

# Challenging boundaries in the literary field

*A perspective from translation studies*

ŞEHNAZ TAHİR GÜRÇAĞLAR

## *Abstract*

*In most contemporary cultures perceptions regarding the literary field are marked by binary oppositions such as high brow/low brow, original/translation, literature for the masses/literature for the elite, commercial/educational, etc. These strict demarcations prevent us from seeing the complexity behind the production, dissemination and consumption of literature. During the past few decades translation studies started challenging these false boundaries by delving deeper into questions of authorship, literary provenance and originality, and enabled researchers to chart literary histories in alternative ways. This paper explores various terms and concepts which are associated with compartmentalized ways of thinking about translated literature. Based on the Turkish case, it argues that boundaries in the literary field are more diffuse than is often suggested and that the seeming boundaries between original/translation, writer/translator, high/low literature have been used to further political and aesthetic agendas.*

The present paper focuses on certain borders frequently imposed on the literary field and inquires into the validity of these borders via examples chosen from modern Turkish translation history. The examples will highlight how the borders, and the categories they lead to, collapse when translational practices and debates on translation are brought to the fore through critical translation historiography. Interestingly enough, translation, which is often represented as an activity geared towards the bridging of languages, cultures and societies separated by physical or non-physical borders, may also become instrumental in the creation of new conceptual borders. So the focus of the paper will be two-fold: the ways in which translation studies, and especially translation history, may help make visible and problematize certain boundaries taken for granted in the literary field, and how translation, as activity and product, may play a role in the creation of new literary, cultural and political boundaries.

The period to be tackled in the paper is the early Republican period in Turkey, more specifically the 1930s and 1940s, which represents a milestone in the making of a new literary and cultural consciousness in Turkey through a

series of radical cultural reforms carried out under the rule of the Republican People's Party. Apart from the cultural transformation the country underwent, the 1930s and 1940s are further interesting for a study of the interactions between literature, culture, politics and translation, since it was a period when translation and literature were conceptualized in strikingly binarist terms. The paper will refer to a series of findings which emerged from a larger project on the intentions and strategies of literary translation and translators in Turkey in 1923-1960<sup>1</sup> and the interim findings of an on-going study on the daily press as a literary site in Turkey in the early 1940s.<sup>2</sup> The findings are based on the study of the discourse built around translation, and therefore the dichotomies to be taken up by the paper are not analytical categories imposed on the field, but are categories that are created by the then-prevailing discourse. The context where this discourse was embedded and where literature and translation assumed specific importance was a political and ideological one in the sense that translation was presented as a way of bringing "Western culture and civilization" into Turkey and therefore emerged as a major tool of modernization.

## Background

Historiographical texts on Turkey usually tackle the history of the country in two main blocks: Ottoman and Republican Turkish history. Although administratively and politically this periodization is necessary, there are numerous links and a strong sense of continuity between the policies of the late Ottoman administration and the Republican People's Party, which ruled the Republic of Turkey during its first three decades in 1923-1950. This continuity was also felt in the field of translation, especially in terms of the way translation was associated with the ideas of westernization and cultural progress. The 19th-century Ottoman elite and the 20<sup>th</sup> century republican intelligentsia were closely engaged in the activity of translation. They included translation in their fictional and conceptual writing and used it as a tool to further their political and cultural ideals (examples include major writers of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods such as Ahmed Midhat Efendi, Hilmi Ziya Ülken, Hasan-Ali Yücel and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar). It was no coincidence that leading writers of the day were at the same time leading journalists, publishers and translators. These activities appeared to be different sides of the same intellectual and creative phenomenon.

Translation became uniquely visible as a political and literary tool during the course of several decades, expanding from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a time when the borders between writing and translation and authorship and translatorship were extremely diffuse, and translation was ascribed an extraordinary amount of prestige and innovatory power which also found a reflection among the reading public as well as commercial publishers.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the findings see Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank the Europe in Middle East-Middle East in Europe programme in Berlin which supported the development of this project through a fellowship they extended in 2008-2009.

While the translation of Western classics was seen as a worthy task which would lead to the emergence of a new canon and a new national literature, the translation of popular works gave life to a publishing industry suffering from the blow dealt by the transition to a new alphabet in the course of only a few months in 1928.

The rise of translated literature in Turkey had already started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While in earlier centuries Ottoman translation activity was largely confined to translations from Persian and Arabic works,<sup>3</sup> translation from Western languages started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The early translations from the West mainly focused on technical and scientific fields such as geography, medicine and pharmacology. The technical translation activity continued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with translations of military books and texts on academic subjects such as mathematics. Western literature only started to be translated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first works to be translated from French literature (which would continue to serve as the major source literature for translators for over a century) were both published in 1859 and included Yusuf Kamil Pasha's version of Abbé Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* and a collection of verse translations by İbrahim Şinasi (Paker 1998: 577).

Translation quickly became a formative force in the Ottoman literary field and paved the way for the importation of new subjects and genres. The most notable and durable influence took place in the field of fiction where the stream of translations into Ottoman Turkish soon gave way to the birth of the indigenous Turkish novel, which in turn was heavily inspired by translations in terms of both theme and narrative style. A similar process took place in the field of drama. Western-style drama made its entry into Ottoman Turkey first via translations and then through indigenous works inspired and triggered by translations (Paker 1991: 18).

The popularity and the spread of translated fiction and drama in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century also gave rise to debates on the use and functions of translation in society – which served as the precursor of a public debate on translation which was to continue well into the 1940s. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, translation activity was largely carried out by private publishers and newspapers, which were especially active with the popular novels they serialized – a role inherited by the newspapers in the Republican period. Although the Ottoman state set up a number of translation institutions to regulate translation activity, it had only limited success (Kayaoğlu 1998). Private publishers printed countless works of fiction translated into Turkish starting from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While some of these were translations of well-known French, Russian or English classics, the majority of the translations were by

---

<sup>3</sup> Ottoman practices of literary translation have become an important field of study in Turkish translation historiography. Saliha Paker (2002, 2006) has tackled textual exchanges between Turkish, Persian and Arabic as the product of the Ottoman “interculture” which has given rise to a series of interesting modes of textual production which cannot be explained by the current understanding of translation *proper* as an interlingual and intercultural act of transfer. Her work, coupled with the approach of Cemal Demircioğlu (2005) who has taken up 19<sup>th</sup> century definitions and concepts of translation in the Ottoman Empire provides striking evidence of the culture- and time-boundness of translation.

popular writers of the day and covered the adventure and detective genres. An extensive, albeit partial, bibliography of these translations is available in Özege's bibliography of works printed in Ottoman Turkish (Özege 1971). The list is long, yet one cannot help but notice that the publication of translated literature was carried out in an arbitrary and unsystematic fashion.<sup>4</sup>

This situation changed little until the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. During the first 15 years of the Republic, the Republican People's Party introduced a series of cultural reforms which had implications for the way the citizens of the young republic lived. The dress code changed, western numerals and western time and calendar were adopted, not to mention overarching reforms in the field of education including co-education and the abolition of religious educational institutions. A reform which left an enduring mark on Turkish society was the alphabet reform of 1928. The reform introduced the Latin alphabet to replace the Arabic-based Ottoman script in an attempt to increase the rate of literacy in the country. The supporters of the reform suggested that the Arabic script was an impediment before increasing literacy as it was difficult to learn and to practice and they presented the shift to the Latin alphabet as a solution (Ülkütaşır 1973: 55-56).

The alphabet reform was accompanied by a massive literacy campaign in which "millet okulları" (nation schools) were established to teach adult learners how to read and write (İskit 1939: 188). The alphabet reform also served as a thrust to increase the reach and popularity of translated literature. When the new generation trained in the Latin alphabet needed a new body of works, translation was called in to serve as a channel for the imports of works by Western authors. It is interesting that almost no attempt was made to transliterate existing translations into the new script. Instead of bringing out re-editions of these translations made in Ottoman Turkish, publishers preferred to have the works retranslated. The main reason for this phenomenon was probably the changes which took place in the vocabulary used in printed books which made previous translations sound outdated. Another reason was the fact that a considerable number of the translations made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were abridged translations or adaptations.

In 1939 the government took an initiative to launch an extensive translation movement and set up the official Translation Bureau (Tercüme Bürosu) which was founded in 1940. The works by the Translation Bureau served to reinforce other cultural projects of the Republican People's Party, such as the People's Houses, community centres which served to diffuse the principles of the young republic among the common people, and the Village Institutes, geared towards raising a generation of teachers to educate the rural population. The impetus of the government-sponsored translation movement eventually died out after the transition to multi-party democracy in 1946, although the Bureau continued to operate on a smaller scale until 1966. When the Democrat Party came to power in 1950, it froze or reversed many cultural reforms undertaken by its predecessor

---

<sup>4</sup> Selin Erkul Yağcı's on-line bibliography includes a more comprehensive list of translated and indigenous novels published in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey in 1840-1940. See [http://kisi.deu.edu.tr/selin.erkul/Erkul\\_Catalogue\\_July\\_2011.pdf](http://kisi.deu.edu.tr/selin.erkul/Erkul_Catalogue_July_2011.pdf)

and the emphasis placed on translation as a tool for modernization and nation-building disappeared. Translation continued to play a major role in the cultural sphere and is still effective in terms of the importation of new genres/sub-genres and new ideas into Turkey. However, it has never assumed the same type of centrality in cultural production as it did earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it is rarely instrumentalized to the same degree.

Let me now move on to problematizing the way translation (as concept, activity and product) was used as a discursive tool for creating a series of borders mainly revolving around the assumed dichotomy between Turkey and the West.

## Turkish literature vs. Western literature

The first focus of this paper is a notorious, yet omni-present, dichotomy which also ruled the literary field in 1930s Turkey— that of “us” and “them”. This dichotomy had been present since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in public debates on literature and translation in the Ottoman Empire, which were marked by the initial attempts at cultural westernization. The so-called Classics Debate which took place over several months in 1897 has been studied by scholars as symptomatic of feelings and ideas which resulted from the initial encounter with European literature via translations into Turkish (Demircioğlu 2005, Paker 2006). The discourse used in the debate by the various parties illustrates the attitude assumed by Ottoman intellectuals towards European literature. This attitude ranged between approval and rejection and foreshadowed the way translation would be given a leading, but controversial role, in the country’s cultural development in the early Republican period. The border drawn between European and Ottoman literature, mainly representing a gap between a more developed literature and its lesser counterpart, continued to exist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, climaxing to a peak especially in the 1930s.

An ideal place to start a discussion of how the dichotomy between Turkish and European/Western literature was maintained and reinforced in the early Republican period is the introduction İsmail Hakkı Sevük wrote to his renowned book *Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz, Garpten Tercümelere* (European Literature and Us, Translations from the West 1940). This two-volume work still stands as a major source of reference for literary and translation historians with the impressive bibliography of translated works it presents covering the period up to 1940. Sevük draws a sharp and critical line between Turkish and European literatures, already presented in the title of the book. Although the term “biz” (“us”) is ambiguous enough, Sevük most likely used it to refer to the new nation-state in the making, implying the totality of the many classes, ethnicities and religions brought together under the blanket term Turkish. Although Sevük does not define what he means by the category “us”, he often juxtaposes European literature with “Turkish literature”, implying that these two categories are strictly separate.

In the introduction to the first volume, Sevük defines what he means by “European”. He argues for the presence of a single “European civilization” which draws its essence from Ancient Greek and Latin humanism and maintains that Europeaness is not a geographical category. To him, truly European nations are

those which have “transferred” the major Greek, Latin and other European works into their own languages. Sevük calls the languages, which have managed to translate major works of the West, “civilized” languages, or “in other words”, he says, “European languages” (Sevük 1940: VI). This apparent stress on translation is expressed emphatically in another statement he makes in the same introduction: it is through “translation” that we will be able to reach “Europe” (Sevük 1940: VI). Sevük’s argument stations literary translation in different posts on either side of the hypothetical boundary between Turkish and European literatures. Translations weigh heavy among the major works of the European “civilization” and make it what it is, according to Sevük. Across the imagined border, the space allocated for translations by Sevük is empty. The filling of this void will be possible through translation as “activity” or movement. This view of translation as an operation, rather than a body of texts, is offered as a remedy for the lack, as a promise for the future. And interestingly enough, as a way to erase the very borders that it has given rise to in the past.

This instrumentalization of literary translation was not uncommon in early Republican Turkey and Sevük is not the only proponent of the use of translation as a tool for literary and cultural development. Major figures in Turkish intellectual life at the time, such as Fuat Köprülü (1928: 445) and Hilmi Ziya Ülken, openly wrote that they expected translation activity to lead to “westernization” (Ülken 1997: 347). In the meantime, Turkish authors themselves complained about the inferiority of Turkish literature, often positioning Turkish writers on opposite sides of the fence from their European counterparts, and acknowledged translation as an important tool for canon formation. Reşat Nuri Güntekin, a translator and major novelist who has been translated into numerous languages since the mid-twentieth century, expressed this lucidly in an interview he gave to a literary magazine: “A rich library of translated works is a must for the emergence of an advanced Turkish literature. Both the writer and the reader can develop only within such a library. The source of what we call literary culture is nothing but fine products of world literature” (Güntekin in Özdenoğlu 1949: 109).

The formative role attributed to translation by the intellectuals of the country also led to the Translation Bureau and the large-scale government initiative to translate a corpus largely made up of European classics. The mission of the Bureau was to translate major works from the West and the East. Although the Bureau claimed that it would translate works from both Western and Eastern literatures, the share of non-Western literature hardly exceeded 8 per cent in the 26-year-long endeavour of the Translation Bureau. The Bureau produced over 1,000 translated titles during its operations. Translation’s burden was largely confined to the field of canonical or classical literature, although it was not the only publisher, which operated in the field of publishing canonical literature; it was preceded and later joined by other publishers which provided room for translations of Western literature among the titles they published. For instance, Remzi Publishing House, which was a privately run institution, was founded by Remzi Bengi in 1927. Remzi preceded the Translation Bureau by a decade and provided ample space for translations among its publications from its inception; therefore it can be considered a forerunner in the field of translations of classics (*Remzi* 1932, 1948).

The general view of translation in the society in the 1930s and 1940s was quite positive as many saw a generative potential in translation. As already stated, translation was regarded as a source of inspiration for Turkish writers and was expected to generate indigenous works. In the meantime, some writers raised the concern that translated literature reduced the sales of indigenous literature by stealing its readership. Halit Fahri Ozansoy wrote in *Son Posta*, “This translation activity which merits much appreciation started to be harmful in one respect. First of all, it deters national literature and publishers are reluctant to publish one indigenous work for twenty translations they publish” (Ozansoy 1943: 4). In 1943, Nahit Sırrı Örik, writer and translator, maintained that translations caused readers to neglect indigenous works. As evidence, he claimed that his translations were in high demand, while his indigenous books remained unpopular (Örik in Özdenoğlu 1949: 88). Translations were not only popular among readers of the classics, they were even more popular among readers who read popular genres of the day such as adventure and detective fiction and romance. The 1940s were indeed a period when writers and readers found pleasure and inspiration in reading translations which cut across genres, themes or categories.

### “High” or “low”?

A second border which was both drawn and also challenged by translation in the 1930s and 1940s was the elusive demarcation between “high” and “low” literature. The Translation Bureau was instrumental in reinforcing the borders between canonical and popular literature by preparing lists of works worthy of translation and constructing a discourse on the major authors and works of Western literature through its journal *Tercüme*. It rarely published contemporary works and focused heavily on ancient Greek and Latin classics, as well as 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century classical fiction and drama. The Bureau called its series of translated classics “Translations from World Literature”, thus implicitly defining a literary canon for the readers.

Sevük’s introduction to his *Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz* also includes a comment on this division, which was prevalent in the discourse on literature and translation until recently, if not still. He writes that while he compiled the bibliography for his book, he found it “impossible” and “useless” to compile a complete bibliography of “detective and adventure novels” which were published in “abundant” quantities. Elsewhere in the book, Sevük states that these books serve to instill the habit of reading in Turks and help pass the time, although “they lack literary value” (1940: 254). This view is representative of a general tendency, which is specific, but not limited, to early Republican Turkey. This tendency was observed in the discourse of intellectuals of the day, who, like Sevük, constantly valued the classics vis-à-vis popular literature, which was given various names. The bibliography of books published in Turkey in 1938-1948 made the demarcation between “literature” and what it termed “people’s books” evident. While canonical literature, i.e. translations of Western classics or contemporary canonical fiction, was placed under the category of “novels and short stories”, detective and adventure fiction, especially in its serialized and shorter forms, was classified as ‘people’s books’. Although the classification

appeared rather arbitrary, one can claim that the criterion of presumed literary value was the motivation behind the classification.

Whether this demarcation also entails a segmentation of readership is worthy of a longer discussion. Canonical literature, as represented by the translations published by major publishers of the day, including the Translation Bureau, Remzi Publishing House and, later, Varlık Publishing House was made accessible to the readers via a network of schools, libraries and public institutions such as the People's Houses. As such, these books represented acceptable reading material for an emerging readership. In the meantime, popular books were also sold widely, often coming in various editions and marketed through their own channels, such as mail order or newspaper stands. The wide availability and the repeated editions of popular books suggest that they also found a readership. There is little reason to believe that the readers of canonical and popular books were separate. There is anecdotal evidence published in memoirs or interviews with famous writers, which suggests that the ardent young readers of the 1930s and 1940s read both types of literature (Tahir Gürçağlar 2008).

While the translation of canonical literature was ascribed an educational mission from the start, dating back to the first translations made from European literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, popular literature remained a field where expectations were low. As Sevük mentioned, popular fiction was considered to be useless, if not down right detrimental, to the intellectual development and morals of young readers. However, this seeming border between canonical and popular literature, equated with “good” and “bad” literature, is problematic. First of all, as I mentioned earlier, there is little evidence to suggest that the readership for these two types of literature remained two distinct groups. The way daily newspapers treated translated and indigenous literature is a clear indication of this. These newspapers brought together both “canonical” and “popular” literature and offered them side by side in their pages. While they published serialized detective fiction or romances, which made up the core of popular reading material in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, they also published serialized canonical novels in both translated and indigenous forms and provided space for literary criticism. The co-existence of both types of literature in the pages of the same publication once more defies the idea that the readers “only” read certain types of literature.

At the same time, the newspapers created and maintained a discourse which resonated with Sevük's ideas on popular literature, and published certain news items, opinion columns or letters from readers which indicated their formal view on literature and popular culture. A common complaint observed in these pieces was a lack of interest in books, especially among young people. A front-page story published by *Son Posta* on January 17, 1941 regretfully reported the “bitter truth” that only 549 books had been published in 1940 (“Bir sene içinde yalnız 549 kitab basıldı” 1941: 1). 220 of these were “literary books” and, according to the newspaper, they mainly consisted of “light translations” – presumably implying translations of popular western novels. One month later, on February 17, columnist Muhittin Birgen of *Son Posta* complained that the younger generation did not read useful books and that “novels and short stories” of no literary value sold more than popular scientific books which the nation needed to read to be able to develop (Birgen 1941: 2). This bias against popular fiction was

echoed in a letter from a reader published in *Vatan* on February 15 under the title “the youth does not read” (S.K. 1941: 4). The reader was extremely upset that students did not read intellectual material and that all they read was “romantic novels, short stories, sports and cinema news” – offering us quite a strong clue regarding the components of popular culture in 1940s Turkey. The reader ended his letter by calling for the removal of such fictional material from school libraries. The negative view on popular literature and a sacralization of classical or canonical literature were not unique to the discourse circulating in the daily press. However, the presence of this type of critical discourse, juxtaposed with the very material it criticizes, is unique to the newspaper as a form creating a dialogical site composed of various types of material, fictional and non-fictional, canonical and popular, and therefore standing as strong proof that borders in the literary field are constructed phenomena which are discursively produced and reproduced.

The demarcation made between canonical and popular books also invites an obvious question. Can all books fit into these categories? Aren't there any in-between cases? Indeed, this type of strict categorization would exclude many works which could not be placed on either side of the border in early Republican Turkey. For instance, popular writers of the 1930s-1950s such as Daphne du Maurier, Agatha Christie or A. J. Cronin would be impossible to situate in this binary scheme.

Translation was present on both sides of the border discursively constructed between canonical and popular literature, yet again in different guises. It assumed an idealist and educational function when it came to the field of canonical literature. Although there was general dissatisfaction with the state of the translation market and humble complaints about the low fees paid to translators (Ediz 1939: 280), translation of classics was seen as a noble activity and even a duty for Turkish poets and writers. Translation's role was more diverse and less noble when it came to translating popular literature. Publishers engaged in popular publishing were accused of having “commercial” concerns by the literary establishment. In the meantime, this commercial attitude meant that these publishers created and responded to popular demand and managed to keep their operations viable. The canonicity of Western literature also had an impact on the popular literature market and translated books often sold more than original writing (Ozansoy 1943: 4; Örik in Özdenoğlu 1949: 88). Many renowned writers of Turkish literature, such as Peyami Safa or Kemal Tahir, wrote popular fiction and translated popular books under pen-names which often provided them with their livelihood. The energy in the popular literature market also created, or rather, maintained, a poetics different from the one which ruled in the field of canonical literature. The main pillar of this poetics was a relaxed attitude to issues of authorship and originality.

## Original or translated?

The distinction drawn between indigenous and translated popular literature is the last border I would like to problematize in relation to Turkish literature up to the 1960s. The emphasis on originality was introduced to the discourse on

translation in Turkey in the 1930s and was placed on two different, yet interrelated, aspects of translation. The first one was the concern shown for direct, or unmediated, translation.

One of the priorities of the Translation Bureau was to ensure that translations of the classics would be made directly from the source texts. Earlier during the decade there were frequent complaints raised against indirect translations, made, mainly via French, by such famous figures as Yaşar Nabi Nayır, Hasan Ali Ediz and Ahmet Ağaoğlu (Nayır 1937: 163; Ediz 1939: 280; Ahmet Ağaoğlu in *Birinci Türk Neşriyat Kongresi* 1939: 171). The translations which were criticized mainly included translations of Ancient Greek and Latin classics. Evidently, the Bureau's focus on first-hand translations was a response to a demand or need created discursively, and represented a view of the source text as an "original" that had to be rendered into Turkish as closely as possible. This idea occupied the agenda for numerous writers and translators. For instance, celebrated classicist Suat Sinanoğlu suggested that a translator who translated a text via an intermediary language would not be able to permeate the "spirit" of the original work and therefore could be "unfaithful" to it (Sinanoğlu 1941). This proves that the shift towards direct translations also meant a shift towards granting a higher status to the original text. This shift in favour of the original work and the original writer was also visible in the use of the concept of "fidelity" which reigned in the discourse on translations in the 1940s.

The second way in which the growing emphasis on the source text as an original was felt was in the covers of books. The Translation Bureau established a standard way of indicating the names of the writers with their set format. This attitude affected other publishers as well. These publishers carefully underscored the status of the books they published as translation by indicating the foreign writer's name on the cover and the title pages, and this often resulted in the granting of a secondary position to the translators, whose names seldom appeared on the covers. This attitude is not only visible on book covers but also in promotional or bibliographical materials. This marks a transition towards a view of translation as a sharply defined category from one which disregarded the status of literature as either original or translated. There is ample evidence demonstrating the shift which took place in the 1940s in the behaviour of the publishers of classical or contemporary canonical literature regarding the presentation and marketing of translated works. For instance in its 1932 catalogue, Remzi Publishing House did not make a distinction between translated and indigenous fiction and placed them into the same category. What is more, it did not have a consistent method of presenting translated books, or their translators. However, by 1948, Remzi had developed certain standards in terms of its presentation of translations and translators, making a clear distinction both between translated and indigenous works and translators and writers. In the field of translation, the imports of Western classics into Turkish via translation resulted in the creation of a new understanding of translation which became immediately visible. Whether the translation of Western classics made Turkey more "European", as Sevük, argued, is debatable, but the 1930s and 1940s certainly saw the emergence of a more Western (as opposed to Ottoman) and essentialist perspective on translation, complete with arguments on the need to render the source text and source author fully and accurately, the growing

emphasis on directness in translation and the rising importance of the provenance of the works (see Chapter 3 in Tahir Gürçağlar 2008).

In the meantime, the border between original and translated material was not so deeply marked in the field of popular literature. While the translators' names were indicated on some popular translated books, others did not feature their translators' names. This is not to say that they were introduced as indigenous books either; there was simply no author's or translator's name on the cover. Nevertheless, it is not feasible to suggest that these works were received as works written originally in Turkish, since their titles would lead to question marks regarding their origins. For instance, in 1944-1945 Güven Yayınevi, a publishing company active mainly in the field of popular literature, published a series called "Meşhur İngiliz Polis Hafiyesi Şerlok Holmes Serisi" ["The Series of the Famous English Police Detective Sherlock Holmes"] which consisted of 83 novels offering a mixture of translations and Sherlock Holmes pastiches written originally in Turkish. Sherlock Holmes was a well-established name among readers of popular literature, one of the best-selling heroes of detective fiction since its first translation into Turkish in 1909. There was little doubt that the books published by Güven would be received as translations. There was no mention of the writer or the translator on any of the stories and they all appeared as anonymous works. One could not even speak of an authorial visibility, let alone the translator's visibility. This was a strategy that reflected an indiscriminating attitude towards translation and indigenous writing, and, for that matter, towards writers and translators.

This is rather different from the attitude of the Translation Bureau or publishers like Remzi who were involved with translated canonical literature. It was also this attitude that allowed for the production and marketing of pseudo-translations, indigenous texts that are presented as translations, or concealed translations or plagiarisms. For instance, one specific author by the name of Ali Rıza Seyfi published a translation of the *Beasts of Tarzan* in which he was presented as the translator, but the author's name was never mentioned. The same translator appropriated Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and published the Turkish translation under his own name with the title *Kazıklı Voyvoda* in 1928 in Ottoman script. The book was published in Latin script in 1946 and was also made into a film in 1953 called *Drakula İstanbul'da*, so although the provenance of the book was known or revealed some time after its publication, no-one problematized Ali Rıza Seyfi's claim to have written an original book. In the meantime, newspapers and magazines were teeming with pseudotranslations until at least the 1960s, and an incredibly large number of Mike Hammer pseudotranslations left their mark on the Turkish publishing market in the 1950s without a single repercussion on the writer/translators. This indifference towards the issue of authorship cannot be explained away by the shortcomings of the copyright legislation in Turkey at the time.<sup>5</sup> Although the possibility of evading the securing of copyrights must have increased the prevalence of these cases, one should still acknowledge the existence of a different and more permissive view of authorship, and hence a different poetics in the field of popular literature which

---

<sup>5</sup> For a brief history of copyright laws in Turkey see Gürses, 2010.

defied a strict demarcation between not only original and translation, but also indigenous and translated literature.

## Concluding remarks

As I have argued throughout the present paper, translation, as product, process and concept, can trigger new ways of thinking about literature and challenge established categories which often shape perspectives on literature. In 1930s-1940s Turkey, translation played a subversive role regarding the borders created between canonical and popular and translated and indigenous literature. These two are specific areas in which the “constructedness” of literary categories can be revealed through translation. Although canonical literature was given priority for the development of the country in the discourse of the intellectuals, and translation was placed in the forefront of literary practices, translation also had a huge impact on the field of popular literature and the growth of a new readership since its permeation of the society was much stronger.

The way translation served as a tool for nation-building and canon-formation in Turkey can be seen as a deliberate attempt at transforming intellectual boundaries between the West, as seen as a more “civilized” space, and the Turkish Republic. Turkish intellectuals mobilized translation in order to bring Turkish literature closer to Europe and in a way attempted to permeate the literary and conceptual infrastructure of the West by acquainting a newly developing readership with the body of Western classics through translation. This is a concrete move which involved a context in which translation served to erase borders. However, paradoxically, these borders were very much marked through the discourse created and maintained by the intellectuals of the country. By pointing to the deficiency of the Turkish literary field vis-à-vis its Western counterparts, Ottoman, and later, Turkish writers and translators set Turkey apart from the West. They constantly argued that this deficiency was created by the lack of a systematic translation activity – an activity which European countries had already undertaken. These writers offered translation as *the* remedy for the belatedness in Turkey’s literary development, making translation a part of the problem, as well as its solution.

## References

- “Bir sene içinde yalnız 549 kitab basıldı”, *Son Posta*, 17.1.1941, p. 1.
- Birgen, Muhittin (1941) “Hergün”, *Son Posta*, 17.2.1941, p. 2.
- Birinci Türk Neşriyat Kongresi, Raporlar, Teklifler, Müzakere Zabıtları*. (The First Turkish Publishing Congress, Reports, Proposals, Proceedings) Ankara, Maarif Vekilliği, 1939.
- Demircioğlu, Cemal (2005) *From Discourse to Practice: Rethinking Translation (Terceme) and Related Practices of Text Production in the Light of Ahmed Midhat Efendi’s Works in the Late Ottoman Literary Tradition*, unpublished PhD thesis, Boğaziçi University.
- Ediz, Hasan Âli (1939) “Tercüme ve Mütercime Dair”, *Oluş* No. 18, 279-280.
- İskit, Server (1939) *Türkiye’de Neşriyat Hareketleri Tarihine Bir Bakış*, İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi.
- Kaplan, Ramazan (1998) *Klasikler Tartışması*, Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı Yayınları.
- Kayaoğlu, Taceddin (1998) *Türkiye’de Tercüme Müesseseleri*, İstanbul: Kitabevi.
- Köprülü, Fuat [Köprülüzaade Mehmet Efendi] (1928) “Tercüme Meselesi”, *Hayat*, 3: 75, 445-446.
- Nayır, Yaşar Nabi (1937) *Edebiyatımızın Bugünkü Meseleleri*, İstanbul: Kanaat Kitabevi.

- Ozansoy, Halit Fahri (1943) "Tercüme Bolluğu", *Son Posta*, 9.10.1943, 4.
- Özdenođlu, Şinasi (1949) *Edebiyatımızın Beş Ana Meselesi*, İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi.
- Özege, Seyfettin (1971) *Eski Harflerle Basılmış Türkçe Eserler Katalođu*, İstanbul: Fatih Yayınevi.
- Paker, Saliha (1991) "The Age of Translation and Adaptation, 1850-1914: Turkey" in Robin Ostle (ed.) *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East 1850-1970*, London: Routledge.
- Paker, Saliha (1998) 'Turkish Tradition in Mona Baker (ed) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 563-582.
- Paker, Saliha (2002) Translation as *Terceme* and *Nazire*, Culture-bound Concepts and their Implications for a Conceptual Framework for Research on Ottoman Translation History in *Crosscultural Transgressions. Research Models in Translation Studies II Historical and Ideological Issues*, ed. Theo Hermans. 120-143. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Paker, Saliha (2006) 'Ottoman Conception of Translation and its Practice: The 1897 'Classics Debate' as a Focus for Examining Change' in Hermans, Theo (ed) *Translating Others* (Volume 2), Manchester: St. Jerome, 325-348.
- Remzi Kitabevi 1932 Katalođu* (1932) İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi.
- Remzi Kitabevi 1948 Katalođu* (1948) İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi.
- S.K. (1941) "Gençlik Okumuyor", *Vatan*, 15.2.1941, 4.
- Sevük, İsmail Habib (1940) *Avrupa Edebiyatı ve Biz*, Volume I, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi.
- Sinanoglu, Suat (1941) "Protagoras'ın Tercümesi Hakkında", *Tercüme*, 1: 5, 485-487.
- Tahir Gürçađlar, Şehnaz (2008) *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey. 1923-1960*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Ülken, Hilmi Ziya (1997) [1935] *Uyanış Devirlerinde Tercümenin Rolü*, İstanbul: Ülken Yayınları.
- Ülkütaşır, M. Şakir (1973) *Atatürk ve Harf Devrimi*, Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.