuities introduced by modern institutions, the unprecedented pace of social change, and the emergence of social structures fundamentally different from those of traditional societies.<sup>60</sup> Together, these dynamics produce a historical rupture between past and present that destabilizes established forms of belonging and identity.

One of the most profound dimensions of this rupture concerns the transformation of temporal consciousness. In pre-modern societies, time was largely embedded in religious

58 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

59 Marshall Berman, *All That Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 22.

60 Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 4.

rhythms, seasonal cycles, and local traditions; modernity, by contrast, introduced a universalized, linear conception of time organized around the ideal of progress.<sup>61</sup> Within this framework, societies were positioned along a single developmental timeline, allowing Europe to present itself as the most “advanced” stage of history while relegating other cultures to earlier temporal positions. The tension produced by this temporal reconfiguration is central to Tanpınar’s *A Mind at Peace*. The novel repeatedly reflects on the disjunction between inherited cultural rhythms and the accelerated tempo of modern life, a conflict captured in the remark that “we are outside universal time... we must change our pace of time.”<sup>62</sup> For Tanpınar, this condition generates a deeply tragic awareness in which individuals must live within a modern world whose values appear increasingly uncertain, yet they remain unable to escape it. The tragic consciousness embodied in the character of Mümtaz, deeply influenced by Nietzschean reflections on tragedy, expresses precisely this predicament: a life lived with full awareness of historical loss, fragmentation, and mortality, however sustained by the courage to continue seeking meaning. Mümtaz’s understanding of tragedy is deeply informed by a perspective reminiscent of Nietzschean thought. At several points in the novel, he expresses admiration for humanity’s capacity to confront its limitations while affirming life. As he declares: “I admire mankind. I admire its power to fight constraints. Fully aware of its fate yet engaging in life nevertheless, I admire that courage. Which of us on a starlit night doesn’t carry the weight of all Creation on our backs? Nothing could be as beautiful as the courage of humanity.”<sup>63</sup>

61 Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks*, 3.

62 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 119.

63 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 109.

This reflection resonates with Nietzsche’s conception of the tragic, which does not arise from mere suffering but from the conscious acceptance of life despite the awareness of its inevitabilities and limits. For Nietzsche, tragedy emerges when the individual recognizes that the world cannot ultimately be transformed according to human desire, but nevertheless continues to affirm life and existence. In this sense, the tragic condition lies in the tension between human consciousness and the constraints imposed by fate. Human beings are not entirely free, for they remain bound to a world they cannot escape or fundamentally alter. Tragedy, therefore, grows out of conflicts of values and irreconcilable tensions within existence.<sup>64</sup> Mümtaz echoes this sensibility when he reflects: “I admire tragedy itself. True greatness resides in the courage we display despite our consciousness of death.”<sup>65</sup> For Tanpınar, the notion of loss occupies a central place in his attempt to describe the world of his time. What had been lost, in his view, was a sense of integrity and wholeness. He perceived modern life as characterized by fragmentation, duality, and discontinuity, conditions that undermined the coherence of both individual and collective existence.

In his thought, the loss of wholeness manifests itself in two closely intertwined realms. The first concerns the disrupted relationship between the individual and society, while the second relates to the rupture in socio-cultural continuity brought about by the radical transformation of the early Republican period. With the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the implementation of sweeping top-down reforms, a widening gap emerged between people’s inherited identities, their present social reality, and the future identities

64 Balcı, *Tanpınar Trajik Bir Şair ve Şiiri*, 18.

65 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 109.

they were encouraged to embrace. Caught between these temporal and cultural orientations, society experienced a profound identity crisis that soon became a central theme of Republican literature. In his novel, Tanpınar foregrounds the tragedy produced by division, duality, and paradox within modern Turkish society, narrating this condition on two interconnected levels: the individual, embodied in Mümtaz's inner struggles, and the broader societal level. Mümtaz's struggles are depicted as follows in the novel:

He was anxious, his mind was divided into two, even three, parts. The first Mümtaz, maybe the most vital, dreading fate and trying to suppress his thoughts, stood beside İhsan's sickbed, staring at his unfocused eyes, chapped lips, and rising and falling chest. The second, Mümtaz tore himself apart trying to reunite with Nuran on each and every Istanbul street corner where she might appear; he tossed a scrap of himself to every gale that arose. A third Mümtaz marched into the wilderness of the unknown and the harsh whims of fate behind the military detachment that had caused the streetcar to stop suddenly.<sup>66</sup>

Through various dimensions of Mümtaz's personality, Tanpınar depicts the uncertainty and despair that define his inner world. Mümtaz's anxiety over İhsan's illness reflects not only a personal fear but also a deeper anxiety about the future. Having filled the void left by his father with İhsan, Mümtaz depends on him as a source of intellectual and moral stability.<sup>67</sup> If Mümtaz represents the new generation, İhsan stands as the intellectual foundation upon which that generation rests. The possibility of losing İhsan, therefore, threatens the collapse of Mümtaz's entire system of values. As the novel states, "He existed

in a state of paradox, his conflicting natures pursuing each other; he thought, looked, and felt through their mediation."<sup>68</sup> Tanpınar situates this personal conflict within the broader historical context of a society undergoing a profound transformation, from the mentality of the sultanate to that of the nation-state during a period marked by the tensions of Westernization. Describing himself as a man of a "civilizational crisis," Tanpınar intertwines personal tragedy with the tragedy of society. The divided self and the dilemmas of the individual form the basis of the pervasive sense of *huzursuzluk* that permeates the novel. Mümtaz's inner crisis thus becomes a reflective lens through which the contradictions of Turkish modernization are portrayed. As the novel suggests, İstanbul itself embodies the coexistence of conflicting worlds: "Here two opposing and difficult-to-imitate polarities of life... actually merged: genuine poetry and grandeur, or rather, their castoffs... At each step, remnants of out-of-fashion entertainments and the traces of old and grand traditions... could be found heaped together."<sup>69</sup>

A central question in Tanpınar's reflection on the dualities created by modernization concerns the figure of the "new man" who would accompany society's transformation. For Tanpınar, any meaningful synthesis between past and present must begin with the self.<sup>70</sup> As he repeatedly suggests, cultural renewal requires a return to one's own historical and spiritual resources, "we need to go back to ourselves... go back to our own past, go back to our own cultural wealth." What Tanpınar sought was a form of personal and cultural modernization rooted in an organically constituted cultural self. In this respect, his reflections also resonate with the

66 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 51.

67 Cemile Yalvarı, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar'ın Romanlarında İdeoloji", (Master's thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi 2015), 129.

68 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 67.

69 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 47.

70 Sezer, "The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity in Turkish Communitarian Thought", 433.

long intellectual heritage of Islamic thought, particularly the Sufi understanding of the self as a site of inner transformation. In classical Sufi discourse, the ideal of *insān al-kāmil* (the perfected human) refers to a figure who achieves spiritual wholeness by harmonizing the inner life with a deeper metaphysical order.<sup>71</sup> The search for such inner coherence stands in sharp contrast to the fragmentation associated with modern existence. Within *A Mind at Peace*, this question becomes inseparable from the experience of unease produced by modernity. The novel repeatedly stages philosophical debates about the possibility of a new human type capable of overcoming the tensions of the present. These reflections resonate strongly with Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his discussions of tragedy and the emergence of the *Übermensch*.<sup>72</sup> Tanpınar employs the tragic mode to explore whether

the torments of modern existence can lead to a meaningful resolution.<sup>73</sup> Tragedy in this sense arises from the coexistence of contradictory values and irreconcilable horizons. This dual structure is central to the novel: while Mümtaz represents the tragic individual who continues to seek meaning within this fractured world, Suad embodies the figure who moves from tragedy toward nihilism and ultimately regards existence as meaningless.

The atmosphere of impending catastrophe that surrounds the novel, especially the anticipation of the Second World War, deepens these philosophical tensions. The approaching war becomes a symbolic horizon against which different visions of the future are articulated. For İhsan, who often represents a mediating and historically conscious voice, the war threatens to destroy the fragile remnants of culture and civilization, bringing about the loss of freedom itself.<sup>74</sup> Mümtaz, however, understands tragedy as an inevitable dimension of existence and interprets the coming conflict as a historical turning point: "All of it foretells the approach of the end of an era. We expect it, even if it proves to be an apocalypse."<sup>75</sup> Within these debates, the figure of the "new man" emerges most clearly in the reflections of Suad, whose outlook bears strong affinities with Nietzsche's vision of the *Übermensch* articulated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>76</sup>

For Suad, a truly new humanity can only arise through a radical rupture with the past. He anticipates a figure who will reject inherited traditions entirely and live beyond the moral frameworks of earlier civilizations. As he

71 The concept of *insān al-kāmil* (the perfect or complete human being) in Sufi thought refers to the spiritually perfected individual who fully realizes the divine attributes within the human self and attains proximity to God through moral refinement, spiritual discipline, and inner knowledge. Systematized especially in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), the term signifies the highest stage of human perfection, where the individual becomes a mirror reflecting divine reality while remaining fully engaged in the human world. See, Hatice Dilek Güldütuna and Elif Hilal Doğan, "Ahmed Avni Konuk'un Fusûsü'l-Hikem Şerhi'ne Göre Yaratılış Bağlamında Ferdiyet Kavramı", *Tasavvuf Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1, 1 (2022): 3-14.

72 The *Übermensch*, formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche most prominently in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, signifies an ideal of human self-overcoming that emerges after the collapse of inherited religious and moral certainties. Rather than denoting biological superiority, the concept describes an individual capable of creating values independently of conventional morality, transcending resentment, conformity, and metaphysical dependence. The *Übermensch* embodies Nietzsche's broader critique of modernity, particularly his rejection of passive nihilism and his call for a life-affirming mode of existence grounded in creative autonomy, perpetual self-transformation, and the affirmation of earthly existence. See, Paul S Loeb, "Finding the Übermensch in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 30 (2005): 70-101.

73 Balcı, *Tanpınar Trajik Bir Şair ve Şiiri*, 35.

74 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 109.

75 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 109.

76 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 26; Ingrid Florez Fortich, "Nietzsche's Übermensch: the Notion of a Higher Aristocracy of the Future", *Civilizar* 10, 18 (2010): 76.

suggests, such a transformation may emerge only through catastrophic upheaval: “It’s not that I oppose its occurrence. Humanity can only rid itself of obsolete life-molds through such a conflagration...”<sup>77</sup> İhsan, by contrast, defends a more historically grounded vision of renewal, arguing that genuine transformation must remain connected to the cultural foundations of the past. As Mümtaz later articulates: “A new life is necessary... In order to leap forward or to teach new horizons, one still has to stand on some solid ground. A sense of identity is necessary... Every nation appropriates this identity from its golden age.”<sup>78</sup> The unresolved tension between these perspectives reflects the deeper condition of in-betweenness experienced by individuals in the modern age. The search for a “new man” therefore becomes another expression of the broader crisis of identity produced by the temporal rupture of modernity, a crisis in which the individual oscillates between radical rupture and the desire for continuity.

Berman’s reading of nineteenth-century modernism emphasizes a recurring hope that the injuries produced by modernity might one day be repaired through new forms of life, imagination, and historical consciousness.<sup>79</sup> Tanpınar’s vision may be situated within this broader modernist concern. Rather than embracing a radical rupture with tradition, as Suad’s Nietzschean posture suggests, Tanpınar imagines cultural renewal through continuity, mediation, and historical depth. This vision is most clearly articulated through İhsan, the wise intellectual figure in *A Mind at Peace*, often read in relation to Yahya Kemal Beyatlı’s influence on Tanpınar.<sup>80</sup> Beyatlı is

one of the leading literary and intellectual figures of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. Yahya Kemal argued that Turkish modernization should emerge from the historical and aesthetic legacy of Ottoman civilization rather than through the complete rejection of the past. İhsan similarly rejects both cultural amnesia and rigid traditionalism. He envisions a form of modernization capable of preserving cultural memory while responding to the social and intellectual demands of the present. For Tanpınar, the classical Ottoman cultural inheritance constitutes an indispensable source of historical continuity, aesthetic sensibility, and collective meaning. Such continuity, however, cannot survive through nostalgia alone; it requires stable material, institutional, and social foundations capable of sustaining a living relationship between past and present. Tanpınar’s vision therefore represents neither romantic restoration nor uncritical Westernization, but an attempt to formulate a historically grounded modernity.

The question of how such a society might be formed is closely connected to the novel’s broader discussions of the “new man” and the tragedy of modern existence. In the early Republican period, the Kemalist project attempted to define the ideal citizen in rigid terms: secular, positivist, nationalist,

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diplomat associated with the cultural and literary transformations of the late Ottoman and early Republican eras. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar first encountered Yahya Kemal as his teacher at the Darülfünun (İstanbul University) in the early 1920s, a formative period during which Yahya Kemal’s lectures on Ottoman history, poetry, and civilization profoundly shaped the younger writer’s intellectual outlook. Their relationship gradually evolved beyond the teacher-student relationship into a lasting intellectual influence. Tanpınar later regarded Yahya Kemal as one of the central figures who taught him to perceive Ottoman cultural history as a living source of aesthetic and historical continuity within modern Turkish life. See, Halim Kara, “Milletleşme Dönemi Şairinin İcadı: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar’ın Yahya Kemal Monografisi,” *Journal of Turkish Language and Literature* 59, 2 (2019): 315-332.

77 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 198.

78 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 198.

79 Berman, *All That Solid Melts Into Air*, 22.

80 Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (Skopje, 1884-İstanbul, 1958), was a prominent Turkish poet, intellectual, and

and fully oriented toward the West, while distancing itself from the Ottoman past.<sup>81</sup> This singular and standardized vision of identity, however, often produced a deep sense of dislocation within society. Tanpınar's novel reflects this crisis by portraying individuals caught between inherited cultural traditions and the demands of modern transformation. Through the discussions among the characters, particularly İhsan, Tanpınar suggests that social renewal requires not only cultural reflection but also structural transformation. Economic reform, a productive education system, and the development of a domestic economy are briefly discussed in the novel as necessary conditions for societal progress.<sup>82</sup> Yet these concerns ultimately point to a deeper philosophical question: the relationship between material and spiritual development.<sup>83</sup> Tanpınar implies that cultural and spiritual renewal cannot emerge in isolation from the material conditions of life; rather, a stable social and economic foundation is required for individuals and societies to rediscover an authentic sense of self.

#### 4.3. Authenticity and Recovery of the True Self: Cultural Memory, Sufi Sensibility, and the Search for *hıdūr*

The uneasiness generated by modernity, both within the individual and in the social order, produces a persistent longing for continuity.<sup>84</sup> This longing articulates a search for an authentic mode of being grounded in a deeper coherence of the self.<sup>85</sup> In *A Mind at Peace*,

81 Parla, "The Wounded Tongue: Turkey's Language Reform and the Canonicity of the Novel," 255.

82 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 198.

83 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 200.

84 Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge Publication, 2005), 1; Alessandro Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity: Rethinking the Project of Modernity* (London: Routledge Publication, 1998) 149.

85 Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity*, 149.

authenticity is closely tied to a reflective form of life shaped by memory, aesthetic sensibility, and spiritual depth. The refined traditions of the city, its architecture, its rhythms of everyday life, and the contemplative atmosphere of Turkish classical music appear as traces of a cultural order in which the self existed in harmony with its surroundings. Such traces evoke an inner coherence that resonates with the Sufi understanding of the self as a reality cultivated through reflection, discipline, and awareness. Authenticity, in this sense, emerges as the recovery of a living continuity between the self and its cultural inheritance.

Within the novel, this search unfolds through contrasting responses to the crisis of modernity.<sup>86</sup> Some figures turn toward rupture, seeking liberation in the rejection of inherited forms; others attempt to sustain a vital connection with the cultural and spiritual foundations of the past. Between these positions stands the figure who experiences most intensely the uneasiness of the age. The force of this experience lies in the simultaneous awareness of fragmentation and the persistent desire for wholeness. Authenticity thus appears as an effort to hold together memory and transformation, tradition and modern experience, without collapsing one into the other. In this horizon, the search for authenticity converges with the search for *hıdūr*, understood as a state in which the self, history, and the surrounding world may enter into a fragile but meaningful harmony. The anxiety that animates this quest emerges from a rupture in cultural memory and from the dislocation of Sufi sensibilities within Turkish modernity. The encounter with European civilization reconfigures the terms through which a society recognizes itself, introducing a hierarchy of cultural value that unset-

86 Sezer, "The Anxiety of Cultural Authenticity," 434.

tles inherited forms of self-understanding. Tanpınar locates the possibility of a meaningful modernity in the capacity to remain connected to the spiritual and aesthetic sources that shape historical consciousness. This crisis of recognition is captured in one of the novel's most striking reflections: "We don't appreciate Dede because he's no Wagner; Yunus Emre, because we haven't been able to cast him as a Verlaine; or Bâkî, because he can't be a Goethe or a Gide."<sup>87</sup>

The statement exposes a profound cultural insecurity. The tendency to value one's own tradition only when it can be translated into Western equivalents. In this gesture, a civilization begins to look at itself through borrowed categories and gradually loses the ability to perceive the depth of its own inheritance. The figures invoked in this passage carry a symbolic weight within the Turkish cultural imagination. Hammâmîzâde İsmail Dede Efendi (d. 1846), one of the most influential composers of classical Ottoman music during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, represents the metaphysical sensibility of Ottoman classical music, a tradition deeply shaped by Sufi cosmology and spiritual discipline.<sup>88</sup> Yunus Emre stands at the formative center of Anatolian Sufism in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth cen-

turies, articulating in vernacular Turkish a language of divine love and inner truth that not only reflected the spiritual transformations of his age but also profoundly shaped the religious imagination and ethical sensibilities of subsequent generations across Anatolia and the wider Turkish-speaking world.<sup>89</sup> Bâkî, the great Ottoman dīvān poet celebrated as *Sultānū'ş-şu'arā'* (Sultan of Poets) and renowned for endowing classical Ottoman poetry with extraordinary expressive power, represents the classical peak of sixteenth-century Ottoman poetry, where language achieves a clear balance between aesthetic refinement, formal order, and intellectual clarity, shaping the standards of the tradition that followed.<sup>90</sup> Together these figures evoke a civilizational tradition through which the Ottoman-Turkish self historically understood beauty, memory, and cultural continuity. Tanpınar's repeated return to these names reveals a central aspect of his understanding of authenticity.<sup>91</sup> Authenticity, in this context, emerges through continuity with a historical and spiritual inheritance preserved across generations through language, art, music, and memory. The self acquires coherence through its relationship to this accumulated cultural world and through an awareness of the traditions that shape historical consciousness. Tanpınar's search for authenticity, therefore, approaches a Sufi understanding of the self in which truth is realized through inward recognition and the cultivation of an already existing spiritual inheritance embedded within the tradition itself.

87 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 289.

88 Hammâmîzâde İsmâ'îl Dede Efendi (d. 1846) was one of the most influential composers of classical Ottoman music during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Associated with the Mevlevî order and trained within the courtly and religious musical traditions of İstanbul, he composed extensively in major Ottoman musical forms, including *âyîn*, *beste*, *semâ'î*, and *şarki*. His works played a central role in shaping the repertoire and aesthetic canon of Ottoman-Turkish music, particularly through their synthesis of Mevlevî musical spirituality, court culture, and the sophisticated modal system (*maqām*) of Ottoman composition. See, Nesrin Feyzioğlu, "Türk Müsikîsinin Modernleşmesi Bağlamında Hammâmîzâde İsmail Dede Efendi ve Ferahfezâ Makamı", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 21, (2017): 625-646.

89 Mahmud Erol Kılıç, "Yunus Emre's Poetry and Philosophy," *Tasavvuf Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 4, 1 (2025): 135-141.

90 Fatma Sinem Eryılmaz, "The Power of Poetry in the Ottoman Context," *Rulers as Authors in the Islamic World: Knowledge, Authority and Legitimacy* (London: Brill, 2024), 561-595.

91 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 289.

Tanpınar's reflections on authenticity also shape his critique of the intellectual and political elites who directed the modernization of Turkey. In his view, the crisis of modern Turkish society emerged from the inability to establish a meaningful continuity between inherited cultural forms and the demands of modern life. Rather than cultivating a balanced transformation grounded in historical consciousness, many of the intellectuals of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods became detached from the very cultural world they sought to reform. As İhsan remarks in the novel, the statesmen of the *Tanzīmāt* lacked even a basic understanding of political economy, while Sultān 'Abdulḥamīd appears as a ruler consumed by the anxiety of preserving power. In the absence of a stable middle class capable of sustaining social equilibrium, villagers, merchants, and artisans alike were compelled to follow the direction set by intellectual elites whose uncertainty deepened the civilizational disorientation of society rather than resolving it.

To articulate this condition, Tanpınar turns to Goethe's metaphor of the Homunculus.<sup>92</sup> In Goethe's imagination, Homunculus is a pure spirit confined within a fragile glass vessel, an intelligence deprived of fully realized existence.<sup>93</sup> Rejecting the limitations of this enclosure, he ultimately shatters the vessel and dissolves into the larger cosmos. Tanpınar reinterprets this image as a meditation on the dilemmas of modern identity. Complete enclosure within tradition produces sterility and immobility, whereas an uncritical surrender to modernity dissolves historical continuity altogether. What emerges instead is the possibility of gradual expansion and transformation. İhsan expresses this vision with

remarkable clarity: "Whatever you do, don't break your shell. Expand it... make it part of your skin."<sup>94</sup> The metaphor points toward an organic model of cultural and spiritual transformation grounded in continuity rather than rupture. At this point, Tanpınar's reflections approach a perspective deeply resonant with Sufi conceptions of selfhood. In Sufi thought, spiritual maturation unfolds through refinement, discipline, and inner unveiling rather than through the destruction of the self's inherited form. The task is to deepen and transform the vessel of tradition until it becomes capable of encompassing a wider horizon of existence. Authenticity, therefore, emerges as a process of inner cultivation through which the self expands while preserving its continuity with the spiritual and cultural inheritance that sustains it.

Tanpınar describes the citizens of the Turkish Republic as "orphans of a civilizational collapse."<sup>95</sup> Cut off from the historical depth of the Ottoman past and asked to adopt an identity whose official origins were traced only to 1923, society found itself suspended in a condition of historical amnesia. As Mümtaz observes in the novel, the Republic attempted to create a new life before a new form of living had fully emerged.<sup>96</sup> The rupture with the past, therefore, did not resolve the crisis of identity. Instead, it produced a generation uncertain of who they were and how they were to situate themselves within history. For Tanpınar, such a rupture threatens to produce what İhsan calls a "nihilistic denial of the self."<sup>97</sup> After two centuries of political disintegration and the immense effort required to rebuild a society from the fragments of an empire, the greatest danger lies in losing the continuity that connects the present with the

92 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 293.

93 Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Faust I & 2*, ed. Stuart Atkins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), xxii.

94 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 293.

95 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 219.

96 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 219.

97 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 48.

accumulated experience of the past. Without this continuity, the individual cannot form an authentic self, capable of responding to the demands of modern life while remaining rooted in a living cultural memory.

The question therefore becomes inevitable: what elements of the past should be preserved in order to sustain authenticity? Mümtaz formulates this uncertainty with disarming simplicity: “What are we?” İhsan’s response is striking. Pointing not to political institutions or social structures but to aesthetic experience, he answers: “We are this *Nevā Kār*.”<sup>98</sup> The composition he refers to, one of the masterpieces of the Ottoman musical canon by Buhūrīzāde Muṣṭafā İtrī (d. 1712), symbolizes for Tanpınar the refined artistic sensibility that formed the deepest layer of Ottoman-Turkish civilization. What must be carried into the future, therefore, is not the mechanical preservation of past institutions but the continuation of this cultivated sensibility.<sup>99</sup> The classical musical and poetic tradition embodies a civilizational taste that connects spiritual depth with aesthetic refinement. In preserving such forms, society does not withdraw from the world but enters it more fully.

Authenticity requires the capacity to inhabit multiple cultural horizons simultaneously, “leaving neither Ronsard nor his contempo-

rary in the East, Fuḏūlī.”<sup>100</sup> The task is thus not to choose between civilizations but to sustain the continuity that allows them to meet within a living cultural self. Here, Tanpınar invokes two emblematic figures of distinct yet equally sophisticated literary civilizations. Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585), one of the leading poets of the French Renaissance and a central figure of La Pléiade, represented the humanist and classical revival of early modern Europe.<sup>101</sup> Fuḏūlī (d. 1556), on the other hand, stood at the height of the Ottoman-Persian poetic tradition, articulating metaphysical longing, love, and spiritual suffering through the refined language of divan poetry.<sup>102</sup> By placing these names side by side, Tanpınar rejects the assumption that cultural identity must be constructed through exclusion or rupture. The comparison instead expresses his broader vision of Ottoman-Turkish intellectual life as a space historically shaped by encounters, translations, and layered inheritances. What he seeks to preserve is a mode of cultural consciousness capable of remaining open to European humanism while sustaining continuity with the aesthetic and spiritual depth of the Ottoman-Islamic tradition.

For İhsan, the formation of an authentic self requires a sense of historical integrity capable of reconnecting past and present. When his former student Nuri asks how such a relationship with the past can be established without falling into nostalgia, İhsan admits that he does not possess a clear formula.<sup>103</sup> What

98 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 281. Buḫūrīzāde Muṣṭafā İtrī (d. 1712), one of the most celebrated composers of Ottoman classical music and a central figure in the seventeenth-century musical tradition, composed *Nevā Kār* in the prestigious musical form known as *kār*. The composition came to occupy a singular place within the Ottoman musical tradition because it embodied the aesthetic maturity of classical Turkish music at its height. Through its expansive melodic architecture, rhythmic complexity, and contemplative atmosphere, *Nevā Kār* represented an ideal of harmony, measure, and spiritual depth that later generations associated with the cultural refinement of the Ottoman world itself. See, İsmail Hakkı Özkan, “Kār”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2001, XXIV: 356.

99 Hemmat, “The Past as an Object,” 242.

100 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 105.

101 La Pléiade was a sixteenth-century circle of French poets who sought to elevate the French language and literary tradition by drawing inspiration from Greek and Roman antiquity while adapting classical forms to the vernacular. See, Ehsan Ahmed, “Pierre de Ronsard’s Odes and the Law of Poetic Space,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 44, 4 (1991): 757-775.

102 Abdülkadir Karahan, “Fuḏūlī”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1996, XIII: 240-246.

103 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 288.

he insists upon, however, is the necessity of preserving a distinct cultural identity while adopting the achievements of Western civilization. This encounter must not unfold unconsciously, “like following the flow of a river,” but through an awareness of what constitutes one’s own historical self. For İhsan, the core of this self lies in the classical taste inherited from the Ottoman tradition.

Tanpınar expresses this idea most powerfully through Ottoman classical music, which he refers to as an encompassing phenomenon, assigning to it everything from the İstanbul landscape to the entire Turkish culture, with its filth, decay, and splendor.<sup>104</sup> Something that trespasses reality and carries its listeners to a spiritual realm, even making them completely forget all the torments of an entire empire.<sup>105</sup> Most significantly, according to Tanpınar, the fact that Ottoman Classical Music is part of the identity of the subjects of the new Republic, and as something that Turks as a society belong to, must be realized. Every element in Tanpınar’s reference to understanding “one’s self” relates to creating an authentic, conscious identity, which will serve as the solid ground on which the modernization project will flourish.

In *A Mind at Peace*, music is a medium that contains the entire texture of a civilization—its splendor and decay, its landscapes, and its collective memory. More importantly, it possesses the capacity to lift the listener beyond the immediate world, opening a space of inward stillness and spiritual depth. In this sense, the musical tradition within Ottoman Sufi culture becomes one of the most profound vehicles for preserving the continuity of the self. This insight is inseparable from Tanpınar’s broader understanding of aesthetics. For him, genuine art cannot arise from

imitation; imitation produces distortion, not beauty. The true opposition is therefore not between East and West, but between the authentic and the imitated. Aesthetic integrity must extend beyond artistic production and permeate life itself. What Tanpınar calls “ways of life”, the patterns of conduct, leisure, celebration, and daily practice through which a society inhabits the world, constitute an aesthetic formation no less than works of art. As Berna Moran observes, this concept encompasses the entire cultural universe of a civilization.<sup>106</sup> These forms are not borrowed, precisely for this reason, Tanpınar suggests that an authentic life can possess the same beauty as an artwork.

In the novel, after Mümtaz says that he is searching for “lives that have been lived,” he gives Şeyh Gâlib (d. 1799), the great Ottoman Mevlevî poet and Hammâmîzâde İsmâ’îl Dede Efendi, one of the most influential composers of Ottoman classical music as examples, remarking that “it is certain that a person’s life can be as beautiful as an art piece.”<sup>107</sup> As he observes, “We look at his life; it is an ordinary one, but solely belonging to himself.” Just as a work of art loses its value and beauty when it is merely an imitation, the same can be said of adopted lifestyles. The concepts Tanpınar expresses through phrases such as “authentic,” “belonging to us,” and “un-imitated” constitute a central element of his mode of thinking. In his view, the defining virtue of a civilization lies in the authenticity of the lives that sustain it: “The virtue of our forefathers comes from the realness and authenticity of their lives. On the other hand, the virtue of the Western civilizations comes from them being generated by reality and continuing their development

104 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 197.

105 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 312.

106 Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*, 166.

107 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 119.

with this.”<sup>108</sup> This aesthetic vision of the self is deeply intertwined with the spiritual ethos of the Sufi tradition. The modesty and inward orientation that characterize many composers of Ottoman classical music exemplify a sensibility in which artistic creation is a path toward transcendence. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s, when *A Mind at Peace* was written, the government attempted to sever the public’s ties with classical Turkish music. For a period, it was banned from the radio and heavily restricted in public performance, as its association with the Ottoman past made it suspect within the new republican cultural agenda. Yet, as Walter Feldman notes, the Ottoman Empire possessed “the best-documented repertoire of any musical culture in the modern Near East,” even though in its final decades this tradition came under attack as the product of an alien musical heritage.<sup>109</sup>

Despite these pressures, the music remained alive among İstanbul’s upper circles along the Bosphorus. Tanpınar’s concern was not antiquarian nostalgia but the danger of a culture becoming rootless. Through Mümtaz, he insists that the identity of republican society is also shaped by the artistry of Ottoman classical music’s composers, warning that its disappearance from people’s lives would be catastrophic.<sup>110</sup> For Mümtaz, the great composers embody the very sensibility of the civilization he hopes to carry into the present. Describing Emin Dede (d. 1945), he calls him “this man whose head is the golden buzzing hive of six centuries, whose breath alone preserves a civilization.”<sup>111</sup> Mümtaz contrasts this dervish-like musical ethos with

the titanic temperament of Western symphonic composers:

A Beethoven, a Wagner, a Debussy, a Liszt or a Borodin was at such variance from this luminary of the literature sitting before him. They were possessed of maddening ire and vengeance, of desires that treated life in its entirety as a banquet spread before them, of a hubris taut with improbable Atlas-like exertions of the single-handed shouldering of such temperaments—of numerous theories and eccentricities that cast their personalities in various lights, and of natures, whose mildness alone cut like the swipe of a leonine claw.<sup>112</sup>

Tanpınar juxtaposes the heroic, self-assertive temperament associated with the Western symphonic tradition with the inward modesty of the Ottoman composer shaped by Sufi sensibilities. The dervish-composer does not seek to impose his personality upon the world; rather, his art emerges from restraint, humility, and participation in a larger spiritual harmony. In this sense, the music Tanpınar evokes embodies a different aesthetic ethos, one in which artistic creation is not the expression of an overpowering ego but a path toward inner balance and collective continuity.

The contrast becomes sharper in the figure of Suad, who embodies a radical detachment from the past and an uncompromising faith in modern progress. Disturbed by the performance of Ottoman Sufi music, he cannot recognize the inward resonance it carries. The music fails to provide what he seeks. His sen-

108 Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*, 166.

109 Walter Feldman, “Cultural Authority and Authenticity in the Turkish Repertoire,” *Asian Music* 22, 1 (1991): 85.

110 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 92.

111 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 296.

112 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 296. Ludwig van Beethoven (d. 1827), Richard Wagner (d. 1883), Claude Debussy (d. 1918), Franz Liszt (d. 1886), and Alexander Borodin (d. 1887) were among the most influential European composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each associated with powerful forms of artistic individualism, emotional intensity, and the romantic ideal of the genius artist. See, Neal Zaslaw, “Music and Society in the Classical Era,” in *The Classical Era: From the 1740s to the End of the 18th Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 1-14.

sibility remains attuned instead to the forceful expressiveness of the Western symphonic tradition. In his final letter he articulates this difference with striking clarity: “People exist by imposing on others. Even artists are this way. Even those you say have ‘saintly souls.’ That night, how Dede Efendi impinged upon us. In the violin concerto that I’ve listened to for one last time, how Beethoven imposed upon me.”<sup>113</sup>

Suad ultimately takes his own life while listening to Beethoven’s violin concerto. Within the novel’s symbolic structure, this act marks the tragic endpoint of a consciousness severed from its own cultural ground. By rejecting the spiritual and aesthetic tradition that once sustained the civilization, he loses the possibility of belonging to any horizon of meaning. For Tanpınar, the lesson is clear. Ottoman classical music—shaped over centuries by Sufi sensibility—serves as a gateway to historical memory. Through the maqāms of Feraḥfezā or Sultānīyegāh, through the compositions of figures such as ‘İtrī, Hāfız Post, or Lebīb Efendi, a civilization remembers itself.<sup>114</sup> These musical forms do more than evoke emotion; they sustain the thread that binds past, present, and future. To preserve this continuity is not an antiquarian gesture but a condition for the emergence of an authentic self. Only through such remembrance can modern life avoid becoming rootless and recover the inner harmony that Tanpınar calls *ḥudūr*.

## 5. Conclusion

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic constituted one of the most radical transformations in the intellectual and cultural history of modern Turkey. The modernization project of the early republican period sought to reorganize society through a deliberate rupture with the imperial past,

producing profound tensions in collective memory, cultural continuity, and individual identity. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who personally experienced this transition, stood at the center of these tensions. Deeply rooted in the intellectual and aesthetic traditions of the Ottoman world while simultaneously immersed in Western literature and philosophy, he approached the problem of modernity not as a simple opposition between tradition and progress, but as a complex question of continuity, identity, and cultural authenticity.

This study has examined *A Mind at Peace* through three interrelated concepts that structure Tanpınar’s reflection on modernity: nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity. Each of these concepts emerges as a response to the historical rupture produced by modernization. Nostalgia reflects the sense of loss created by the sudden distancing of the Ottoman past from the lived present; uneasiness expresses the existential dislocation experienced by individuals caught between competing cultural horizons, and authenticity represents the search for a stable ground upon which a meaningful modern identity can be constructed. In Tanpınar’s narrative, these concepts do not simply diagnose the crisis of modernity but also point toward the possibility of reconciliation between past and present.

When read against the background of Sufi thought, the philosophical depth of these concerns becomes even clearer. In classical Sufi terminology, *ḥudūr* signifies the state of inner presence in which the heart gathers itself around a single center and becomes consciously aware of standing before God. Such presence implies a condition of unity in which the divisions between matter and meaning, body and spirit, are overcome through the tranquility (*sakīnah*) of the heart. The modern condition portrayed in Tanpınar’s novel,

113 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 391.

114 Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*, 197.

however, is characterized precisely by the loss of this inner coherence. The uneasiness experienced by Mümtaz and the other characters reflects a world in which the spiritual and cultural sources of unity have been destabilized. In this sense, the novel can be read as a meditation on the disappearance and the longing for *hüdür* in the modern age.

Tanpınar does not respond to this condition with a rejection of modernity. On the contrary, his project seeks to reconcile the premises of modern life with the deeper cultural and spiritual traditions that shaped the Ottoman intellectual world. The search for authenticity in *A Mind at Peace*, therefore, involves not a nostalgic return to the past but the attempt to restore continuity within a fragmented historical experience. Art, architecture, classical Ottoman music, and the aesthetic experience of İstanbul all function in the novel as traces of a cultural memory that may enable the modern subject to rediscover a more integrated sense of self. From this perspective, Tanpınar's work should not be understood merely as a melancholic portrayal of a tragic modernity. Rather, the novel suggests that the uneasiness produced by modern transformation may itself become the starting point for a deeper search for authenticity and inner harmony. In this sense, nostalgia, uneasiness, and authenticity appear not only as symptoms of modernity but also as conceptual pathways through which the possibility of *hüdür* might once again be imagined. Ultimately, *A Mind at Peace* transforms a classical spiritual concept into a modern existential question. If *hüdür* once signified the state of the heart standing in conscious awareness before God, Tanpınar's novel asks whether such presence can still be imagined in a historical moment defined by rupture, dislocation, and uncertainty. The enduring

significance of Tanpınar's work lies precisely in this question, which continues to resonate within broader debates on modernity, cultural continuity, and the search for an authentic self.

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