

# *Combined and Uneven Modernism: Turkey's İkinci Yeni Poets*

---

**Kenan Behzat Sharpe**

*University of California, Santa Cruz*

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the poetry of a group of mid-twentieth-century Turkish modernist poets known as İkinci Yeni, or the “Second New.” Engaging with global approaches to modernism that relate it to capitalist modernity, and building on the specific historical dynamics of 1950s Turkey, I use the Second New as a case study to show how modernist literature from the periphery can be compared with more canonized Western models without relying on claims of European originality or literary influence. Through readings of Second New poets Edip Cansever and Turgut Uyar, I show how their poetry combines classic modernist tropes familiar from nineteenth-century European works (*flâneurie*, the crowd, metropolitan life and its psychic effects) with more distinctly twentieth-century tropes (neon lights, nylon, the atom bomb, Cold War consumerism) in a manner that reveals the particular contours of Turkey’s incorporation into global capitalism. This form of peripheral modernism from Turkey sheds light on the combined and uneven nature of modernist literature throughout the world.

**I**N THE MID-1950S, something happened to Turkish poetry. A smattering of poems composed in an unaccustomed style began appearing in the popular literary magazines of the period. Sharing a certain bizarre quality in their use of language and deployment of imagery, the poems were published by a handful of young writers in Istanbul and Ankara. The poets issued no common manifesto explaining this sudden aesthetic shift. Most of them did not know each other. And yet these poems, flaring up in this journal or that, gave the appearance of a coordinated assault against not only the dominant trends in Turkish letters but also the very rules of grammar and syntax. Like fires set simultaneously at various points across a large urban space by a team of autonomous saboteurs, these poems caused immediate panic among Turkey’s cultural intelligentsia.

Rushing to interpret this new poetic style, critics described it as *soyut* (abstract) and *anlamsız* (meaningless).<sup>1</sup> They also gave it a name: İkinci Yeni (the Second New). This was not chosen by poets themselves, but today the work of Ece Ayhan (1931–2002), İlhan Berk (1918–2008), Edip Cansever (1928–86), Cemal Süreya (1931–90), Turgut Uyar (1927–85), and others is still known as the Second New. This article explores the conditions of possibility for this poetry’s emergence. Engaging both with global theories of modernism and with the specific history of capitalist modernity in Turkey, I will argue that modernist literature from the periphery can be understood in relationship to more canonized Western models without relying on claims about originality or influence. In fact, attention to peripheral modernism can help shed light on the relation between capitalist modernity and literary modernity throughout the world.

As the name “Second New” suggests, the 1950s was not the first time that Turkish poetry underwent a process of renewal. Nineteenth-century Ottoman reformers criticized the imperial tradition of courtly poetry. They sought to replace *divan* poetry’s highly symbolic world of pleasure gardens, roses, and nightingales with a more realist and even positivist literary mode. After its formation in 1923, Turkey, the Ottoman Empire’s successor state, went even further in discrediting the urbane Persian- and Arabic-inspired tradition of Ottoman poetry in favor of more “national” and folk-based models.<sup>2</sup> By the 1930s, these efforts to liquidate and then reengineer Turkish language and literature had reached a level of “catastrophic success.”<sup>3</sup> Upon this fresh slate appeared even more radical attempts.

From 1937 to 1945, a group of poets known as the Garip (Strange) movement, and retroactively crowned the “First New,” further simplified Turkish poetry. Orhan Veli, Melih Cevdet Anday, and Oktay Rifat rejected both the tradition of Ottoman courtly poetry and the early Turkish Republic’s craze for writing poetry inspired by Anatolian folk literature. Instead of Ottoman cosmopolitanism or Romantic nationalism, the First New poets favored unrhymed free verse that narrated the experiences of the 1940s urban everyman while using decidedly unpoetic language, as in Veli’s “Poem with Bells”:

We civil servants,  
At nine o’clock, at twelve, at five  
Have the streets to ourselves  
That’s how God fated it  
We wait either for the end-of-day bell  
Or for the first of the month.<sup>4</sup>

Quotidian lines like these were the apotheosis of nearly a century of reforms. By the early 1950s, however, the popularity of the once iconoclastic First New style had resulted in a slew

<sup>1</sup> Asım Bezirci, *İkinci Yeni olayı* [The Second New incident] (Istanbul: Gözlem Yayıncılık, 1986), 23.

<sup>2</sup> On Turkish nationalism’s attitude toward Ottoman poetry, see Victoria Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); and Walter G. Andrews, “Stepping Aside: Ottoman Literature in Modern Turkey,” *Journal of Turkish Literature* 1 (2004): 9–32. The Second New was itself decried as a sneaky revival of Ottoman poetry by its left-nationalist critics in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase comes from Geoffrey Lewis’s classic account of state linguistic engineering: *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Orhan Veli, *Bütün şiirleri* [Complete poems] (Istanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1954), 110. All translations from the Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted.

of imitators, each employing the same radically colloquial idiom with its lightly satirical but good-natured humor.

The Second New put an end to all this. Opaque metaphors, unpoetic objects and substances (aluminum and atoms, nylon and neon, minibuses and telephones), and a melancholic, desire-ravaged lyric voice began to appear in Turkish poetry. One of the first poems in this new style was Cemal Süreya's "Sigarayı attım denize" (I threw a cigarette into the sea), published in 1955. It begins, "Now we are dividing a pigeon's flight / In the famous blueness of the sky."<sup>5</sup> The difference from the colloquial language and concrete imagery of the First New is immediately clear. In these lines, a pigeon's flight is "divided" as if it were an actual object capable of being split in two. The poem pushes the limits of conventional language in order to depict a world straining free from laws of physics and logic:

This is at least how you and I were in the old days  
 If a cloud passed by, we saw it  
 If no one objected to the minaret's pleasure, it too  
 If a man had made a habit of misery, him too  
 Whenever for the sake of freedom and peace and love  
 We threw a cigarette into the sea  
 It kept burning until morning<sup>6</sup>

Does a minaret have moods? How can a spark set liquid ablaze? What Süreya's poem describes is a world on the brink of a thoroughgoing transformation. The speaker of these poems is inebriated with possibility and seeking to impart the same experience to the reader. Accordingly, the poem ends in a crescendo of flames.

The mode of subjectivity expressed in these poems provides a clue to its aesthetic. Recent scholarship on modernism has been turning away from defining it via a catalog of linguistic and literary strategies (defamiliarization, montage, the materiality of the text, and so on) and looks instead at modernity itself. For example, Michael Whitworth has influentially argued, "Modernism' is not so much a thing as a set of responses to problems posed by the conditions of modernity."<sup>7</sup> Marxist critics have long approached modernism in terms of the problems, both material and psychic, posed by modernity. For Fredric Jameson, one of the hallmarks of modernist literature is the way it engages with the experience of an external world felt to be on the cusp of imminent transformation: "It is because the object world, in the throes of industrialization and modernization, seems to tremble at the brink of an equally momentous and even Utopian transformation that the 'self' can also be felt to be on the point of change."<sup>8</sup> It is this unstable, explosive, and almost combustible subjectivity that is characteristic of Second New poetry. In this body of work, as with other examples of modernist literature, the transformation of the psyche and the object world wrought by modernity is the source of both rapturous enthusiasm and deep anxiety.

Yet describing the Second New as modernist poses its own set of problems. In using the term "modernism," however capaciously, to describe Turkish poetry in the 1950s are we not importing

<sup>5</sup> Cemal Süreya, *Sevda sözleri: Bütün şiirleri* [Words of love: Complete poems] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1998), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Michael H. Whitworth, ed., *Modernism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 312.

a foreign vocabulary? After all, it was not the term most used in Turkey at the time to refer to this poetry. This disconnect between literary text and literary-critical apparatus inevitably raises questions of center and periphery. How relevant are theories of modernism (developed in, and for, Euro-American contexts) to literature in the periphery? Is modernism a suitable concept for registering the specificities of the Turkish situation? Because the Second New appeared later than more canonized examples of poetic modernism, from Baudelaire to Eliot, does this mean that the Turkish poets were inevitably derivative vis-à-vis these earlier sources? Does there need to be a clear flow of influence to call something modernism? Global approaches to modernism under the umbrella of the “New Modernist Studies” have, since the late 1990s, challenged the Eurocentric biases of earlier theories. Scholars have effected a threefold expansion in the study of modernism, transforming conventional understandings of when modernism happened (temporal) and where it was located (spatial), as well as challenging ossified canon formations that have excluded mass cultural forms and marginalized social groups (vertical).<sup>9</sup> Yet as this cluster shows, problems of center and periphery are still not fully solved.

My contribution suggests that theories of modernism that relate it to capitalist modernity are best equipped to register the unequal relationship between center and periphery without privileging the first over the second, whether as origin point or temporal precursor. This does not mean that peripheral modernism points to one of several “alternative modernities,” though the periphery often does have important idiosyncrasies. As critics informed by a world-systems framework like Jameson, Pascale Casanova, and Harry Harootunian have argued, modernity is singular,<sup>10</sup> produces an unequal world-literary space,<sup>11</sup> and is everywhere coeval thanks to a “common reference provided by global capital and its requirements.”<sup>12</sup> Yet this emphasis on singularity should not be taken to mean that modernism is identical wherever it appears.

As the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) argues in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, in order to register the specificity of modernist literature in places outside the North American and Western European core, one must be attentive both to capitalism’s singularity and to its unevenness.<sup>13</sup> Initially developed by Engels, Lenin, and especially Trotsky, the theory of combined and uneven development pointed to how countries like Russia and China were incorporated into global capitalism; there, capitalism did not replace precapitalist formations but was instead combined with them, so they existed side by side. Trotsky gives the example of an urban proletariat working in modern factories existing alongside subsistence farmers living in “villages of wood and straw.”<sup>14</sup> The WReC traces combined and uneven development in literature, specifically its “modes of spatio-temporal compression, its juxtaposition of asynchronous orders and levels of historical experience, its barometric indications of invisible forces acting from a distance on the local and familiar . . . as these manifest themselves

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies,” *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737.

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 163.

<sup>13</sup> Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

in literary forms, genres, and aesthetic strategies.”<sup>15</sup> It is this juxtaposition of phenomena in various locations and historical moments that characterizes modernism everywhere but particularly in the periphery. As Jameson argues, modernism emerges out of a “situation of incomplete modernization.”<sup>16</sup> This is as true for Turkey or Brazil as it is for Germany or the United States.

This article takes the Second New as a case study to show how the exigencies of modernity in mid-twentieth-century Turkey help us understand one particular appearance of the modernist impulse. Through readings of poems by Edip Cansever and Turgut Uyar, I will show how classic modernist tropes familiar from nineteenth-century European works (flâneurie, the crowd, metropolitan life and its psychic effects) are combined with more distinctly twentieth-century tropes (neon lights, the atom bomb, Cold War consumerism) in an example of what the WReC calls the “spatial bridging of unlike times.”<sup>17</sup> Certain nineteenth-century European symbols of modernity (such as aluminum, shown in Paris exhibitions as the metal of the future) could, in midcentury Turkey, remain objects of modernist cathexis because of the country’s specific tempo of industrialization. Yet in the 1950s, simultaneously with the rest of the world, Second New poetry showed both fascination and disgust with nylon: a symbol of modern convenience and also, in Turkey, of American Cold War meddling. Tracking the appearance of these objects and tropes reveals the combined and uneven ground of Turkish modernist poetry.

### THEORIES OF PERIPHERAL MODERNISM

“Modernism” has long been a contested term in Turkey, partly because it is seen as the specific provenance of the “West” rather than globally singular and coeval. The novelist Orhan Pamuk, for example, has famously asserted that Turkey did not produce modernist literature in the twentieth century: “At no point did the winds of modernist literature blow—I won’t even say ‘strongly’—among us.”<sup>18</sup> According to Pamuk, novelists like Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar might superficially resemble modernist European writers in technique, but they did not break strongly enough from tradition or society. In her informative introduction to modernism in Turkey for the volume *Global Modernists on Modernism*, scholar Kaitlin Staudt argues that Pamuk’s comment is “representative of a wider, long-standing academic stance that dismisses modernism as an inappropriate theoretical paradigm for understanding Turkish novels of the early twentieth century.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere she cites poet and scholar Hilmi Yavuz, who argues that Turkey did have modernist literature: it simply appeared belatedly. Referring to Oğuz Atay’s sprawling 1972 opus *Tutunamayanlar* (The disconnected), Yavuz writes: “nearly fifty years after *Ulysses* was written modernist Turkish novelists followed Joyce. Belatedness, yes! This is the distinguishing feature of our novelistic tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>16</sup> Jameson, *Singular Modernity*, 141.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Orhan Pamuk, “Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar ve Türk modernizmi” [Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Turkish modernism], *Defter* 23 (1995): 43.

<sup>19</sup> Kaitlin Staudt, “Modernism in Turkey,” in *Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Alys Moody and Stephen J. Ross (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 191.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted and translated in Kaitlin Staudt, “Make it *Orijinal*: Literary Modernism and the Novel on the Turkish-British Axis, 1908–1948” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2017), 8.

Emphasis on absence or belatedness is such a common trope in discussions of Turkish literature that critic Nurdan Gürbilek has given it a name: “the criticism of lack.”<sup>21</sup> Gürbilek describes it as a pattern of self-castigation common in many peripheral countries, along the lines of “We don’t have any authentic novels” or “We don’t have modernism.” Turning this critical mode on its head, she argues that instead of lack being a specific defect of Turkey, the anxiety of being “belated to a genuine experience” is one of modern literature’s foundational tropes.<sup>22</sup> For example, *Don Quixote*’s characters constantly try to live out an ideal that has its real ground elsewhere, particularly in books.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* seeks to escape the boring and unreal periphery to find authentic life in the “glimmering capital.”<sup>24</sup> Though Gürbilek does not discuss combined and uneven development, her examples point to how capitalist development, wherever it appears, “does not smooth away but rather *produces* unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course.”<sup>25</sup> In comparing Turkish novels with these classic works, Gürbilek offers us a paradigm for using concepts like modernism without either “disregarding cultural differences” or falling into “discriminative culturalism” that sees Turkey as uniquely lacking.<sup>26</sup>

Nergis Ertürk approaches modernism similarly. In “Modernity and Its Fallen Languages” she compares essays written in the 1930s by Tanpınar and Walter Benjamin that point to the effects of language reform projects and the communications revolution on literary language, treating both modern German and modern Turkish literature and literary criticism “as an archive of a crisis in language.”<sup>27</sup> In doing so, she refuses to ascribe priority to either the German or the Turkish half of the comparison. One exciting consequence of her method is the “collapse of hierarchical models for comparing Turkey with and to an always already ‘surrealist Europe’—revealing a ground of comparison for ‘Europe’ and ‘Turkey’ as comparable sites of the crisis of modernity.”<sup>28</sup> Thinking about modernism in this way makes it possible to “turn from the assimilative search for reflective mimicry of European modernism” and instead look for the conditions that “constitute such formations to begin with.”<sup>29</sup> With this method, one can trace similarities in modernist texts across core and periphery without erasing important specificities.

Both Gürbilek and Ertürk discuss modernism in Turkey in relation to the novel. The case of poetry is quite different. When it comes to modernist poetry, Staudt argues, “scholars offer a plethora of possibilities for modernism’s advent.”<sup>30</sup> In the twentieth century, debates on poetry in Turkey, and modernism specifically, have historically been both fiercely heated and theoretically rich. The reason for this, critic Orhan Koçak suggests, is that “the discourse on poetry has long

21 Nurdan Gürbilek, “Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, nos. 2/3 (2003): 599.

22 *Ibid.*, 625.

23 *Ibid.*, 621.

24 *Ibid.*, 620.

25 WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 12.

26 Gürbilek, “Dandies and Originals,” 623.

27 Nergis Ertürk, “Modernity and Its Fallen Languages: Tanpınar’s *Hasret*, Benjamin’s Melancholy,” *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (2008): 43.

28 Nergis Ertürk, “Surrealism and Turkish Script Arts,” *Modernism/Modernity* 17, no. 1 (2010): 49.

29 Nergis Ertürk, “Modernism Disfigured: Turkish Literature and the ‘Other West,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger with Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 536–37.

30 Staudt, “Modernism in Turkey,” 191.

acted as a cipher of Turkey's engagement with modernity.<sup>31</sup> In this search for modern poetry's origin point some critics name proponent of art-for-art's-sake Ahmet Haşim or the great modernizer of Ottoman verse Yahya Kemal; for others, the major break is Orhan Veli and the First New or else Soviet Futurist-inspired Nâzım Hikmet.<sup>32</sup> In one of the most interesting works of literary criticism in recent years, Yağın Armağan synthesizes these debates but trades the idea of "modern poetry" and its foundational moment for a more specific analysis of modernism. The latter's defining feature, in the Turkish context at least, is an emphasis on aesthetic autonomy.<sup>33</sup>

Armağan begins by exploring why the difficult poetic language used by Second New gave rise to such intense debate and vitriolic denunciations when it first appeared. Left-wing critics in particular despised this poetry, describing it as "formalist" and as an imitation of European modernist poets. Armağan argues that what made these poets controversial in the political, institutional, and cultural context of Turkey was "their demand both for autonomy as subjects and for the autonomy of the work."<sup>34</sup> This flew in the face of dominant trends of Turkish poetry, including the First New and other modern precursors. From its inception, the Turkish state had supported literature that supported the national project by helping to build a common language.<sup>35</sup> Here Armağan draws on the work of Gregory Jusdanis, whose classic work *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture* investigates the "Enlightenment project of culture-building" common to states outside the capitalist core.<sup>36</sup> Like modernists in Greece, Second New poets were uninterested in culture-building for a political project. What made their poetry radical was its uselessness for any kind of political instrumentalization, whether nationalist or oppositional. While by the 1950s this insistence on aesthetic autonomy was not a radical gesture in Western Europe or North America, in the Turkish context autonomy remained a modernist shibboleth. It is in this sense that Armağan argues that while some Second New poets were aware of earlier modernist examples from Europe, reading everyone from Rimbaud to Pound, the movement was not a copy but rather "nurtured by Turkey's specific conditions."<sup>37</sup> Taking the argument one step further than Armağan, we can say that İkinci Yeni poetry sought to remain autonomous from political, social, and economic conditions, but it was these conditions that made the notion of aesthetic autonomy widely thinkable for the first time only in the 1950s.

A 1984 essay by Perry Anderson forms a useful complement to Gürbilek's, Ertürk's, and Armağan's approaches to modernism by providing insights into what peripheral locations, in particular, share. Anderson discusses modernism's mid-twentieth-century "after-glow" in contexts outside Western Europe and North America.<sup>38</sup> For Anderson, aesthetic modernism was initially made possible by the experience of capitalist modernization itself. In the late nineteenth and early

<sup>31</sup> Orhan Koçak, "Westernisation against the West," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity*, ed. Celia Kerslake et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 306.

<sup>32</sup> Yağın Armağan, *İmkânsız özerklik: Türk şiirinde modernizm* [Impossible autonomy: Modernism in Turkish poetry] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), 76–114.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 122.

<sup>37</sup> Armağan, *İmkânsız özerklik*, 127. For a longer argument connecting the Second New's emergence to the political, social, and cultural conditions of 1950s Turkey, see Kenan Behzat Sharpe, "Şiirsel özerkliği dönemselleştirmek: İkinci Yeni örneği" [Periodizing poetic autonomy: The case of the Second New], *Birikim*, no. 378 (2020).

<sup>38</sup> Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review*, no. 144 (1984): 109.

twentieth centuries, all that was solid melted into air—previous social formations broke apart and new technologies like the radio, telephone, automobile, and airplane radically transformed how people experienced time and space. This period was also marked by a sense of ambiguity, of a future yet to be determined, and thus modernism was, in essence, an artistic expression of “the imaginative proximity of social revolution.”<sup>39</sup> In the Euro-American context, this sense of possibility—will the future be communist, capitalist, something else entirely?—was partially shut down after World War II. With “an oppressively stable, monolithically industrial, capitalist civilization . . . now in place,” high modernism itself became canonized and domesticated in universities.<sup>40</sup>

However, this was not the case everywhere, or at least not for long. As late as the 1960s, this same “openness of horizon” still existed in certain places.<sup>41</sup> Anderson’s description of modernism’s blossoming outside the capitalist core countries has powerful resonance with the situation in Turkey, as the close readings that follow will show: “Pre-capitalist oligarchies of various kinds, mostly of a landowning character, abound; capitalist development is typically far more rapid and dynamic, where it does occur, in these regions than in the metropolitan zones, but on the other hand is infinitely less stabilized or consolidated; socialist revolution haunts these countries as a permanent possibility, or indeed one already realized in countries close to home—Cuba or Nicaragua, Angola or Vietnam.”<sup>42</sup> One need only recall the proximity of the Soviet Union and the popular enthusiasm felt for Cuba and Vietnam to see how proximate revolution was felt to be in Turkey at midcentury.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the United States was heavily involved in Turkey as part of the anticommunist Truman Doctrine. According to Cold War common sense, Turkey was (alongside fellow NATO member Greece) the first in a long line of dominoes that needed to be kept upright.<sup>44</sup> Hence, the Marshall Plan showered Turkey with aid money that resulted in the breakneck construction of highways, the introduction of new consumer goods, increased urbanization, and the transformation of rural life—all while stubborn elements of an earlier dispensation remained.<sup>45</sup> While the Second New poets declared their autonomy, they also had their ears to the ground. The equally thrilling and anxiety-producing encounter with new goods and technologies, within the context of Turkey’s incomplete modernity and Cold War liminality, is palpable in the poetry of Edip Cansever and Turgut Uyar.

### **EDIP CANSEVER: ALUMINUM, ATOMS, AND AMERICA**

Edip Cansever grew up in the run-down historical neighborhoods of old Istanbul. In 1946 he took over his father’s business as a seller of antiques at the historic Grand Bazaar. Despite having no real sense for business, he worked at the small shop for most of his life—a career that gave him

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> For a brief introduction to the politics of 1960s Turkey, see Emin Alper, “Reconsidering Social Movements in Turkey: The Case of the 1968–71 Protest Cycle,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 43 (2010): 63–96.

<sup>44</sup> For an analysis of the 1960s in relation to Cold War geopolitics in the Mediterranean, see Kenan Behzat Sharpe, “A Mediterranean ’60s: Cultural Politics in Turkey, Greece, and Beyond,” in *Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, ed. Martin Klimke et al. (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 170–79.

<sup>45</sup> Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018), 5–6.

plenty of time for writing. Cansever published his first books of poetry in 1947 and 1954. With their short lines, colloquial language, and lighthearted lamentations the poems there betrayed a strong First New influence.

Yet in the same period, there were signs that Cansever's poetry was beginning to register a changing world. In 1954 he published "Alüminyum dükkan" (The aluminum shop) in the Istanbul journal *Yeditepe*, a literary home for the inchoate Second New. The poem reveals Cansever's own transition from established modes of poetic expression to something more discomfiting:

I cast a glance at the sea  
 The fish are singing ring-a-ding.  
 This is a worn shoe I say  
 This is a waterlogged piece of cheese I say  
 This is a boiled potato in your hand.  
 This is human intuition  
 This is human reason  
 This is the rule of law  
 Like strawberry's genesis into strawberry.

So this is reality and you know reality  
 This hammering of a nail  
 This kneading of bread  
 This knowledge of love and shame and humanity  
 This feeling, this thinking, this human burden  
 Both inside this society and outside this society  
 This is your situation, this is work in nature  
 This dumb flower  
 This knowledgeable tree  
 This utterly progressive thinking  
 This water, this river, this wind  
 This stone, this cloud, this air  
 This known, this unknown  
 This time before Christ, this time after Christ

Here's the newest of the new human being  
 Lined-up boxes,  
 Bended sheets of tin,  
 Aluminum shop.<sup>46</sup>

The poem shows a stockpiling tendency. This long list subsumes everything under a single grammatical structure, a kind of universal equivalent: "This" can be a "boiled potato," or it can just as easily be "strawberry's genesis into strawberry," the "hammering of a nail," or "human reason." This combination of discordant things is, according to the WReC, a hallmark of the kind of combined and uneven development that inspires peripheral modernism: "Any typology of combined and uneven development will offer a catalogue of effects or motifs at the level of narrative form:

<sup>46</sup> This translation is adapted from George Messo, *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde* (Swindon: Shearsman Books, 2009), 104.

discrepant encounters, alienation effects, surreal cross-linkages, unidentified freakish objects, unlikely likenesses across barriers of language, period, territory—the equivalent of umbrellas meeting sewing machines on (animated) dissecting tables.<sup>47</sup> This final image—“beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table”—comes from the comte de Lautréamont, who was a key influence on the Surrealists.<sup>48</sup> Breton transformed “umbrellas and sewing machines” into something of a slogan. Roughly three decades later, Cansever developed a similar emphasis on serendipitous convergences and the meeting of everyday objects from different realms of daily life. These he brought together in the operating room of his poetry.

This poem, like the others Cansever would collect in his 1957 book *Yerçekimli karanfil* (Gravitational carnation), is full of unpoetic images from industry, production, and science. The use of “aluminum” in the title and conclusion of “The Aluminum Shop” is of particular importance. Aluminum is the classic modernist metal. In use since antiquity, it was only in the nineteenth century that it began to be produced industrially. Aluminum made its grand debut to the public at the Paris Exposition universelle of 1855. In the following years, visitors encountered aluminum foil and wire for the first time. These became symbols of the future. In the 1890s aluminum production became more widespread globally. Increasingly cheap, it was used in the production of everyday goods like jewelry and eyeglass frames. During World War II, aluminum gained importance for industrial production, particularly in the field of aviation. After the war aluminum became an everyday product, used especially in household items. However, it regained its double aura as both futuristic and quotidian when aluminum was used in the first satellite launched into space, in 1957, and also in the creation of the first Coca-Cola cans.

Turkey first came into contact with aluminum consistently in the 1950s, when it was used in construction, kitchen goods, and electrical wiring. Starting in 1956 a limited amount of aluminum began to be produced within Turkey, followed by the first local production plant in 1967. When Cansever published “Aluminum Shop” in 1954, there was no production of aluminum to speak of in Turkey. For this reason, the metal could still evoke the level of industrial modernity to which Turkey was straining (and which, in the 1960s, was pursued with the strategy of import substitution). With an emphasis on reason and the cerebral, Cansever’s poem reveals how the human psyche itself is a substance as open to redesign and industrial production as metals. The poem ends with people squashed between contradictory images of order and destruction, nature and industry: “Here’s the newest of the new human being / lined-up boxes, / bended sheets of tin, / aluminum shop.”

In addition to the combination of objects, Cansever uses a technique of clashing temporalities. The appearance of aluminum in “Aluminum Shop” must be thought alongside the reference to atoms in another poem from the same 1957 collection. “Güzel atomların yaptığı ayak” (The foot made by beautiful atoms) revels in contemporary scientific and technological developments while also betraying deeper doubts:

I feel a violet without my hands  
It’s so beautiful that even America is beautiful  
Even you are beautiful, lacking me

<sup>47</sup> WRcC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Comte de Lautréamont, *Les chants de Maldoror* [The chants of Maldoror] (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2004), 504.

Even the atoms are beautiful  
 The molecules even  
 They gather and become a foot on me  
 They become a mouth a little bit  
 They become teeth all sharp  
 Two eyes all shiny  
 Ten nails all pointed  
  
 I feel a violet with my hands  
 I feel a molecule  
 An atom  
 Horrifying.  
 They gather and don't become a foot on me  
 Mouth, tooth, nail  
 They don't become an eye  
 All together  
 All together we become something, you see,  
  
 Its mouth, nose, hands, arms  
 Up against that horrific beauty.<sup>49</sup>

Racing up and down the scale from micro to macro, from atoms and molecules to body parts, Cansever's poem glimpses the unconscious reality of how the physical world is composed. It takes pleasure in peeling away appearances to reveal the inner workings of matter. However, this technological giddiness risks tipping over into terror, which is where the poem ends. What if these atoms and molecules do not gather into a foot or a tooth? There is a fear of misfiring, of the process going haywire through excessive attention to what should occur automatically. The perspective provided by modern science is as disconcerting as it is beautiful.

These fearful musings about atoms become meaningful in the context of mid-twentieth-century anxiety over nuclear war. As Cansever commented in a contemporaneous interview when asked why he writes about science and machines in his poems, "If I look up at the sky, there's a refrigerator right next to me. If I'm walking in the street, automobiles and motor vehicles are out in abundance. . . . Am I alone in this? The fear of atoms and hydrogen bombs grips my heart."<sup>50</sup> (Such fears became particularly intense in Turkey, which hosted the US military base that held the Jupiter missiles threatening Moscow during the Cuban Missile Crisis.) Yet in his 1956 interview, Cansever admits that he is optimistic: "I'm passionate about test tubes, pipes, steel, screws. Those inanimate objects that secure my happiness—I love each one like a person. If I had the chance, I would spend my free time in laboratories."<sup>51</sup> It is in this context that the line "even America is beautiful" makes sense as antinuclear anxiety. Yet why does submerging ourselves in the atomic level of existence reveal the beauty of "America"? At this point, the thematically alien

<sup>49</sup> Edip Cansever, *Sonrası kalır I: Bütün şiirler* [What's next remains: Collected poems] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2015), 107.

<sup>50</sup> Edip Cansever, *Şiiri siirle ölçme* [Measuring poetry with poetry], ed. Devrim Dirlikyapan (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), 186.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

worlds of geopolitics, commerce, and military power intrude on the microscopic and seemingly autonomous universe of this poem.

“Aşkın radyoaktivitesi” (Love’s radioactivity), first published in 1955, sheds further light on the appearance of America and its atoms in Cansever’s poetry and how it differs from the attention to aluminum. This poem also moves from the speaker’s own physical body to the larger body politic (or geopolitic):

When I feel love, I remain all alone  
I rub my groin all nicely  
You know those littlest of my toes  
I see them first of all.

A steel-blue vein is right there on my chin  
Often I can spot it outside in the sun  
It pulses thump-thump on the edge of my face  
Thick as can be my hair comes into my hand.

This matter happens during the daytime, right in the daytime  
When my filthiness, my dirty smells are most unmistakable  
While continuing to inhale, while thinking about something  
I lean over and stay right at the foot of the window.

I think about upstairs, given that I’m one floor below  
Four walls, a refrigerator, a sky resembling nylon  
The almost poisonousness of cold objects  
I realize that a current of love is wandering all across me

Without pause I’m loveifying but always like this  
My shoulders are as fresh as carnations, my knees, my feet  
Meanwhile it aggregates and disappears, that crazy explosive thing  
My nails sparkle like the day.<sup>52</sup>

In this series of unrhymed quatrains that resembles a Petrarchan *blason*, the speaker examines his body piece by piece, with an attitude ranging from masturbatory to clinical. Even while enjoying his own corporeal existence, the speaker preserves a kind of distance, as if observing something alien. Then the attention to the intensely organic quality of the body, its sweating, smelling physicality, gives way to hair and toenails—both intimate yet detachable aspects of the human body. Lacking nerves yet serving necessary functions, they are both attached to, yet not quite part of, the body. This hardness connects with the “steel-blue vein” and the “poisonousness of cold objects.” There is an uncanny blurring of lines between the animate and the inanimate because even these created objects possess a kind of life. Even what is cold can have a warming effect, just as an unstable atomic nucleus can emit energy in the form of radiation: what Cansever calls “a current of love.”

The presence of “a sky resembling nylon” in the poem can be seen in relation to Cansever’s interest in aluminum. Both substances stimulate an affective charge for the poet. However, like the atom, nylon is a decidedly twentieth-century trope, unlike nineteenth-century aluminum.

<sup>52</sup> Cansever, *Sonrası kalır I*, 97.

In the immediate context of the poem, nylon imparts a sense of claustrophobia: “Four walls, a refrigerator, a sky resembling nylon.” This vision of the sky as imprisoning also has a nineteenth-century pedigree in modernist poetry. Charles Baudelaire’s poem “Spleen: V” famously begins: “When skies are low and heavy as a lid [*un couvercle*] / over the mind tormented by disgust. . . .”<sup>53</sup> A *couvercle* is the kind of lid used with a cooking pot. It is, like aluminum, a hard object. In Baudelaire, all of nature is as menacing as this lid-like sky. This creates a parallel between the ennui of the speaker and the confining natural world. In contrast, Cansever’s sky is not a lid, metallic or otherwise, but nylon. Rather than a demonstration of the correspondence between the poet’s mental state and nature, as in Baudelaire, “Love’s Radioactivity” is set indoors: the sky is glimpsed from inside “four walls” and “at the foot of the window.” The tone is also more playful than that in “Spleen.” Though trapped indoors, Cansever’s speaker can still imagine being outside. The only nature immediately available in “Love’s Radioactivity” seems to be the body itself, but even this seems to blend with other synthetic objects from the world of manufacturing.

Nylon is the hinge that links Cansever’s “even America is beautiful” with his “radioactivity of love.” The American company DuPont began its research into nylon in 1930. Nylon stockings were first displayed in 1939 at the New York World’s Fair within the futuristic “The World of Tomorrow” exhibit.<sup>54</sup> After entering the commercial market to much fanfare in 1940, nylon production was diverted from stockings to the war effort. During World War II nylon became crucial in the production of aircraft fuel tanks, shoelaces, mosquito netting, and hammocks. Nylon’s sudden disappearance from the commercial market transformed it into a highly lucrative black-market good. In September 1945 nylon stockings reappeared in shops in the United States. Demand among women was so great that “nylon riots” even broke out in Pittsburgh and other cities. These events gave the popular press a chance to depict “women consumers as desperate and frivolous” as a way to project on them larger anxieties about the darker side of consumer culture.<sup>55</sup> Analyzing this intense demand for nylon, one academic study of the history of the DuPont company argues, “Nylon is one of the great symbols of the American century, on par no doubt with Coca-Cola in the consumer dreams of 20th-century men and women. . . . It is not only a technologically advanced product, it . . . also captured the public’s imagination.”<sup>56</sup> In Turkey, too, nylon was “an object of desire.” Throughout the 1950s, nylon stockings and dress shirts, marketed at a price available to all income groups, were immensely popular.<sup>57</sup> Stockings were advertised with femme fatale–style illustrations of women and guarantees that the product included “100% real DuPont nylon.”<sup>58</sup> With its association with the United States, nylon serves a periodizing function

<sup>53</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal* [The flowers of evil], trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 2008), 76.

<sup>54</sup> Audra J. Wolfe, “Nylon: A Revolution in Textiles,” *Chemical Heritage Magazine*, <https://www.sciencehistory.org/distillations/magazine/nylon-a-revolution-in-textiles>.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Smulyan, *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 70.

<sup>56</sup> Pap A. Ndiaye and Elborg Forster, *Nylon and Bombs: DuPont and the March of Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 182–83.

<sup>57</sup> Mehmet Alkan, “Soğuk Savaş’ın toplumsal, kültürel ve günlük hayatı inşa edilirken” [Constructing social, cultural, and everyday life in the Cold War], in *Türkiye’nin 1950’li yılları* [Turkey’s 1950s], ed. Mete Kaan Kaynar (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 600.

<sup>58</sup> Gökhan Akçura, “Plastiğin milli tarihi: Evlenmeyin erkekler, naylon kızlar çıkacak” [The national history of plastic: Don’t get married, men, the nylon girls will come], *Manifold* (blog), 19 January 2019, <https://manifold.press/evlenmeyin-erkekler-naylon-kizlar-cikacak/>.

in Second New poetry. It illustrates the transformation of the object world in 1950s Turkey, its cultural-political backdrop, as well as the anxieties this transformation provoked.

After World War II, Turkey took its position within the Pax Americana and entered a period of multiparty democracy. After years of single-party rule, in 1950 the probusiness Demokrat Parti (DP) came to power promising increased prosperity using the US model of “private enterprise, agricultural modernization in the countryside, and rapid urbanization.”<sup>59</sup> Turkey became more strongly linked than ever to circuits of global capitalism, both materially and symbolically. President Celal Bayar famously declared: “In our country we have worked to follow the course of the Americans’ progress. We are hopeful that after thirty years this auspicious country of ours will become a little America.”<sup>60</sup> The unfamiliar goods that began flooding Turkey’s streets (like the nylon clothes and refrigerators to which Cansever refers) were a symbol of these aspirations. As protectionist economic policies of the war years were loosened by the Democrats, US military base exchange stores became the conduit for new consumer goods: “Colorful nylon dress shirts, electric appliances, even underwear leaked out of the American Bazaar—that is, the PX stores—and into the local market.”<sup>61</sup> A makeshift resale market called the “American bazaar” was set up in the Tophane neighborhood of Istanbul, where clothing, chewing gum, flashlights, transistor radios, irons, records, canned foods, and other goods would first make their way into the hands of local consumers.<sup>62</sup> They trickled from there into the homes of intrepid middle-class consumers and eventually to the wider public, becoming symbols of an improved standard of living. The new objects that the Second New poets saw around them were a direct product of US military power in Turkey and a “period of intensified incorporation of Turkey into the world capitalist system.”<sup>63</sup> The Marshall Plan, which gave Turkey a total of \$349.02 million in aid, was designed as a “program of Americanizing the organization of production and consumption patterns across Western Europe.”<sup>64</sup> The more US Cold Warriors could demonstrate the supposed superiority of “the American way of life,” the more they thought they could secure this little America on the Soviet Union’s southern borders, which became a NATO member in 1952.

These goods wasted no time in penetrating the imaginations of Cansever and other Second New poets. By dwelling with seemingly trivial commodities, new objects, and extreme close-ups of already minuscule phenomena, the poet led his readers to comprehend the world-historical implications of the flotsam and jetsam of modernity. He understood the double meaning of these new commodities, representing US Cold War intervention as well as altogether new cultural, political, and psychic possibilities. Accordingly, his poems treated the manufactured materials of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century capitalism with hatred, horror, love, and fascination all at once. This poetry imagined impossible relationships among multiple periods, objects, and elements in order to register a world that was as confusing as it was new.

<sup>59</sup> Cangül Örnek and Çağdas Üngör, eds., *Turkey in the Cold War: Ideology and Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Alkan, “Soğuk Savaş’ın,” 595.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmet Oktay, “Kimsenin ilgilenmediği olayların tarihçisi” [The historian of events in which no one is interested], in *O ben ki: Edip Cansever* [That I: Edip Cansever], ed. Yalçın Armağan (Istanbul: Alkım Yayınevi, 2005), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Alkan, “Soğuk Savaş’ın,” 596.

<sup>63</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 237.

<sup>64</sup> Adalet, *Hotels*, 5.

### TURGUT UYAR: NYLON, NEON, AND THE BLASÉ METROPOLITAN

Turgut Uyar's poetry similarly bares traces of the combined and uneven process of capitalist modernity in Turkey, with many of the same objects appearing in his poems. At the same time, Uyar was particularly attentive to urban transformations. His poetry shows parallels with analyses of modern capitalism and psychic life by Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, and others. Without relying on a flow of influence from European center to Turkish periphery, careful attention to Uyar's work can reveal how similar tropes arose from a similar, though compressed, experience of modernity. These classic themes (re)occur under the neon lights and in the nylon unreality of a specifically mid-twentieth-century peripheral metropolis.

In 1959 Uyar published *Dünyanın en güzel Arabistanı* (The world's most beautiful Arabia), which brought together his first batch of poems in the Second New style. The opening lines of the first poem begin in medias res with a reference to nylon: "Whereas there was nothing out there to be afraid of / Everything was made of nylon that's all."<sup>65</sup> This famous poem, "Geyikli gece" (Deer night; literally "night with deer" or "deer-filled night"), describes a pastoral refuge that is continually threatened by the city, symbolized by nylon. The poem is based on an opposition of rural-urban, natural-manufactured. Given nylon's association with women's stockings and societal fears about mass culture's transformation of gender roles,<sup>66</sup> it is not surprising that the poem repeatedly emphasizes a supposedly more "natural" form of heterosexual sex: "we would make love in bed, one man and one woman."<sup>67</sup> These references should be read alongside the poem's phantasmagoric images that serve to contrast the sensuous deer night with the brutality ("gladiators and gnashing gears") and artificiality of the city.

While describing the deer night, the speaker notes that "ships cannot take you there / Neon and theories cannot warm it here and there."<sup>68</sup> After nylon, neon stands in for the city's glittering falseness. A colorless and odorless gas, it may give off light, but it is as cold as ideas. However much the poem seems to verge on primitivism, comparing neon with the unlit blackness of the forest, it is careful to insist that refuge can also be found in the interstices of urban space:

If you thought our melancholy stemmed from major things you'd be wrong  
For example, if we drank glasses of wine we'd be liberated  
Or if we stabbed a man  
Or if we spat in the street

This alternating description of the premodern deer night (with its sky, moonlit antlers, rivers, and fires) and the underground of the city (where the "we" of the poem fight, get drunk, wander the streets, play dominoes, and kiss in stinking beds) continues until the poem ends with a striking final line: "I lie down and kiss myself on the cheeks."<sup>69</sup> The poem begins midthought, and now it ends with this cryptic image of impossible circularity. The city may be threatening, but it is

<sup>65</sup> Turgut Uyar, *Büyük saat: Bütün şiirleri* [The large clock: Complete poems] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002), 113.

<sup>66</sup> See Andreas Huyssen on the "universalizing ascription of femininity to mass culture" and the misogyny that characterizes much modernist literature: *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 62.

<sup>67</sup> Uyar, *Büyük saat*, 115.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

nothing to get too worked up about. It is only nylon: flimsy and unreal. Like neon, it is flashy but insubstantial—mere gas.

Like Cansever, Uyar published two earlier books of verse in a radically simpler style before writing poems like “Deer Night.” These were inspired by the First New and early Republican neo-folk poetry, describing the colorful realities of the Anatolian countryside in crystal-clear language. So what exactly occurred such that the poet who in 1952 published verses like “You’re my motherland, my daily bread / You’re the victory I’ve felt and known for years”<sup>70</sup> could, in the space of a few years, begin writing lines like “Everything was made of nylon that’s all”?<sup>71</sup> When Uyar’s poetry begins to mutate dramatically around 1956, it was due to a combination of international, personal, and political factors.

Uyar was born in 1927 in the capital of Ankara. From the age of eleven to twenty-three Uyar’s life was spent under the shadow of the single-party rule. Uyar’s father was a military officer, and in 1941, because of the family’s economic problems, Uyar was enrolled at a military boarding school. Upon graduation in 1946 he decided to stay in the service, moving from Turkey’s west to the far northeast of Anatolia. He spent four years in an isolated and remote subprovince near the Georgian border. In 1952, two years into the rule of the pro-American DP, Uyar was given a new posting, in Ankara. After many years in rural Anatolia, he was to return to life in the big city. Things had changed and Uyar noticed. Looking back on this period in an interview in 1973, he reflected: “The thing that pushed me to write the poetry I did [starting in 1956] was seeing that my environment had changed. A suddenly urbanizing world, the neon lights I suddenly encountered, large hotels, a situation foreshadowing a series of new developments: all these made it so that writing the poetry of Orhan Veli [of the First New] could no longer save me.”<sup>72</sup> Uyar was aware of how cultural and historical periodization were linked to his biography. Within this new urban climate of the 1950s, the earlier style of poetry had become nothing more than the residue of a previous era. Something more suited to the age was emerging to usurp it. It was this newness that Uyar’s poetry explored: and what better symbol for this new world with its gritty streets and hotels than neon, that most modernist of chemical elements—discovered in the late nineteenth century, adapted for commercial lighting in the 1910s, and given a name that means, simply, “new”?

Uyar moved to the big city of Ankara in 1952, and within the space of a few years, he was publishing poetry in the Second New style. Another poem from the same period is “Meymenet Sokağına vardım” (I reached Meymenet Street), published in April 1956.<sup>73</sup> As if to mimic urban disorientation and what Perry Anderson calls the “complex and differential temporality” of capitalism, the poem contains long, meandering lines with multiple clauses and even complete sentences often without punctuation, syntactical linkages, or even logical connections among them.<sup>74</sup> The poem begins: “Prepare meatballs for me prepare salads and window too.”<sup>75</sup> While eaten throughout the country, *köfte* (meatballs) are a common street food in the proletarian districts of large cities and associated with the quick pace of urban life. *Köfte* and salad are linked

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>72</sup> Turgut Uyar, *Korkulu ustalık* [Fearful mastery], ed. Alaattin Karaca (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 512.

<sup>73</sup> *Meymenet* means “fortune” or “auspiciousness.” It is the name of a street in Istanbul’s historic Fatih district, not far from the neighborhood of Edirnekapi, where Uyar was from.

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” 101.

<sup>75</sup> Uyar, *Büyük saat*, 127.

through culinary association, but then there is the appearance of “window.” Whether or not the singular noun is also meant to be the direct object of the verb “prepare,” the addition of this word to the list cannot but elicit the shocking image of chewing on broken glass.

In its subsequent lines, “I Reached Meymenet Street” moves on to the subject of urban malaise and how to escape it:

Let me sit down and with hope forget some things  
 I know the taste of black wine forest-like  
 Black wine is made from black grapes in fragrant cellars  
 I stopped I'll say these things I haven't gotten used to it<sup>76</sup>

The speaker is disoriented and ill-adapted to his surroundings. He seeks refuge in a cluster of positive associations, lingering over them one by one like the beads of a rosary: hope, wine, forests, the color black, and hidden places. It is as if we are being let in on the inner workings of a benign psychological delusion. With its private utopia, the poem is closely linked in spirit to “Deer Night.” As “Meymenet” continues, the impression of such a link only increases:

I'll always know the taste of Meymenet Street but I can't go  
 I'll sit down and sort through files until evening  
 In my narrow free moments I'll stop and think about the streets  
 The little streets heading down to the seaside  
 Ninety-two files I'll sort I'll start to love the earth  
 I'll make an effort to love the things I haven't gotten used to  
 There's a time, between green and five-thirty  
 To make love with the universe that tires itself out, softens, grows eager<sup>77</sup>

The act of “sorting files” evokes the lives of civil servants, like Uyar himself, trapped in “narrow” offices where the work is mindless and repetitive. The antidote to this sterility is found not only in nature but in the dimly lit streets and old-style wooden houses of the city. Even if it remains no more than a thought, Meymenet Street is a talisman of sorts. In Uyar's poetry such places function as portals to a different kind of life, one beyond the constraints of work or logic or even conventional language: “a time between green and five-thirty.” To use Ernst Bloch's terms, this kind of poetic image is a powerful description of the “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous” that is caused by uneven capitalist development; for Bloch as for Uyar, there is something utopian about these contradictions, for they reveal “the still subversive and utopian contents in the relations of people to people and nature.”<sup>78</sup> Yet this is not simple primitivism. It is as if the speaker of these poems cannot decide whether urban space represents a threat to survival, a residue of earlier lifeways, an opportunity for novel forms of pleasure and flâneurie, a space of salvation, or some combination thereof. Whichever way things land, it is clear that the pressure exerted by urban, external stimuli is extreme.

If we follow Uyar's own historical reading of what pushed him and his colleagues to transform their poetry, the proximal cause is again the societal transformations Turkey experienced

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>78</sup> Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 38.

in the 1950s under the DP. Uyar's reflections from 1984 corroborate and expand upon the earlier interview:

Our generation came to an awareness of poetry with Orhan Veli's "Garip." Later . . . they called us the Second New. . . . Actually, none of us had any information regarding what each other was doing. It can be asked, then: "So what then changed that poetry also went through a change?" Alongside poetry's own specific organic livingness [i.e., its internal dynamics] it is necessary to touch on the explosion of cash [caused by] the Demokrat Parti—and on the changing of values and the shaking [*sarsıntı*] of their foundations. Speaking for myself, when I came . . . to Ankara, I also experienced a shock [*sarsıntı*] and felt the need to enter into a period of internal searching [*hesaplaşma*, literally a "settling of accounts"]. The others must have gone through a similar shock because poetry changed, finding a place for itself within changed conditions. Without a doubt social events have a significant effect in the speeding up and slowing down of poetry['s development].<sup>79</sup>

In delineating the social changes that catalyzed the transformation of his generation's poetry, Uyar draws on vocabulary normally associated with earthquakes or psychological trauma (*sarsıntı*). He is also careful to emphasize that the Second New was not a literary movement but an almost unconscious response to the contours of capitalist modernity in Turkey in this period—what Anderson calls the "after-glow" of modernism.

The early 1950s witnessed intense economic transformation—the postwar "explosion of cash" to which Uyar referred. This engendered new social dynamics. With extra money in their pockets and new networks of roads linking the countryside to the cities, there began a massive internal migration to urban centers. As an indication of this rapid growth, in 1950 the population of Ankara was only 289,000. By 1960 it would reach 650,000. With the overall population of the country increasing and the cities rapidly expanding, Turkey moved up a gear in its transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society, while still maintaining many precapitalist characteristics.

One example of this transformation is the Hilton Hotel Istanbul, opened in 1955 as a symbol of capitalist modernity "ten miles from the Iron Curtain." As Conrad Hilton remarked in his opening speech, the hotel was a "first-hand laboratory [where guests] may inspect America and its ways at their leisure."<sup>80</sup> Yet right below this laboratory of American capitalism were swathes of farmland plots still tended by horse and plow. While left-wing intellectuals in the 1950s began debating what would happen to the country's "feudal remnants," the decade also saw the growth of mass culture (radio, television, advertising, and a celebrity star system). While much remained the same, a new sense of mobility and possibility settled in for many sections of Turkish society.

By 1956, however, poetry began to diagnose the darker aspects of this social and economic modernization.<sup>81</sup> For Uyar, both the promises and the dangers of modern life are manifested most acutely in the metropolis itself. In "Büyük ev ablukada" (Big house blockaded), he compares life in the city to a state of siege:

<sup>79</sup> Uyar, *Korkulu ustalık*, 555–56.

<sup>80</sup> Adalet, *Hotels*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Uyar turned out to be prescient, for within two years Turkey was in an economic crisis, with the lira devalued, inflation on the rise, and the DP becoming increasingly dependent on foreign aid and authoritarian repression at home to hold on to power. See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 231–34.

(There was bread there was butter there was nothing to be ashamed of  
 Something else wasn't there too but I couldn't grasp it.)  
 Well that's it, being like this is the best of to-be's  
 I held a small child and helped him off the bus  
 (I had helped him off the bus  
 What was not there was important goddammit)<sup>82</sup>

The poem's first line is an interruption: this kind of parenthetical statement occurs across Second New poetry. In the second line, we stumble over a logical contradiction. Instead of listing "There was X, Y, and Z too," as the grammar of the Turkish would normally progress, Uyar's second line causes an effect roughly like that of the improbable English formulation "X was there, Y was there, and Z wasn't there too." The poem allows for these blank spots, ascribing as much significance to what cannot be grasped as what can. As much as "Big House Blockaded" stresses multiplicity and the accumulation of people/things/experiences in the city, in this way mirroring the expansion of possibilities and material goods, it is also a poem about what is absent. Amid all this abundance, there are things that cannot be said—or expressed only in muffled whispers and self-interrupting asides.

The speaker has a number of chance encounters with other city dwellers, narrated through floating bits of reported speech. The city is a place where everyone—young and old, rich and poor, evil and good—rubs shoulders:

I looked at the sky it's right in its place  
 Robbers swindlers right in their places  
 Same with the profiteers traitors the devil-may-care [*vurdumduymazlar*]  
 Good I said I felt such relief  
 No disturbance in the order I said I felt glad  
 From one of its secluded regions I entered the city<sup>83</sup>

Here, in his typically understated style, Uyar gives us a veritable catalog of urban types, from wartime profiteers to hucksters to subversives. In the space of fewer than twenty lines, we have already encountered seven groups of people plus the small child from the bus. This variety represents the typical order of things in the metropolis. The poet has discovered the crowd.

The most interesting group within Uyar's urban typology is the *vurdumduymazlar*. Beyond "devil-may-care," the term used here can also be translated as "impassive" or "unfeeling." The Turkish noun literally means "I-hit-they-don't-feel." This is a type familiar from the history of urbanization. As early as 1903, the phenomenon Uyar describes in "Big House Blockaded" had been theorized. In *The Metropolis and Mental Life* Simmel wrote: "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli."<sup>84</sup> The enfeebled human mind must find a way to shield itself from the "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions." This is where numbness enters the picture. According to Simmel, the "metropolitan type

<sup>82</sup> Uyar, *Büyük saat*, 188.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, eds., *The Urban Sociology Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 25.

of man” shields himself from this mad rush of stimuli by strengthening the “organ [capable of] protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart.” The mind is less sensitive than the heart, according to Simmel; the intellect is surface to the personality’s depth. And so the urban type comes to rely habitually on the intellect. This has unintended consequences, however. Taking refuge in the surface results in impersonality, or what Simmel famously called the state of being “blasé”: “There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude.”<sup>85</sup> They get hit, but they don’t feel it. Like Uyar himself moving suddenly from the countryside to Ankara, the poetry shows a speaker and a nation psychically unprepared for the high levels of stimuli found in the metropolis.

For further development of Simmel’s insights about the “blasé attitude” and the urban type, one with immediate relevance to Uyar’s poetic project, we can look to Walter Benjamin’s “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939). In this essay, Benjamin traces a long history of the relationship among poetry, the city, and mental life. He does this mainly through an exploration of Baudelaire’s poetic innovations in *Les fleurs du mal*. The question Benjamin sets for himself is how lyric poetry can be produced in a “climate [that] has become increasingly inhospitable” to such an endeavor.<sup>86</sup> In other words, when neither the psychological habits of the reading public nor the external social conditions are any longer conducive to the concentration and particular emotional dispositions required by lyric poetry, what happens to the genre? When the external world has become so complex and overwhelming that people are “unable to assimilate the data of the world around [them] by way of experience,” how can one write poetry designed to address itself to a coherent and stable interiority? Baudelaire’s solution was to speak directly to that inattentive, thrill-seeking, pleasure-addicted, and fickle constitution of “Hypocrite lecteur—mon semblable,—mon frère!” According to Benjamin, Baudelaire faced the problem head-on and proved that “lyric poetry can have as its basis an experience for which the shock experience has become the norm.”<sup>87</sup> In this way, he transformed himself into the lyric poet of the urban crowd.

In a rapturous passage dedicated to the metropolitan “man” of Baudelaire, Benjamin provides a description applicable to the equal-parts manic and anxious speakers who populate Uyar’s poetry. When Benjamin narrates the experience of the urban type navigating a crowded city scene where all sorts of vehicles and bodies fight for space in the chaos, he could just as well be describing a busy avenue in mid-twentieth-century Ankara, with its sophisticated city dwellers and newly arrived peasants both wandering down the avenues, as in nineteenth-century Paris: “Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man ‘a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness.’”<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in “Big House Blockaded” the experience on buses and in crowds—where one is packed cheek by jowl with every genus of the urban menagerie—results in an electric charge of sorts. And so just as the “subterranean shocks” of Baudelaire’s poetry

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 155.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

cause “words to collapse,” Uyar’s work shows the effects of the crowd through its elliptical asides, unfinished thoughts, gaps in memory, disjointed grammar, and phantasmagoric images.<sup>89</sup> The poems of *The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia*—with their wild oscillations between silence and prolixity, fear and elation—record the magnitude of the shock experienced under what critic Nermin Menemencioglu calls “a bombardment of impressions.”<sup>90</sup> Like surplus electricity coursing through the body causing sudden and jerky movements, “Big House Blockaded” reads like the furious scribbling of a seismograph recording violent aftershocks.

The subsequent lines of Uyar’s “Big House Blockaded” combine the nineteenth-century problematic of the crowd with more contemporary questions:

Look all of you I built this city I raised it up but I couldn’t love it  
 (There was bread there was butter I had said so it’s important  
 There was nothing to be ashamed of who should I explain this to)  
 If I don’t love it no one would be able to love it  
 It summoned us to passions to bus to hot dogs [*sosis*] to refrigerator  
 To telephone to cinemas to radios a whole mass of fickle loves  
 To hordes and hordes of unhappy habits  
 To packs of lies and dirty tricks to villainy to linen suits  
 (Later his wife died, that kid’s  
 He was alone he was feeble like everyone else  
 He became polluted defamed he drunked [*sarhoşladı*] he visited filthy broads  
 We understood that no one but the deceased could save him  
 The deceased had not done it either<sup>91</sup>)

In this stanza, the speaker explicitly reflects on his, and “our,” relationship to the city. As the poem slips quickly from first- to third-person narration, it becomes clear that trying—but being unable—to love the city is a problem of collective importance. As in Marx’s early theory of alienation, the people who produce the city are alienated from the thing they produce. Yet Uyar is more interested in consumption than labor. For him, the new urban objects that hostilely confront us—buses, hot dogs, refrigerators, telephones, cinemas, radios—are the cause of this alienation. Refrigerators, for example, existed in only a minority of middle-class homes and were considered both a luxury item and a source of prestige. The same was true for televisions. Telephones and radios were slowly becoming more widespread, but they still also emanated an aura of the new. *Sosis* (encompassing both hot-dog-like sausages and cheap, mass-produced cold cuts) was a new kind of fast food. It was met both with desire, as a symbol of ultramodern eating habits, and with a suspicion of uncleanness. The flora and fauna of mid-twentieth-century Ankara are connected to the fear and pleasure of the age.

Both modern appliances and the crowd become conflated in the speaker’s mind with “fickle loves,” “lies,” and “villainy.” The dark side of this seeming improvement in the standard of living is the unmooring of existing social relations and an increase in loneliness, anomie, and anxiety.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>90</sup> Nermin Menemencioglu, “Turgut Uyar’ın şiiri” [Turgut Uyar’s poetry], in *Şiirde dün yok mu: Turgut Uyar üzerine yazılar* [Does poetry have no yesterday? Writings on Turgut Uyar], ed. Tomris Uyar (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 1999), 57.

<sup>91</sup> Uyar, *Büyük saat*, 189.

The result of new, imported lifeways and growing consumer culture, objects like telephones and refrigerators become a source of suspicion. There is something unseemly and threatening about this modern world, as we see in the corruption of the “child” whom he helped off the bus in the previous stanza. This sexist depiction of decadent values (“filthy broads”) proves once again that the modernist fear of the masses is expressed through a fear of women.<sup>92</sup> For Uyar, this kind of social breakdown is also expressed through the breaking down of language, what Turkish critics call *deformasyon*. The combination of the noun/adjective *sarhoş* (drunk) with the active-verb suffix *-lamak* produces a strange neologism (to drunken) that can be read as a linguistic parallel of a society’s moral degeneration.

Uyar’s “Big House Blockaded” alternates between radical and regressive political stances and brings together experiences (the crowd, radio) associated with a nineteenth-century moment of urban modernity alongside discomfort with the post–World War II conjuncture of consumer capitalism (neon lights, nylon, refrigerators). Like Cansever’s poetry—and indeed, the work of Süreya and the other Second New poets—it illuminates the kind of combined and uneven development of a peripheral metropolis in the afterglow of modernism. Locating the Second New within this national and international context makes it possible to grasp the social grounding of the poetry’s many formal novelties, as well as its similarity with earlier examples of modernist imagination, without collapsing them into each other.

Rather than any direct genealogy of influence, what these parallels between Second New poetry and more canonical poets and theorists of modernism/modernity show is that a combination of social, political, and economic conditions (urbanization, industrialization, the rise of consumer capitalism) experienced at different historical periods (nineteenth-century Europe or mid-twentieth-century Turkey) allows particular kinds of cultural phenomena to appear. Approaching modernity in this way, and not through a catalog of techniques or the literary-historical tracing of influence, allows us to further “de-link [modernity] from the idea of the ‘west’ and yoke it to that of the capitalist world-system,”<sup>93</sup> which causes similar though uneven effects everywhere.

In fact, attention to peripheral modernists like the Second New reveals more starkly the contradictions at the heart of modernism globally. For example, poets like Cansever and Uyar sought to create an autonomous aesthetic. At the same time, close readings of their poetry reveal that this form of autonomous literature is intimately connected to geopolitical, social, and economic transformations. This confirms Jameson’s argument about modernist poetry: “There is of course no reason why specialized and elite phenomena, such as the writing of poetry, cannot reveal historical trends and tendencies as vividly as ‘real life’—or perhaps more visibly, in their isolation and semi-autonomy which approximates a laboratory situation.”<sup>94</sup> Jameson was referring to the poetry of Wallace Stevens, which, the more it tries to separate itself off from any historical referent, ever more clearly reveals how it is sutured into the history of capitalist development. An even more extreme version of this dynamic occurs with the appearance of aluminum, atoms, nylon, and neon in Second New poetry. The laboratories that first discovered or produced these substances may have been located in Western Europe and North America. However, modernist texts produced in peripheral countries like Turkey create a kind of social laboratory that,

<sup>92</sup> Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 52.

<sup>93</sup> WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text* 9 (1984): 179.

through its extremes, brings to newly heightened visibility the dynamics of combined and uneven development that is at the heart of the modernist aesthetic globally. It is not for nothing that Cansever—in his statement about why objects from science, medicine, and technology appear in his poetry—uses the same metaphor: “If I had the chance, I would spend my free time in laboratories.” The peripheral poem is the laboratory whose experiments reveal the volatility of aesthetic autonomy: encoded, as it were, with the logic of capitalism. A