

## Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

### Confronting History, Speaking With History: Is the Narrative of the French Revolution in Ali Kemâl's *Fetret* Used as a Tool of Diagnosis and Remedy?

*“A frantic intellect striving to instill historical consciousness in  
his contemporaries”*  
(Meriç, 2005, p. 166)

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#### Abstract

This article offers a *Fetret*-centered reading of Ali Kemâl's extended French Revolution discussions as a deliberate political-ethical device rather than an encyclopedic detour. It argues that the novel's recurrent pauses—moments when narration yields to lengthy debates on Bastille, revolutionary actors, and the vocabulary of “liberty”—constitute a laboratory in which the Second Constitutional Era's public language is tested. The “*Bedia-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*” polemic functions as the key experimental scene: a journalistic text forges legitimacy through a calendrical coincidence (Bastille in July; the Ottoman Constitution in July), romanticizes the Revolution by collapsing Marat, Robespierre, and Danton into a single heroic bloc, and culminates in the refrain “Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!” *Fetret*'s critical intelligence lies in showing how such speech acts can aestheticize violence and convert historical analogy into a shortcut of authorization. Selman Bey's intervention is therefore not a pedantic correction but an ethical diagnosis of public reason. His charge of “*fikdân-ı tetebbu*” (lack of disciplined inquiry) and his self-implicating question—“*what percentage of us is still free of such stains?*”—redefine historical knowledge as an

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obligation of intellectual life and as a preventive politics aimed at limiting radicalization and purge mentalities. The Danton/Robespierre/Saint-Just triad is read as an analogical map for contemporary positions: Danton figures pragmatic moderation, Robespierre the logic of delegitimizing opposition through suspicion, and Saint-Just the rhetoric of extra-legal necessity that suspends judgment and law. In methodological terms, the article mobilizes Ali Kemâl's *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* only "in footnote dose," using it to sharpen *Fetret*'s implied distinctions without displacing the novel's central stage. Ultimately, *Fetret* treats the French Revolution as a medium for diagnosing and treating the moral and rhetorical risks embedded in constitutional politics.

*Keywords:* *Fetret*, Ali Kemâl, French Revolution, Second Constitutional Era and public discourse, Historical analogy and political legitimation

### **Tarihle Yüzleşmek, Tarihle Konuşmak: Ali Kemâl'in *Fetret*'inde Fransız İhtilali Anlatısı Bir Teşhis ve Tedavi Aracı mı?**

#### **Öz**

Bu makale, Ali Kemâl'in *Fetret*'inde Fransız İhtilali etrafında uzayan tartışmaları ansiklopedik bir sapmadan ziyade, bilinçli bir siyaset-ahlak aygıtı olarak *Fetret* merkezinde okur. Çalışmanın iddiasına göre romanın tekrar eden "duraklamaları"-anlatının geri çekilip Bastille, ihtilal aktörleri ve "hürriyet" kelime dağarcığı üzerine uzun münakaşalara yer açtığı anlar- II. Meşrutiyet'in kamusal dilinin sınındığı bir laboratuvar kurur. "*Bedâia-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" polemigi bu laboratuvarın kilit sahnesidir: gazeteci metin, temmuz rastlantısı üzerinden (Bastille Temmuz'da alındı; Kanûn-ı Esâsî Temmuz'da ilan edildi.) meşrutiyet üretir, Marat-Robespierre-Danton'u tek bir kahraman blokuna indirger, ardından "*Yaşasın hürriyet, yaşasın meşrutiyet!*" nidasıyla kapanır. *Fetret*'in eleştirel zekâsı, bu tür söz edimlerinin şiddeti estetize edebileceğini ve tarihsel analogiyi bir "yetkilendirme kısayolu"na çevirebileceğini göstermesinde yatar. Bu yüzden Selman Bey'in müdahalesi pedantik bir düzeltme değildir, kamusal muhakemenin etik teşhisidir. Onun "*fikdân-ı tetebbu*" suçlaması ve kendini de kapsayan "*yüzde kaçımız masûnuz?*" sorusu, tarih bilgisini aydının yükümlülüğü ve radikalleşme ile tasfiye mantığını sınırlayan önleyici bir siyaset olarak yeniden tanımlar. Danton/Robespierre/Saint-Just üçlüsü de güncel pozisyonlar için analogik bir harita sunar: Danton pragmatik ölçülülüğü, Robespierre muhalefeti şüphıyla gayrimeşrulaştırma mantığını, Saint-Just ise muhakeme ve hukuku askıya alan "hukuk dışı zorunluluk" retorliğini temsil eder. Metodolojik olarak makale, Ali Kemâl'in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*'ini sadece "dipnot dozunda" kullanır; böylece romanın merkezini bozmadan ayrımları keskinleştirir. Sonuçta *Fetret*, Fransız İhtilali'ni, meşrutiyet siyasetinin içinde saklı retorik ve ahlaki riskleri teşhis edip tedavi etmeye yarayan bir vasıta olarak ele alır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* *Fetret*, Ali Kemâl, Fransız İhtilali, II. Meşrutiyet ve kamusal dil, tarihsel analogi ve siyasal meşrulaştırma

Ali Kemâl (1869–1922) emerged as a prominent journalist and political actor within the Second Constitutional Era’s volatile public sphere, distinguished by his liberal stance, acerbic polemics, and friction with Unionist authorities. *Fetret* functions as a text that re-evaluates this experience through fiction while deliberately frustrating conventional novelistic expectations: it establishes a narrative of love, jealousy, and everyday conflict, only to suddenly center lengthy debates on history and politics. Notably, the French Revolution operates here not as an externalized encyclopedic display, but as a conceptual apparatus for interrogating the tensions emerging alongside the Second Constitutional Era’s discourse of liberty. Interrogating *Fetret* from this standpoint, this article investigates how the novel’s revolutionary dialogues construct a mechanism of diagnosis and remedy (i.e., diagnosis as capturing the symptoms staged by the text; remedy as the proposed discipline of inquiry, moderation, and legal judgment).

The most striking aspect of *Fetret* is its deliberate suspension of narrative flow. The scene frequently detaches from the characters’ daily tensions to accommodate pages of discourse on the French Revolution. Journalistic texts are debated, the Danton-Robespierre conflict is unpacked, and the lexicon of the “liberty” slogan is scrutinized. While these sections might superficially resemble an encyclopedic display, this article contends that Ali Kemâl does not employ these revolutionary blocks as mere decor; instead, he transforms them into a diagnostic instrument. This “diagnosis” targets the romantic revolutionism, slogan-fed historical ignorance, and the ease of justifying violence pervasive in the Second Constitutional Era’s political climate. The “remedy” is the proposal of a liberal political reason that establishes moderation, judgment, public responsibility, and historical knowledge as ethical duties. The newspaper scene in *Fetret* clarifies this framework: an editor likens the Ottoman revolution to the Bastille, romanticizes the Marat–Robespierre–Danton triad as the “*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*” (the wonder of the great revolution), and concludes with “*Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 34). Selman Bey’s reaction is more than a correction; he identifies this rhetoric as dangerous and issues a severe judgment: “*fikdân-ı tetebbu*” (lack of disciplined inquiry) and the self-implicating question, “*what percentage of us is still free of such stains?*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35). This single inquiry expands the novel’s target audience, shifting the focus from an individual journalist to a collective public culture.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kunalp’s observation that “there are only two works in Ottoman Turkish concerning the French Revolution... censorship applied in the Ottoman Empire... prevented the free circulation of books” (Kunalp, 1991, p. 147) demonstrates that the ignorance in question is not a ‘personal failing’ but a structural matter regarding channels of circulation.

Ali Kemâl does not obscure the text's generic claims. He describes a writing style that departs from “*story-telling*” toward a “*tarihimsi bir mah-sûl-i tedkik u tetebbu*” (a history-like product of research and inquiry) (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 5), grounded in thought and investigation. By referencing Vogüé's *Emvât-ı Gûyâ* and Anatole France, he discusses how an idea-driven narrative can be constructed.<sup>2</sup> These passages serve as strong internal evidence that the “pauses” in *Fetret* are not formal defects. Furthermore, the author posits citation and inquiry as authorial principles: failing to extract every event and idea from a source or document signifies amateurism and a “lack of inquiry.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 4). Alongside this, “skill lies in blending those acquisitions according to an anxiety or aim and presenting them in an aesthetic manner.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 4). Here, “*tetebbu*” is not merely a methodology; it is a mental discipline and an ethical matter. Consequently, the revolutionary dialogues in the novel exist not to make the reader “informed,” but to cultivate the reader's public judgment. This article attempts to unfold this function by tracing it scene by scene.

The methodology relies on close reading; however, rather than sufficing with what the text “says,” characters' utterances are treated alongside their discursive positions.

The debate surrounding Selman Bey, Samed, and *Fetret* operates as a theater of ideas. Selman Bey's sentences establish a “speaking position” representing a public reason that is historically grounded, allergic to slogans, and resistant to the aestheticization of violence. Conversely, the figure of Hayret Bey represents a mentality that establishes authority through superficial knowledge and misinterprets contemporary politics due to a flawed understanding of historical continuity. Accordingly, the study incorporates rhetorical analysis: what the provocative language of the newspaper segment incites, the “cooling” and “tempering” effect produced by Selman Bey's correction, and the dramatic thresholds at which the novel constructs this conflict. The note that Selman Bey's published piece in Selâm “warned and tempered public opinion” is internal evidence of the novel's relationship with the public sphere.

The corpus centers on four focuses: (i) the preface and poetic declarations; (ii) the “*bedâ-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*” scene and subsequent debates; (iii) passages unfolding the Danton–Robespierre tension; and (iv) scenes establishing historical consciousness as “intellectual responsibility.” Ali

<sup>2</sup> Ali Kemâl refers here to M. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's (1848–1910) 1899 work, *Les Morts qui Parlent*.

Kemâl's *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* will be integrated at the footnote level to sharpen the allegorical moves within *Fetret*.<sup>3</sup> In the “*Medhal*” (Introduction) of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, revolution is described as an “ocean” whose impact is “*perpetual*”; two principles (*legal equality* and *national sovereignty*) are explicitly defined, followed by the observation that their initial application could be “*cruel*” and “*bloody*.”<sup>4</sup> This framework reinforces *Fetret*'s critique of liberty rhetoric by acknowledging the principle while condemning the blood-soaked method. Similarly, the reference to Danton as a “*moderate reformer*” in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* demonstrates that Selman Bey's politics of moderation is a deliberate construction. This article will mobilize both texts through these brief links, yet the stage will remain reserved for *Fetret*.

In this article, the concepts of “diagnosis” and “remedy” are used as operational titles guiding the textual analysis rather than abstract metaphors. Diagnosis involves capturing symptoms on stage: (i) the normalization of historical ignorance; (ii) the aestheticization of violence through slogans; and (iii) the delegitimization of opposition through a logic of “purge.” Remedy emerges as (i) a reading discipline imposing an ethics

<sup>3</sup> Kunalp's statement highlighting the “pedagogical/instructional” role of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* bolsters this aim: “...yet the book's method proves remarkably effective if one recalls its purpose is to educate.” (Kunalp, 1991, p. 148)

<sup>4</sup> Since *Fetret* serves as the primary stage, *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* will not be “mounted” as a secondary main text, thus preserving word economy and preventing the dispersal of the reading focus. Conversely, utilizing *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* in “footnote doses” establishes a two-tiered intertextual relationship that disciplines both works. The first tier is conceptual condensation: while *Fetret* identifies the violent potential within the rhetoric of “*bedîa*” on the polemical stage, the nature of the novel often leaves historical details as mere “signs.” *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* offers the precision to sharpen these signs—even within a single note. For instance, Danton's identity as a “moderate reformer” (*muslih-i mutavassıt*) demonstrates that moderation is a calculated political technique rather than a simple middle ground. Saint-Just's claim that “there is no need for judgment” starkly illustrates how violence is converted into a justification for the suspension of law. The second tier is rhetorical-economic. Here, the footnote is not a repository for “information stacking” but a space of evidence confirming the allegorical order established in *Fetret*. This footnote strategy aligns with the goal of “guiding the reader / communicating ideas” (*tebliğ-i efkâr*) explicitly declared in the Preface; historical detail functions as a threshold determining the reading regime. Gérard Genette supports this with his striking observation: “*The original (auctorial) preface has as its chief function to ensure that the text is read properly*” (Genette, 1997, p. 197). This “monitory peritext” logic complements the declaration in *Fetret*'s Preface regarding the communication of ideas and the intent to guide the reader through “description and dissection” (*tasvir ve teşrih*). Consequently, the main text follows the staging of *Fetret*, while the footnotes render the historical evidence behind the scene visible as necessary. By having the novel stage political ethics and the historical work expand the “material” of that same ethics, the article consolidates Ali Kemâl's cross-generic output into a singular argument.

of inquiry as public responsibility; (ii) political reason mitigating violence through moderation and pragmatism; and (iii) a conception of legitimacy that refuses the suspension of law and judgment.

This study proposes reading *Fetret* as a simultaneous intervention into two debate areas. The first is the issue of didactic discourse, the thesis-driven narrative, and “public reason” in the Ottoman novel.

The pauses for historical discourse should be evaluated as staging techniques for thought rather than formal flaws. Characters function as speaking positions within the public sphere rather than psychologically deep entities; the text clashes generic languages while Selman Bey's insistence on inquiry grants this plurality a normative measure. The second area is the Second Constitutional Era's journalistic language and political rhetoric. *Fetret* does not debate constitutionalism in binary terms of affirmation or negation; it exposes how the word “liberty” rapidly transforms into a legitimacy-generating rhetorical machine that fuels radicalization and purge mentalities regardless of intent. Thus, the article's contribution is not to dismiss the text as weak for being didactic, but to render visible within the literature how this didactic claim constructs a socio-moral diagnostic/remedial system.

The intellectual ground of this approach is built around two fundamental questions of historiography: How does historical narrative produce meaning, and through which mechanisms does political language provide legitimacy? In *Fetret*, Selman Bey's revolutionary dialogues bring these questions into the novel form. The subject of debate is not merely “what the French Revolution really was”; a sharper issue exists: through which narrative patterns is the Revolution turned into something “beautiful,” and with what rhetoric is it used as a basis for today's political ambitions? Viewing the historical dialogues solely as information transfer misses the novel's primary tension. Selman Bey's anger toward the journalist is not just intellectual intolerance for faulty chronology; he perceives the risk of aestheticizing violence and transforms this into a matter of public ethics. Hayden White's fundamental thesis on historiography proves useful here.<sup>5</sup> White's move in *Metahistory* is to read historiography as a meaning-producing narrative structure beyond the transfer of raw facts; he defines the historical work as a “*verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse*” and implies that the historian emplots events to grant them exp-

<sup>5</sup> On the very first pages of *Metahistory*, Hayden White declares how he will read the historical work: “I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse ...” (White, 1973, p. 2). White thus conceives the historical text not as a “fact report” but as a linguistic structure that selects and organizes events, establishing its explanatory claim through this narrative order.

lanatory power through a moral tone (White, 1973, p. 2). This emphasis aligns with *Fetret*'s project. The novel does not present the past as “naked fact”; it confronts the reader with how events are emploted and to which moral tone they are bound. Thus, history ceases to be a repository of information and becomes material for political judgment. Selman Bey's insistence on the Danton–Robespierre distinction is vital for this reason: while a historical truth is sought through these figures, the ultimate goal is to scrutinize the boundaries of the Second Constitutional Era's “liberty” language. Quentin Skinner's warning completes this framework: understanding a text is not just identifying “what it says,” but capturing what act the author performed with those words and with what intention they addressed which recipient.<sup>6</sup> Read this way, the revolutionary figures in *Fetret* cease to be simple historical material; Selman Bey's insistence on the Robespierre/Danton distinction becomes a speech-act that tests and intervenes in the Second Constitutional Era's discourse of liberty. Moreover, Selman Bey's intervention is not limited to dialogue; the mention that his piece in *Selâm* “warned and tempered public opinion” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 93) confirms that the text itself names this intervention: correction and warning.

While the sources mentioned in the article are mostly relegated to footnotes to avoid overwhelming the main text, the framework must remain clear: *Fetret* treats the French Revolution not as a commentary on the past, but as a political and moral laboratory for Constitutional Turkey. Historical figures transform into “masks” behind which contemporary positions are debated. Selman Bey's polemic is less a didactic history lesson than a call for political hygiene.

In brief, this article argues that *Fetret*'s recurring pauses for French Revolution debate function as a political-ethical device: they diagnose how liberty rhetoric can aestheticize violence and turn analogy into a shortcut to legitimation, and they propose a remedy grounded in disciplined inquiry (tettebbü'), moderation, and legal judgment. Methodologically, it combines close reading with rhetorical/speech-act analysis, using *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* only in “footnote dose” to sharpen *Fetret*'s implied distinctions. In doing so, it reframes Selman Bey's intervention as an ethics of public reason and clarifies the novel's contribution to debates on constitutional-era political language.

<sup>6</sup> “to understand a text must be to understand both the intention to be understood, and the intention that this intention should be understood.” (Skinner, 1969, 49)

Skinner proposes a reading here that does not reduce the text to “what is said”: The historian's task is to reconstruct, within context, the communicative act (warning, legitimation, correction, objection, provocation, etc.) the text performs through its linguistic resources.

The article's plan is as follows: the first section addresses the poetics of the "pause" scenes and the novel's generic claims, reading Ali Kemâl's "*tarihimsi*" ("history-like") narrative idea alongside his formal choices. The second section analyzes the "*bedâ-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" polemic, discussing the potential for violence behind the "*liberty*" slogan together with Selman Bey's corrective strategy. The third section treats the Danton–Robespierre–Saint-Just triangle as an analogical apparatus, reinforcing Selman Bey's liberal, anti-radical, and pragmatic politics with limited supporting citations from *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*. The fourth section opens the issue of historical consciousness and intellectual responsibility through the Hayret Bey/Selman Bey contrast, demonstrating the ethical weight carried by "*tetebbu*" in the text. Ultimately, the following claim will be defended: what Ali Kemâl performs in *Fetret* is a conversation with history, but the recipient of this conversation is not the past, but the present.

### **Revolutionary Debates Suspending the Narrative: Strategy and Poetics**

This section interrogates the "stalling" of the narrative in *Fetret* as a deliberate socio-poetic strategy rather than a technical flaw. It first traces the authorial contract with the reader—the promise of engaging delivery and generic claims—before explaining this formal choice in terms of generating public reason and discursive conflict.

#### ***The Promise of "Engaging Delivery" and the Deliberate Suspension of Narration***

The most controversial aspect of *Fetret* lies in its "static" segments. Echoing a Tanzimat-era habit, the momentum of the plot is interrupted, transforming the scene into lengthy discursive blocks on history and politics. This choice is decisive not merely for novelistic technique but for the contract established with the reader. In the opening pages, Ali Kemâl explicitly declares his style and objective:

*"To describe and dissect the deepest and most difficult ideas and issues, yet to be easily understood by those of us who simply know how to read and write; making our literary language familiar not just to the elite but to the commonality is, in our view, the most appropriate style".* (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, pp. 5–6)

The two verbs—describe (*tasvir*) and dissect (*teşrih*)—are not accidental. Description suggests presenting a "tableau" to the reader, while dissection implies unfolding and displaying that tableau in its constituent parts. Thus, the text operates on the promise of making thought visible rat-

her than merely providing aesthetic pleasure through immersion in a story. Consequently, reading the revolutionary debates in *Fetret* as “encyclopedic additions” would be to neglect the novel’s own poetic declaration. Ali Kemâl’s justification is not a generic pedagogical slogan like “it is good to know history”; rather, it is a search for a narrative model capable of capturing the dispersing attention of a modern readership. The emphasis on “*familiarizing the public with our literary language*” reveals the intended publicity: the debate spills over from the narrow circle of elite salons into the broader reading public.

The work consists of the comparisons, interpretations, desires, plans, and ideals of a semi-Europeanized young man, educated abroad, based on his experiences in Istanbul over a mere two years. Since the primary objective is the communication of these ideas, the fictional structure remains weak, and the plot is nearly non-existent. The book’s segments strongly evoke the acts of a play. From this perspective, the “pause” scenes cease to be a weakness and transform into the site where the novel’s public function is established. As the dialogue lengthens, an insistence on “cultivating judgment” emerges, moving beyond the mere desire to “teach”. Furthermore, this suspension aligns with the text’s dramatic order. The strong sense of theatrical acts suggests the work is built on a logic of staging rather than narration. This theatricality arises not from a multitude of events but from the deployment of ideas onto the stage: characters are not just living individuals but speaking positions; ideas are circulated, tested, and weighed through them. *Fetret* can be read as a compendium of ideas that Ali Kemâl had been circulating through newspapers and books for years. However, where narration stops, the text does not fall silent; on the contrary, it begins its “actual work”.

This poetic choice becomes even clearer through historiography and discourse theory. Hayden White’s conceptualization of the historical text as a “*verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse*” allows us to read the historical dialogues in *Fetret* as a rhetorical web producing meaning. The didactic context becomes secondary. Similarly, Quentin Skinner’s proposal to treat the text as a “*speech-act*” applies here: Selman Bey’s revolutionary dialogues are less about narrating the past and more about intervening in the contemporary political linguistic field. Viewed together, the suspension of narration emerges not as a formal flaw but as a moment of socio-moral intervention.

### **From “Storytelling” to “History-like Product”: The Novel’s Generic Claim and French Examples**

Ali Kemâl does not leave the novel’s generic claim to chance; instead, he constructs it by aligning with French literary modernity. He argues that the “*style of story-writing*” has evolved in France, with some examples “*nearly departing from storytelling*” to become a “*history-like product of research and inquiry*” (tarihimsi bir mahsûl-i tedkîk u tetebbu). His reference to Vogüé’s *Emvât-ı Gûyâ* as “*a page from the subsequent history of France*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 5) indicates a deliberate erosion of the line between “*story*” and “*chronicle*”. Turning to Anatole France, he speaks more openly: “*beauty is not in the event*”; meaning resides “*in the idea*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 5); and the style must be smooth enough to carry that idea. Here, it is declared upfront that the novel’s center is the idea, not the event. This generic claim makes it impossible to view the revolutionary debates in *Fetret* as “*non-novelistic fragments*”. The text begins by contesting what a novel should be. Ali Kemâl does not establish a hierarchy between “*benefiting from reading*” and “*taking pleasure*”; he places both on the same page. (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 3)<sup>7</sup> This move is a modernist gesture in the Ottoman literary market, reconciling “*utility*” with “*literature*”. Thus, the discursive blocks do not burden the novel’s art; rather, they are the aesthetic form of the novel’s claim to utility.

It is useful here to briefly frame the genre. In the European tradition, the “*novel with a thesis*” (*roman à thèse*) or didactic novel has often been viewed as aesthetically questionable. However, modern criticism shows that taking the genre’s own rhetoric and its contract with the reader seriously is more productive. Susan Rubin Suleiman’s discussions on the *roman à thèse* demonstrate that a didactic claim does not automatically result in “*bad literature*”; instead, it establishes a type of aesthetic economy through specific formal strategies—such as the teaching narrator, opposing

<sup>7</sup> “... I do not suppose that those who read fiction solely for amusement, or even to find utility through diversion, will find delight in this work; however, I am equally convinced that those who seek intellectual vitality in thought will not be dissatisfied with this composition. My primary aim is to serve this latter segment of our public. Driven by this conviction, I felt no inclination to amplify the narrative elements, events, or tragedies of *Fetret*, nor to render its contents more alluring and sensational. Conversely, I could not bring myself to diminish the sections approaching truth and science. While such adjustments would have lightened this humble product, making it easier and more pleasurable to read, my concern to provoke reflection rather than offer entertainment has shielded me from such compromises.” (Ali Kemâl, 1330, pp. 3–4)

positions deployed on stage, and the use of exemplum.<sup>8</sup> *Fetret* adapts this economy to the heated language of the Ottoman public sphere by clashing the tones of journalistic writing, coffeehouse rhetoric, salon conversation, and history lessons within the same text.

This clash becomes even clearer when viewed through Bakhtin's theory of the novel. Bakhtin's conception of the "novel" as a polyphonic discursive field explains the function of characters in *Fetret* as "speaking positions". The novel is not a monologue governed by a single authoritative language; different social voices and worldviews resonate on the same stage. However, this plurality does not assume equivalence between voices: Selman Bey's insistence on inquiry (tettebbu) and distillation establishes the normative threshold that determines which language the reader should trust. The revolutionary dialogues in *Fetret* are moments where this polyphony intensifies: on one side is the journalistic language generating slogans like "*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*"; on the other is Selman Bey's language demanding investigation and refinement. These two voices do not merely debate; they test the reader's trust. What Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia" manifests here: while Selman Bey's voice attempts to pull thought toward "grounding" and "distillation" from within the plural languages, the slogan language produces a centralizing allure that reduces that same plurality to a single emotion.<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin's explicit inclusion of "newspaper and journalistic genres" among examples of linguistic stratification shows

<sup>8</sup> The *roman à thèse* constitutes a "system of dominant traits"; its hallmark is a "*manifest intention to communicate an unambiguous, virtually exhortative message.*" Rather than defining the genre as a rigid template, Suleiman characterizes it as a contract operating around specific dominant features. Consequently, the reader perceives the text's insistence on constructing a "message" from the outset; the narrative order, the staging of opposing positions, and the dominance of the didactic voice become integral parts of this contract (Suleiman, 1993, p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> "*all languages of heteroglossia . . . are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.*" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291–293). In the same passage, Bakhtin emphasizes that these "languages" clash and interrelate within the novel, where the novelist enlists them to orchestrate themes and indirectly convey intentions. Defining each language within heteroglossia as a "*specific point of view on the world,*" he notes that the novel mobilizes this plurality for the "orchestration of [its] themes." Within this framework, the journalistic language in *Fetret* represents a centripetal impulse that erases distinctions and summons the reader to a singular emotional trajectory. Conversely, Selman Bey's discourse operates within the heteroglot field through a demand for "differentiation/grounding": it resists collapsing distinct figures, makes the revolution's internal conflicts visible, and thereby compels the reader toward a "linguistic choice."

that the journalistic rhetoric in *Fetret* is not a random stylistic choice: the text deploys the generic languages of the public sphere (journalism, oratory, salon talk) onto the stage, positioning the reader within the very clash of these languages.<sup>10</sup>

### **The “Act” Structure and the Staging of Thought: Dissection, Diagnosis, Public Reason**

Where narration halts, the text effectively establishes a “dissection table”. The astonishment caused by a newspaper segment is the clearest example: starting with crude analogies like “*the Bastille was also taken in July,*” the piece groups Marat, Robespierre, and Danton along the same line, sanctifying them as the “wonder of the great revolution” (*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*). (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 34) Selman Bey’s response, while inviting the reader into history, simultaneously educates the reader’s political intuition: the writer is “*not at all cognizant of the facts*”; this ignorance is the result of a “*lack of inquiry*” (*fikdân-ı tettebbu*); and the more severe question follows: “*what percentage of us is still free of such stains?*”. (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35) In this sentence, the diagnosis does not target a single individual; it transforms into a critique of public culture. The novel’s “pause” occurs exactly here—where the reader feels addressed.

This scene is the knot where poetics binds to political function. Selman Bey’s objection is not just about “correct information”; it is a moral

<sup>10</sup> “*oratorical, publicistic, newspaper and journalistic genres.*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 289). Habermas provides direct grounding for the idea of clashing these generic languages of the public sphere—such as journalistic style, oratory, and salon talk—on the same stage: “*However much the Tischgesellschaften, salons, and coffee houses may have differed in the size and composition of their publics, the style of their proceedings, the climate of their debates, and their topical orientations, they all organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing*” (Habermas, 1989, p. 36); see especially (Habermas, 1989, “The Public Sphere in the World of Letters in Relation to the Public Sphere in the Political Realm,” pp. 51–56). Here, the public sphere is constructed through the ongoing discursive practices of different “regimes of speaking.” Benedict Anderson captures this condition with striking clarity: “*The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing... simultaneously, and precisely for that reason, makes possible a remarkable mass ritual: the almost simultaneous consumption of the newspaper as fiction. We know that this morning or evening edition will be consumed on an incredible scale today and not some other day, moreover between these specific hours... These mass rituals—Hegel noted that newspapers serve as modern man’s substitute for morning prayers—have a paradoxical significance*” (Anderson, 1995, pp. 49–50). Anderson’s insight reinforces the emphasis on “generic languages of the public sphere / journalistic style” by anchoring it in his fundamental thesis regarding the newspaper’s capacity to situate the reader within a simultaneous sense of publicity. Collectively, these studies frame the co-circulation of journalistic language and salon conversation in *Fetret* as a mechanism where discursive competition “produces politics.”

inquiry into how the romantic glorification of revolution relates to violence. The word “Bedîa” (wonder/beauty) evokes admiration; Selman Bey strips away this claim to beauty: uniting Robespierre and Danton “*in thought, spirit, and aim*” renders the revolution’s internal conflicts invisible, thereby making the logic of violence invisible as well. (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 34) This invisibility is precisely the dark potential of the Second Constitutional Era’s “liberty” discourse: the slogan speaks, judgment falls silent. The novel seeks to break this silence. The promise of “*engaging delivery*” thus assumes the claim of keeping public reason alive, far beyond a simple tactic for gaining readers. Here, the “act” structure (perde düzeni) gains new meaning. In a play, the curtain calls the audience to a scene; something happens, the audience witnesses it, and the curtain closes. In *Fetret*, the curtain opens not over an event, but over a debate; the reader, in the position of the audience, watches a conflict of ideas. Ali Kemâl’s novel stages the social and political issues of an era as “matters to be debated,” deliberately making limited use of narrative possibilities to do so.

The novel’s distance from narration is the price paid for its proximity to thought; yet this price is paid for the text’s intended function of “communicating ideas” (tebliğ-i efkâr). Another result of this strategy is that history, while referring to the “past,” serves as a linguistic repository organizing the present. Ricoeur’s tension between “*representation*” (représentance/standing-for) and “*reconstruction*” provides a strong background for understanding why the historical dialogues in *Fetret* carry energy directed toward the present.<sup>11</sup> In this framework, “history” is not merely a record of what is finished; it is an act of representation established along the axis of testimony-archive-writing, contracting with the reader through a certain promise of truth.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Ricoeur’s positioning of memory as the primary source of the “pastness” mark ties Selman Bey’s command to

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, Part II: “History, Epistemology,” particularly the discussion of the historiographical operation: the stages of the historical process are conceived as “methodological moments, interwoven with one another” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 137). This assertion underscores that history is not a “linear” transmission, but a reconstructive activity consisting of intertwined methodological maneuvers.

<sup>12</sup> In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), Part II: “History, Epistemology,” Ricoeur conceptualizes the regime of representation through the notion of “standing for” (*représentance*). Historical representation is defined by this intentionality, which renders historical knowledge the “learned heir” of memory (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 137). Furthermore, he emphasizes that representation is ultimately established on the “scriptural” level. Within this framework, the contract between the historical text and the reader is predicated on the promise to engage with persons and events that “actually existed.”

“know correctly/distill” to an ethical obligation: the past can only govern the present through the continuity of this meticulous negotiation between memory and history.<sup>13</sup>

Behind the “staging” of historical dialogues in *Fetret* lies a very concrete epistemic intuition: history is made visible not as a theme, but as an active method. The claim to approach a “*history-like product of research and inquiry*” explains why the long revolutionary blocks are considered legitimate; what the reader encounters is not the flow of the plot, but the “*description and dissection*” of thought. Ricoeur’s definition of historical knowledge through three “phases” (documentary/evidence, explanation-understanding, representation/literary-scriptural presentation) is enlightening here; Ali Kemâl effectively dramatizes these phases within the novel. Journalistic language, like “*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*,” produces words that translate historical events into public excitement but loosen the regime of evidence. Selman Bey’s objection begins with the diagnosis of “*lack of inquiry*,” thus first demanding documentary evidence. Moreover, the publication of Selman Bey’s response in a newspaper the next day enters the record as a “writing-act” within the text: the debate does not remain at the level of ideas but transforms into “writing” in the public sphere; Ricoeur’s idea that “*history is writing from beginning to end*” sits exactly at this threshold.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the revolutionary dialogues in *Fetret* become less a lesson about the past and more a scriptural laboratory organizing the language of today through the past. The reader is forced to test, scene by scene, which words take evidence seriously and which produce excitement and defer distillation. The note that Selman Bey’s published piece “*warned and tempered public opinion*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 93) brings Ricoeur’s idea—that historical representation is ultimately established in “writing”—into *Fetret*. Here, history does not end with speech on stage; it transitions into writing to exert its influence in the public sphere.

<sup>13</sup> At the conclusion of the discussion in Part I of *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), Ricoeur sharpens the privilege of memory in marking “pastness” by stating: “*we have nothing better than memory*” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 21). This emphasis demonstrates that the contrast between the “misinformed Hayret Bey” and the “distilling Selman Bey” in *Fetret* can be read as an ethical tension alongside its epistemic dimension: the value of discourse concerning the past is established upon the delicate balance between acknowledging the unreliability of memory and avoiding the state of being memory-less.

<sup>14</sup> In the section “History, Epistemology,” Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the “phases” of the historiographical operation and underscores “scripturality.” Ricoeur’s dictum that “*History is writing from one end to another*” and “*the confrontation of the archive with history as the ‘first writing’*” are conveyed as follows: “*archives constitute the first writing ... ‘scripturality’*” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 138) and “*History is ‘through and through writing’*” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 228).

Koselleck's attention to the tension between the "*horizon of experience*" and the "*horizon of expectation*" in modernity helps explain how the promise of liberty in the Second Constitutional Era could rapidly inflate "expectation" and suppress "experience". *Fetret* writes this tension into the novel's form: when the narrative accelerates, political excitement also accelerates; when the debate lengthens, the tempo drops, the reader's mind is called to the stage, and distillation and judgment replace the magic of the slogan.<sup>15</sup>

The primary claim of this section converges at this point: the revolutionary debates in *Fetret* exist not to stop the novel from being a novel, but to change the novel's function. By reducing the "event" and increasing the "idea," the text develops a slowing-down technique against the easily ignited public language of the Second Constitutional Era. This slowing is not passive waiting; it is an active intervention operating through dissection and diagnosis. Consequently, the suspension of the narrative is not the moment the text falls silent, but the place where it speaks at its loudest.

### **The "*Bedâ-i İhtilâl-i Kebîr*" Polemic: Diagnosing Liberty Rhetoric**

This section investigates how the "liberty/constitutionalism" slogan evolved into a legitimacy shortcut and how this shortcut obscured potential violence. It deconstructs the romanticization forged by the July analogy and interprets Selman Bey's correction as a matter of public ignorance and intellectual responsibility.

### ***The July Analogy: Why Pairing the Bastille with the Kânûn-ı Esâsî is Problematic***

Reading the "*bedâ-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" polemic in *Fetret* as a mere detail would be an insufficient interpretation; this segment is a center where the novel's socio-moral pulse beats. Ali Kemâl does not frame the debate as a casual coffeehouse spat; the scene opens with the language of the contemporary press, drawing the reader into the question of how legitimacy is manufactured. A "politically provocative segment" (*bend-i müheyyic-i siyasi*) published by "one of the daily newspapers" converts a calendrical coincidence into evidence to bind the Ottoman revolution to the French Revolution: "*The Bastille was taken in July, and we received our consti-*

<sup>15</sup> In the chapter "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories" of his renowned work, Reinhart Koselleck formulates how these two categories produce historical time as follows: "*it is the tension between experience and expectation ... generates historical time*" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 284).

*tution in July*".<sup>16</sup> This sentence, appearing as a simple comparison, carries the essence of the malfunction the novel diagnoses: history ceases to be an analytical field of inquiry and becomes a decorative backdrop feeding the slogan.

The pairing is problematic on two levels. The first concerns the "analogy technique" itself: the resemblance is derived from superficial synchronicity (July) rather than structural relationships. The second level is more severe: such a comparison is not just "incorrect" but politically "provocative". By invoking the Bastille, the journalist summons the mythical origin of the revolution; he then presents Marat, Robespierre, and Danton hand-in-hand as the heroes who produced the "*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" (the wonder of the great revolution), concluding with the cry: "*Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!*". *Fetret* scrutinizes this act of binding: the slogan compresses historical complexity, elevating emotion as it does so, and converts that heightened emotion into "constitutionalist" capital. This is not a rhetoric that devalues liberty; on the contrary, it is a public linguistic regime that converts liberty into "high energy" while leaving it vulnerable to the possibility of violence.<sup>17</sup>

Here, the history-politics relationship constructed by the novel aligns with the concept of "*expectation*" in modern historical thought. The calendrical analogy fails to build a genuine "*horizon of experience*" to link the past to the present; instead, it inflates the "horizon of expectation": invoking the Bastille is a shortcut guaranteeing the feeling that "the

<sup>16</sup> "Following comparisons such as 'The Bastille was taken in July, and we received our constitution in July,' [the article] concluded: 'Just as the Marats, Robespierres, and Dantons joined hands to bring forth that wonder of the great revolution (*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*), our warriors of liberty must likewise act in unison to elevate the Ottoman revolution to that same exalted height. Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!'" (Ali Kemâl, 1329, p. 34)

<sup>17</sup> In the same chapter, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," Koselleck defines the metaphor of the "*horizon*" precisely through the invisibility of the future: "The horizon is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 283). Consequently, even if expectation is constructed as an extension of experience, it transcends it to produce a new temporal regime; Koselleck encapsulates this with the formula: "it is the tension between experience and expectation ... generates historical time" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 284). Within this framework, the July analogy functions as an acceleration technique that inflates the horizon of expectation without anchoring it in a space of experience; the discourse of "liberty" thus becomes the vehicle for this temporal acceleration.

revolution has begun here, too”.<sup>18</sup> Koselleck’s framework regarding the widening gap between experience and expectation in modernity clarifies why this shortcut is both alluring and dangerous: as expectation grows, political reality is perceived through impatience and intolerance; liberty ceases to be a matter of institutions and procedures and becomes a trance demanded “right now”. Ali Kemâl’s subtlety emerges in that the objection to the journalist is not an objection to the Constitution itself. The target is the glorification of the constitutional ideal through “revolutionary romanticism”. When the revolution is moved into the category of beauty, “blood” becomes merely an aesthetic detail. The word “*Bedîa*” itself carries a critical symptom. Conversely, the framework Ali Kemâl establishes at the outset of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* defines the revolution as an “ocean” (*umman*) that simultaneously evokes “wonder” and “terror”.<sup>19</sup> In *Fetret*, the newspaper sentence reduces this dual-valued experience to a single value: “wonder” (*bedîa*). Thus, the novel’s diagnosis crystallizes: the problem is not discussing the revolution, but converting it into “fuel for the slogan”.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Selman Bey’s Correction: From “Lack of Inquiry” to Intellectual Responsibility***

If the scene where comparisons like “*the Bastille was taken in July...*” are expressed in a daily newspaper is read only as “journalistic criticism,” *Fetret*’s primary move is missed. The newspaper piece is the spark that

<sup>18</sup> While acknowledging the allure of the revolution at the level of principle, Ali Kemâl renders the bloody character of its practical application particularly visible: “*Thus, through a host of means—joyous and sorrowful, acceptable and objectionable, even catastrophic and rejected—this Great Revolution (inkilâb-ı kebîr) attempted to, and did, apply these principles first in France. The beginnings of this application were cruel, they were bloody; often, they scorched and devastated all in their path unjustly and wrongfully.*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 4)

The emphasis on “cruel/bloody” (*gaddarâne/hûnîn*) in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* establishes the normative threshold that explains the symptomatic nature of the word “wonder” (*bedîa*) in *Fetret*.

<sup>19</sup> Ali Kemâl establishes the revolution as an ambivalent experience in the very first paragraph: “*The Great French Revolution is an ocean that fills one with both wonder and terror. Though it occasionally gladdens the mind, at other times it plunges it into despair; yet it invariably induces a state of agitation.*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 3)

<sup>20</sup> For a comparative reading of political language, Roger Chartier’s work—specifically the chapters “The Public Sphere and Public Opinion” (Chartier, 1991, pp. 20–38) and “A New Political Culture” (Chartier, 1991, pp. 136–169)—provides illuminating insights into public representation, reading regimes, and the production of revolutionary meaning.

This framework facilitates the conceptualization of why the “July analogy” in *Fetret* functions not as “historical evidence,” but rather as “legitimizing rhetoric.”

ignites the debate, but Selman Bey's intervention is the novel's normative compass. Selman Bey's language differs formally from his opponent's: the journalist speaks with a "high" style of excitement; Selman Bey dissects, differentiates, and displaces names. By stating that presenting "*Marat, Robespierre, and Danton as united when they were opposites in thought, soul, and aim*" is an error, he pulls the debate from the level of the slogan to the level of intellectual labor.<sup>21</sup> Here, the focus of criticism moves beyond "false information," as Selman Bey considers the political consequences of the error.

Selman Bey's sentences target two types of errors simultaneously. The first is a technical error: grouping revolutionary actors together, rendering internal conflicts invisible, and thus erasing the historical mechanics of violence. Speaking with a concrete example—such as "*not knowing that Robespierre purged Danton out of hatred and envy*" (*hıkd u hased*)—saves the critique from being an abstract moral sermon; it shows that knowing history is a matter of "structure," not just "detail". The second error is normative: this technical mistake produces irresponsible political energy in the public sphere. Selman Bey's judgment that it is "*the work of a very deep lack of inquiry*" (*fıkdân-ı tetebbu'*) brands ignorance as both a simple deficiency and a politically active fault. The novel's true severity appears in the question Selman Bey expands beyond the individual journalist to the public sphere: "*I wonder what percentage of us is still free of such stains?*". This question establishes the theme of "intellectual responsibility" in *Fetret* as a piercing reckoning rather than a didactic program. The target is no longer "that journalist"; the expanded target is "us"—the reader, the writer, the youth, and the press. The word "free" (*masûnuz*) is particularly important, as the issue is not just information but *stain*—the possibility of a political and moral blemish. Ali Kemâl removes the confrontation with history from the binary of "blessing the past" or "cursing the past"; history becomes a trial of purification for public reason.

<sup>21</sup> Selman Bey intervenes to correct the journalist's error regarding the French Revolution with the following words:

*"The author of the article is by no means cognizant of the facts concerning the history of the Great Revolution; for, first of all, mentioning only these three figures out of all the men of the revolution, then portraying beings who were so diametrically opposed in thought, spirit, and aspiration as being perfectly united—and especially failing to know that Robespierre sent Danton to the political scaffold driven by malice and envy, and moreover, not fully perceiving how that terrible calamity itself met its ruin—finally judging that these men brought about a vague outcome defined as the 'wonder of the great revolution,' is all the result of a lack of inquiry, indeed, a very profound lack of inquiry. Yet, I wonder, what percentage of us are still free from such blemishes?"* (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35)

*Ricâl-i İhtilâl* serves as a repository showing the background of this trial. In the preface of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, while Ali Kemâl labels the revolution as “*passionate phases*” (*müteheyyc safahat*), he accepts that this passion is a force that triggers thought itself; however, he immediately constructs an argument bound to two principles (*legal equality and national sovereignty*) and explicitly states that the “initial applications” could be “cruel” (*gaddarâne*) and “bloody” (*hûnîn*).

This framework demonstrates that Selman Bey’s actions in *Fetret* are not about “vilifying the revolution,” but are an ethical-epistemic stance dictating how the revolution should be read. Later in the same preface, the rationale for *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*’s authorship becomes clearer: against those who worry about the “*impact of revolutionary events on our public opinion*,” he declares this anxiety “*futile*”.<sup>22</sup> This subtle distinction illuminates *Fetret*’s polemical strategy: the problem is not that the revolution “affects” Ottoman public opinion; the problem is that this effect occurs through the slogan and romanticization—that is, through a “lack of *inquiry*”.

At this point, the circulation of the word “liberty” in *Fetret* can be linked to the emphasis on political language in modern revolutionary literature. Hunt’s approach showing that revolutionary politics is built through symbols and words as much as institutions;<sup>23</sup> Ozouf’s work reading the revolution as a “*system of public representation*” ; and Furet’s debates on the power of revolutionary discourse to manufacture legitimacy are useful for explaining why the newspaper sentence in *Fetret* is so “functional.”<sup>24</sup> However, Ali Kemâl’s novel should not be read as a text “applying” results of this literature to the Ottoman context; it is more appropriate to view the novel’s own critique of political language as an “internal debate” within the contemporary press environment. Selman Bey’s polemic speaks from

<sup>22</sup> “...some among us appear somewhat apprehensive regarding the manner in which these revolutionary events influence our public opinion. We find such apprehension to be futile. For if those events take root in the mind and thought of a people in their true reality, they shall lead not to evil, but to good.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, pp. 9–10)

<sup>23</sup> Lynn Hunt provides a crucial perspective in Part I, “The Poetics of Power,” of her work: “*Political symbols and rituals were not metaphors of power; they were the means and ends of power itself*” (Hunt, 1984, p. 54). At the level of the footnote, this emphasis elucidates why slogans in *Fetret* like “Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!” functioned so effectively; they were not merely speech acts but political practices that organized public fervor.

<sup>24</sup> “In his seminal work interpreting the French Revolution, specifically in the chapter “The French Revolution is over,” François Furet summarizes the revolution’s operation as an “*endless*” politico-linguistic legacy with his famous remark: “*the Revolution has a birth but no end*” (Furet, 1981, p. 3).”

within the same public sphere rather than with academic distance. This interiority sharpens the diagnosis: the effect of the slogan operates independently of the intent of those who produce it.

### ***Principle–Practice Distinction: Politics of Moderation Against “Wonder” Rhetoric***

The function of the “*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*” polemic in *Fetret* is not merely to expose a false analogy. The novel links the polemic to a proposed remedy. At the core of this remedy lies the “principle–practice distinction”. The newspaper piece paints the revolution in a single moral tone: beauty. Selman Bey, however, differentiates the revolution: he reminds us how things attractive at the level of principle can transform into a mechanism of violence at the level of practice; this reminder is not made to fix the constitutional ideal in place, but to protect it from the language of violence.

In *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, this distinction is established with a clear economy of sentences: the impact of the revolution is summarized in two principles—“*legal equality*” and “*national sovereignty*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 3)<sup>25</sup>—but their initial application in France was “cruel” and “bloody”.<sup>26</sup> With this sentence, Ali Kemâl keeps the revolution between two extremes: neither entirely condemned nor entirely glorified. This dual perspective is the primary antidote to the word “*bedîa*” (wonder) in *Fetret*. “*Bedîa*” is a closure; it ends the debate, gives the verdict, and comforts the reader. The principle–practice distinction, conversely, causes discomfort and forces the reader into judgment rather than a final verdict.

From within *Fetret*, one can see how this judgment is linked to a conception of politics. The text accepts the revolution as a “tremendous surge and clamor” (*müthiş bir cûş u hurûş*) but then speaks of the “gradual disciplining” (*tehzib*) of the revolution and its entry into a “phase of evolution”. This language is not a call for “imitating the revolution”; rather, it is the idea of disciplining the raw energy of the revolutionary experience. The concept of “*tehzib*” carries two meanings here: (i) the restraining

<sup>25</sup> To academically and rhetorically solidify the article’s “principle–practice distinction / two precepts” axis and to validate the argument via an “external voice,” Kunalalp observes: “His approach is that of a liberal bourgeois historian: he reduces the effects of the Revolution to two precepts—equality of rights and national sovereignty.” (Kunalalp, 1991, p. 148)

<sup>26</sup> Kunalalp describes Ali Kemâl’s reading of the revolution as the “*approach of a liberal bourgeois historian*” and notes that he anchors the effects of the revolution in two precepts: “His approach is that of a liberal bourgeois historian: he reduces the effects of the Revolution to two precepts—equality of rights and national sovereignty” (Kunalalp, 1991, p. 148). (See also footnote 17.)

of violence, and (ii) the education of political thought. *Fetret*'s remedy employs both: liberty can only be secured through institutions and the cultivation of public reason; otherwise, liberty may be crushed under the excess of its own language.

What this proposed remedy aimed for in the context of the Second Constitutional Era must be considered by remembering the grounds of political competition at the time. The post-1908 public sphere was an environment of debate expanding through the press but hardening just as rapidly. The word "liberty," while expressing a legitimate demand against autocracy, could easily be instrumentalized in a discourse that demonized the opponent. Feroz Ahmad's analysis of the polarization between the Committee of Union and Progress and the opposition, and the press producing a "camp language" to carry this polarization, suggests that the "slogan critique" in *Fetret* is not an abstract ethical call but a concrete political warning.<sup>27</sup> Ali Kemâl gives this warning through the "French Revolution" mask; the function of the mask is to gain distance for the reader without sinking directly into contemporary polemics. Moreover, this "mask" does not remain an abstract comparison in the novel; the polemic opens from a newspaper segment, Selman Bey's response is carried to the newspaper columns, and the text labels this an intervention that "*warned and tempered public opinion*". (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 93) Thus, the French Revolution becomes a staging technique for correcting public discourse without directly entering the immediate fray.

At this exact point, "*bedîa*" rhetoric works as a tool that accelerates the speed of politics. The slogan does not seek "truth"; it gathers sides. The press language that romanticizes the revolution is often such a gathering technology. It brings the crowd to "excitement" (*teheyyüc*) and then sanctifies that excitement with a legitimizing word: liberty. The framework *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* draws around Danton and Marat also shows how this technology carries a tendency to "produce scapegoats" and open space for "easy violence". For example, Marat's line in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* that "*judging the enemies of the nation at such length is a futile burden; one should just*

<sup>27</sup> In the chapter "Resurgence of the CUP" of his famous work, Feroz Ahmad summarizes the common denominator of the Liberal Union's composition by stating that "they were all bitterly opposed to the CUP" (Ahmad, 1969, pp. 99–100). In the chapter "The Counter-Revolution of 1909" of the same work, he also records that the opposition press (e.g., Kâmil Paşa's Port Said theme) circulated events for political purposes (Ahmad, 1969, pp. 32–33). While exemplifying the aggressive language used by the pro-CUP press targeting Kâmil Paşa, Ahmad specifically emphasizes the accusation of "*slackness and inefficiency*." Thus, he substantiates how the discourse of "liberty" could rapidly harden within a competitive repertoire of accusations following 1908.

*kill them*" exemplifies how excitement can slide into a logic of "execution without judgment". (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 134) This example clarifies why the heroic triad established in the newspaper piece in *Fetret* drew objection: invoking Marat as a founding hero of the "*bedîa*" means packaging the legitimacy of violence as well.<sup>28</sup>

*Fetret's* remedial sentence emerges right here: to speak with history is to produce a measure for today. This measure rescues the word "liberty" from the hands of a sterile romanticism and makes it a subject of political ethics. Selman Bey's objections carry a liberal-pragmatic political intuition found throughout the novel. Politics should proceed through knowledge and judgment, not the tyranny of emotion; otherwise, the best principle becomes the excuse for the worst practice. Therefore, at the end of the polemic, the reader does not only see the journalist's error; they also face their own "way of reading". The reader who applauds the "*bedîa*" must eventually face the question: "*are we free?*". How inclined are we to ignore the possibility of violence within an aesthetic discourse?.

To summarize the section's general argument: the "*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" scene is the first major laboratory of *Fetret's* diagnostic and remedial scheme. The diagnosis is the slogan's seizure of history: the Bastille–Constitution analogy reduces revolutionary experience to a calendar; heroicization makes revolutionary violence invisible; the cry of "*Long live liberty!*" substitutes trance for judgment. The remedy is the historical distillation and principle–practice distinction represented by Selman Bey: the revolution is an "*ocean*"—both wonder and terror; it is possible to draw lessons for political reason from it, but only through disciplined inquiry (*tetebbu*) and measure.

### **Historical Analogy: Contemporary Political Positions through Danton, Robespierre, and Saint-Just**

Reading Selman Bey's anger in the "*bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" polemic solely as a matter of "historical knowledge" would be reductive. Selman Bey's primary move is not merely to place revolutionary actors into an encyclopedic "who's who" list, but to transform the tension between them

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Tackett focuses particularly on the crisis of legitimacy, the normalization of the "extraordinary," and the expansion of extrajudicial-administrative measures. While demonstrating how the legitimacy crisis following the King's flight normalized "extraordinary" measures at the local level, Tackett emphasizes the following concrete outcome: "... the authorities, fearful of real plots or succumbing to popular pressures, gave orders to search or arrest without trial whole categories of persons." (Tackett, 2003, p. 174.) This literature corroborates, through historical patterns, the risk in *Fetret* of the rhetoric of "wonder" (*bedîa*) masking violence.

into a laboratory of political language. For him, the homogenization in the newspaper piece (“Marat, Robespierre, and Danton hand-in-hand...”) is not a simple error. It is a form of political hypnosis—a romanticization that dissolves distinct characters and divergent regimes of violence into a single image of “revolutionary beauty,” thereby blinding the contemporary public reason to the reality of violence. Indeed, Selman Bey’s correction opposes this “unity”; however, in the same sentence, he sets the direction of the debate by invoking the Robespierre–Danton relationship through the logic of “purge.” The objective is to recognize the lethal mechanism of competition operating within the revolution. This scene in *Fetret* opens a space for debating contemporary questions such as “tolerance for opposition,” the “fragility of moderation,” and the “facile justifications for extra-legal measures” rather than merely delivering a history lesson. Thus, Danton, Robespierre, and Saint-Just transcend the boundaries of French historical figures to become the landmarks of the liberal, anti-radical stance Ali Kemâl occupied within the Second Constitutional public sphere.

This section proposes that Ali Kemâl does not employ “historical analogy” in *Fetret* as a mere game of resemblance, but as a technique for legitimizing political positions. Yet, the novel’s allegorical order operates not by classifying individual figures as “good” or “bad,” but by diagnosing their mutually destructive logics. Selman Bey’s language, while demanding “*tetebbu*” and distillation, forces the reader to confront the socio-moral ground of contemporary political conflict: At what threshold is liberty a “legitimate excitement,” and beyond which point does it transform into a trance hostile to law and pluralism? The novel’s answer lies within the characters’ readings of history. Danton represents the possibility of moderation and the politics of “*tavassut*” (centrist mediation); Robespierre illustrates how the suspicion-purge chain turns a regime against its own promises; and Saint-Just exemplifies how the courage to suspend the law is manufactured through the language of “virtue.”

### ***Danton: The “Moderate Reformer” and the Possibility of Liberal Identification***

In Selman Bey’s readings of the revolution, Danton occupies a distinct place; Georges Jacques Danton represents an intermediate logic within the “liberty–violence” tension established in *Fetret*. While the journalist’s text collapses revolutionary actors into a single heroic collage, Selman Bey deconstructs this collage, reading names appearing on the same stage as opposites “*in thought, spirit, and aim.*” His emphasis on Robespierre sending Danton to the “*political arena*” (execution) driven by “*hatred and envy*” points to a politico-moral map positioning Danton against Robespierre (Ali

Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35). This map is the novelistic projection of the struggle between “radicalism” and “moderation” within the constitutional public sphere. In *Fetret*, Danton’s name does not dissolve into a revolutionary glorification; instead, it transforms into a contemporary fate through the fragility of the “*purged moderate*.” Consequently, moderation is simultaneously accused of “leaving the revolution half-finished” and becomes one of the first victims of the revolution’s machinery of violence.

At this point, the construction of “Danton” in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* clarifies the background of the allegory in *Fetret*. Ali Kemâl explicitly positions Danton as a “moderate reformer” (*muslih-i mutavassıt*);<sup>29</sup> this definition implies that Danton established a political “*tavassıt*” that functioned as a “blood-reduction” mechanism during the revolution. The language of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* frames moderation not as “passivity,” but as a technique of governance attempting to manage both the crowd and the institution during crises. While underlining Danton’s idea of “*moving with the public to manage it*,” this principle is presented as a prerequisite for making public energy “manageable” under revolutionary conditions.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Danton becomes more than a character portrait; he functions as a political norm—a middle ground that does not entirely exclude popular mobilization but refuses to abandon it to lawless excess.

The significance of this middle ground in the context of *Fetret* converges with Ali Kemâl’s way of legitimizing his own liberal-opposition stance. In the Second Constitutional Era, liberal criticism often found itself caught between two fires: the necessity to defend constitutional principles against a potential return to autocracy, and the need to warn against the institutionalizing violence of radical excitement tied to “revolutionary romanticism.” By extracting a language from history that says “constitutionalism yes, purge politics no,” Danton serves as a historical “genealogy” for this dual necessity. Selman Bey’s objection in *Fetret* was directed not at the principle of the Constitution, but at the aestheticization of liberty—reducing violence to an aesthetic detail. The Danton analogy transforms

<sup>29</sup> “In short, essentially the Jacobins were in favor of the monarchy, whereas the Cordeliers were supporters of the republic; Danton, as was his custom, was a moderate mediator between the two.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 82)

<sup>30</sup> “It is probable that Danton displayed an excessive inclination toward public opinion and followed the desires of the people all too closely in matters of government. However, one must accept this principle: ‘In a period of revolution, moving with the masses and through that very medium in order to govern the public is the sole means to preserve sovereignty (*kuvvâniyyet*).’ Those factions that distance themselves from the people during such times are condemned to a disastrous end; yet, in their downfall, they annihilate the nation as well.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 109)

this objection into a character logic through a vision of moderation that prevents political language from overstepping legal bounds in the name of “virtue” or “salvation.”

Danton’s tragic end dramatizes this vision. In *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, descriptions of Danton as one who “could not commit cruelty; but could only be a reformer or a victim” demonstrate the moderate figure’s vulnerability before the “crime-producing” mechanism.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, for a regime of violence to sustain itself, it must eventually produce an “internal enemy”; at this point, moderation is converted into an object of “suspicion.” The Robespierre–Saint-Just line, by transforming the assembly into a shrinking ring of power through “purges,” presents Danton’s fate as both an individual misfortune and the necessary result of a political logic. Once the logic of purge is established, those who “walked together yesterday” can easily be erased from the stage today with the label of “traitor.”

This reading prevents *Fetret* from being reduced to a text merely narrating the French Revolution. Rather than glorifying Danton as a historical hero, Ali Kemâl’s text draws a political ethical boundary through him, questioning whether revolutionary energy can be managed with “common sense.” The argument is that it is possible, but the price is high; because in the eyes of radical politics, moderation is a defect that “delays” or “dilutes.” The political equivalent of this price within the novel is clearly the fragility of the liberal opposition amidst the hardening competition of the Second Constitutional Era. Deploying Danton as a “moderate reformer” is Ali Kemâl’s way of grounding his own political reason through a historical example; it simultaneously confronts the reader with a bitter truth: moderation does not survive on good intentions alone; when not protected by institution and law, it is the first thing to be crushed.

### ***Robespierre: The Logic of Purge and the Motif of “Hatred and Envy”***

In *Fetret*, Maximilien Robespierre’s name appears not as a hollow label for “radicalism,” but as a specific mode of political behavior: “purge.” Selman Bey’s emphasis on Robespierre sending Danton to his fate driven by “hatred and envy” is a two-level diagnosis (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35). The first is the level of historical “accuracy”—understanding internal divisions and the motives behind purges. The second level is more critical: recognizing this mechanism within contemporary politics. The note of “hatred and envy” codes Robespierre not only as an ideological radical but

<sup>31</sup> “Georges Jacques Danton labored not for his own malice or ulterior motives, but to serve France. He was incapable of such wickedness or tyranny. At most, he could only be a reformer or a victim of injustice.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, pp. 47–48)

as a figure who translates political competition into a language of moral condemnation. Thus, *Fetret* demonstrates that violence in politics does not arise from “ideas” alone; affects such as suspicion, resentment, envy, and the anxiety of power can be legitimized within the language of “virtue.”

This personal tone is linked to a structural description in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*. The way figures like Saint-Just and Couthon “revolved around” Robespierre, while Marat remained “a power alone with his newspaper,” implies that the revolution operated as a “discourse regime”: press, club, assembly, committee... Robespierre’s central position in this regime is tied to both his success in “persuading the masses” and his will to “purge” the assembly and his rivals. The language of *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* hardens here: the “savage” elimination of the Girondins and the sending of “herds” of people to their fate through “superficial and sham trials” show that the logic of purge was operated under a procedural cloak.<sup>32</sup> When *Fetret*’s emphasis on “hatred and envy” meets *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*’s focus on “sham trials,” what Robespierre symbolizes becomes clear: defeating the opposition and casting it out of politics by declaring it “illegitimate.”

The political equivalent of this mechanism in *Fetret* is the possibility of the Second Constitutional Era’s “liberty” discourse rapidly transforming into a language of “opposition hunting.” Ali Kemâl’s novel does not distance Robespierre as a “monster of the past”; on the contrary, it keeps the feeling of “it could happen here” alive. The sharpness of Selman Bey’s polemic enters here, where historical ignorance does not merely remain comical but produces a shortcut legitimizing violence. Presenting Robespierre and Danton as “hand-in-hand heroes” renders the logic of purge invisible; what is hidden easily repeats in today’s politics. This is precisely why Selman Bey targets the public consequences of ignorance when accusing the journalist of a “lack of inquiry.” The question “what percentage of us is free?” is a self-critique stating that the Robespierre model belongs not only to “them” (the French) but exists within “us” (the Ottomans) depending on the general socio-moral state of the public.

Another dimension of the Robespierre analogy is the atmosphere of “fear.” Narratives in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* about the assembly “trembling” before Robespierre and Danton being “sacrificed to that bolt” show that the regime of purge produced a collective surrender: people fell silent not only be-

<sup>32</sup> “...what was Saint-Just thinking, much like Robespierre? Was it not, first and foremost, to purge the National Assembly? On the initial pretext of accusing them of separating the provinces from the center and advocating decentralization (adem-i merkeziyet), the Girondins—those illustrious pillars of the Great Revolution—were eliminated in a savage manner; they were sent to the political scaffold in droves following sham and superficial trials.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 48)

cause they were unpersuaded, but because they were afraid.<sup>33</sup> This suggests how the press, the assembly, and intellectual circles in the constitutional public sphere could become trapped within a regime of “hesitation.” The danger of Robespierre-style politics is not only that it presents violence as a “state of exception”; it also establishes a psychological climate that renders the opposition unable to speak. The goal of *Fetret*’s “*description and dissection*” strategy is to make this climate visible by marking the dangerous threshold where the word liberty and the word suspicion coexist in the same sentence.

Ultimately, Robespierre is not a convenient label for the “radical wing” in *Fetret*; he is the name for something more subtle: the monopolization of political legitimacy through the language of morality. Whoever represents “virtue” speaks; the rest are coded as “traitor” or “weak.” Ali Kemâl’s liberal anti-radicalism manifests here as a rejection of the idea that revolutionary goals can be achieved by “eliminating the opposition,” rather than a rejection of the goals themselves. Robespierre sending Danton to his fate mirrors the struggle of the opposition to remain “legitimate” in the Second Constitutional Era.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Saint-Just: The Language of Violence and the Justification for “Extra-legal Measures”***

In Ali Kemâl’s revolutionary narrative, Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just appears less as “youthful” energy and more as the ideological language of violence. In *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, Saint-Just’s position in the assembly is described as the orator who “*defends best*” where Robespierre hesitates;

<sup>33</sup> “*Beyond a doubt, for every fair-minded person, Danton is an awe-inspiring figure of the Great French Revolution; he is the most preeminent among the men of the revolution. Yet, from one perspective, it is for this very reason that he remained, in the eyes of history, its most victimized figure for a long time. He was one whose profound worth was not rightfully recognized. Essentially, he was long subjected to loathsome slanders by the opponents of that revolution, yet he remained certain of his own true value. For, forty-eight hours before his execution, when he appeared before that tyrannical revolutionary tribunal, he declared:*

*‘I am Danton. My age is thirty-five; my residence tomorrow will be nonexistence. My name shall remain in the temple of history.’*

*Even while grappling with his end, he demonstrated through every gesture and word his confidence in his eternal future. Indeed, as the Great Revolution gradually transitioned into the pages of history—as the characters of the men of the revolution began to be judged not by personal ambitions, slanders, or rumors, but by historical facts and documents—Danton suddenly shone forth. He shone as a flash of genius, bestowing a new brilliance upon France and the French spirit.”* (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, pp. 71–72)

<sup>34</sup> “*The National Convention was practically seized by wrath; yet, as we have previously submitted, it was essentially trembling before Robespierre. Had it not sacrificed Danton out of that very impulse? It fell once more into such a dread that it resolved to have that document of malice and slander published.”* (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 187)

Saint-Just is both the man of practice and the architect of discourse. This discourse is ready to suspend the law in the name of “virtue.” Indeed, the argument established over the fate of Louis XVI opens a threshold that renders judgment unnecessary: the formula “*there is no need for judgment... he must just be killed*” crystallizes a way for political violence to manufacture “easy legitimacy.”<sup>35</sup> Law, debate, and evidence are turned into a luxury for the sake of the “salvation of the revolution”; everything that becomes a luxury can quickly be deemed “treason.”

Ali Kemâl’s depiction of Saint-Just is accompanied by a moralistic language of elevation. Saint-Just’s statement in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* that “*Happiness is a good idea in Europe*” shows that revolutionary violence can equip itself with a universal goal like the “happiness of humanity.” This is a linguistic logic of the same family as the “*bedâ*” rhetoric criticized in *Fetret*, where violence is made invisible within a sublime purpose—and thus made easier. In Ali Kemâl’s eyes, Saint-Just is the name for a politics that hardens in the name of “virtue” and more comfortably justifies “extra-legal measures” as it hardens. Consequently, the Saint-Just analogy serves as a warning to Constitutional Turkey: when law is suspended in the name of liberty, liberty itself is suspended.

In *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, Saint-Just is discussed not only at the rostrum but also in the practice of extraordinary powers like being a “delegate” (*murahhas*); this practice produces a space of power where one is “*the absolute arbiter of life and death.*”<sup>36</sup> The line Saint-Just represents is not “violence for the

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<sup>35</sup> “*There is no need for a lengthy trial of the King; he must simply be put to death, he must be put to death. For there are no longer any laws left to try him. It is he who has utterly destroyed the laws. He must be put to death. For he is the enemy; a trial is only for the citizens of the nation. That tyrant, in order to be worthy of a trial, must first be a child of this nation. He must be put to death, for he is a criminal. He was caught red-handed. In any case, monarchy is an eternal crime (cinâyet-i ebedîyye). A king is outside of nature (hâric-i tabîat). There can be no relation between the people and a king.*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 36)

<sup>36</sup> “*One long-standing habit of this assembly was to send envoys on special missions to the provinces, and particularly to the armies at the borders. The influence of these representatives was vast. For the most part, their actions fill the bloodiest pages of the history of the Great Revolution. Saint-Just attached exceptional importance to these types of assignments. He increased the authority of these representatives by yet another degree.*

*To such an extent that the conduct of some of these representatives—who exercised absolute and arbitrary power—in certain provinces constitute heart-rending sagas of atrocities... For instance, following the Vendée rebellion, Carrier, who was sent to Nantes, had hundreds of innocent clergy thrown into the river to be drowned... The ‘drownings of Nantes’ remain among the most tragic and notorious episodes in the history of the revolution.”* (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, pp. 49–50)

sake of violence”; it is a line that turns violence into a tool of management for a “higher” purpose. Even references to Carrier’s massacres in Nantes after the Vendée remind us of the repertoire of atrocities revolutionary power can establish in the name of “representation.” Though Saint-Just is not the only name performing this repertoire, he is the founding figure of the politico-moral language that makes it appear “reasonable.”

The link here to *Fetret* is rhetorical rather than nominal. Selman Bey’s anger toward the word “*bedia*” in *Fetret* is directed at a category of “pleasure” and “beauty” that sterilizes violence. In Saint-Just’s discourse, the categories of “*happiness*” and “*virtue*” perform the same function by being presented as the price for overstepping the law to “save humanity.” Selman Bey’s polemic attempts to break this shortcut to legitimacy. This is why his “*ocean*” (*lucce*) metaphor is vital; revolution is an “*ocean*” where “*good deeds*” and “*evils*” swirl in the same vortex.<sup>37</sup> This metaphor is the antidote to Saint-Just-style legitimacy manufacturing; it offers the reader a political experience of moral complexity rather than a monochromatic revolutionary tale. Ali Kemâl’s “remedial” line becomes clear here: what will prevent the word liberty from turning into a “trance of virtue” is either the distilling knowledge of history or the institutional safeguards of law and pluralism.

The allegorical function of Saint-Just in *Fetret* is to bring the allure of extraordinary political language in the Second Constitutional Era into debate. The impatience produced by the feeling of “right now” devalues “judgment”; when judgment is devalued, persuasion gives way to purge. Selman Bey’s “conversation” with history thus transcends an intellectual stance and becomes a defense of the regime: an intervention that cools public reason against a language of violence that could stifle constitutionalism.

<sup>37</sup> “*Most of us remain content with the general history and secondary school readings regarding the Great French Revolution. Yet, the tragedy is that we subsequently attempt to adopt this revolution as a precept and a blueprint for our own political actions. Do we ever reflect that this great revolution is an abyss—a disturbing, complex, agitating, and magnificent site for the manifestation of virtues and vices, justice and tyranny, ignorance and science? It is grand in its objective, its essence, and even its outcome; for it led to the transfer of sovereignty—not only in France but eventually across all of Europe—from a single, unaccountable person, an absolute monarch, to the public and the community at large. Most notably, it enabled the French to achieve six centuries’ worth of progress—politically, socially, and even economically—within a mere six years.*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35)

### ***Intermediate Conclusion: The Function of the “Mask” and the Legitimacy of Liberal Anti-Radicalism***

What is seen through the Danton/Robespierre/Saint-Just triad in this section is that *Fetret* does not exhaust the French Revolution as a “subject.” What Ali Kemâl performs at the level of the novel is to transform the revolution into a laboratory of political ethics. In this context, Danton represents the possibility of moderation and keeping public energy within an institutional framework; Robespierre represents the logic of suspicion and purge that turns the regime against its own promises by stifling opposition; and Saint-Just represents how the language of virtue/happiness facilitates overstepping the law. Selman Bey’s “conversation with history” uses these figures as a “mask” that allows for discussing the contemporary struggle without being directly impaled by it. While watching the stage of the French Revolution, the reader gains an awareness of the Second Constitutional stage—finding the expression that liberty is sustained not through slogans, but through pluralism, law, and the cultivation of public reason. The question “*what percentage of us is free?*” thus ceases to be a test of historical knowledge and transforms into a reckoning of conscience for the constitutional public.

The analogy established through these three figures shows that *Fetret* does not keep the French Revolution outside as “an example from history”; on the contrary, it turns it into a measuring device for the political ethics of the Second Constitutional Era. Danton made visible that moderation is not merely “goodwill” but a complex practice of management and restraint; Robespierre showed how the opposition can be turned into a “crime” when politics monopolizes the language of legitimacy; and Saint-Just showed how easily the law can be suspended in the name of virtue and happiness. Rather than placing these figures in a “gallery of heroes,” Selman Bey’s reading of history leaves the reader with a choice: will liberty be protected by the trance of the word, or by a public reason that observes the threshold of law and pluralism? At this exact point, the novel’s primary tension becomes clear: the issue is not loving or not loving the revolution; it is the regime of knowledge and the linguistic disciplines through which we discuss the revolution. This is why the contrast between Hayret Bey and Selman Bey in Section 4 cannot be reduced to a mere difference in character; this is a boundary line where *Fetret* separates the “correct” and “incorrect” intellectual types, and thus their modes of speaking with history. Along this boundary, the diagnosis of ignorance and the slogan seizing the public sphere meets the remedy—re-establishing history as a responsibility that

distills public reason and calls political language to measure.<sup>38</sup>

### **Historical Consciousness and Intellectual Responsibility: “True” and “False” Intellectual Models**

While *Fetret*’s lengthy French Revolution debates pit political positions against each other, they primarily center the intellectual’s public vocation, utility, and the discursive regime required for speaking in the public sphere. The novel’s sharpest move is deploying two distinct intellectual types—Hayret Bey and Selman Bey—in a mirrored contrast. Hayret Bey represents a superficial culture of “*European exposure*” and name-dropping disconnected from substantive thought; Selman Bey embodies the ethics of *tetebbu* (disciplined inquiry) and its public responsibility. This contrast clarifies the novel’s pedagogical claim: history is not merely a source of examples; how we know history directly dictates how we produce contemporary politics.

This section avoids simplifying this contrast into a mere “comic vs. serious” binary. In the novel’s view, Hayret Bey’s comedy is not innocent laughter, as misinformation often yields the “very serious” consequences of misguided politics. Selman Bey’s authority stems not just from erudition, but from the moral function he assigns to knowledge. Furthermore, the novel establishes this function beyond the French Revolution, calling for Istanbul to be read as a “public of civilization,” thereby revealing the internal facet of historical consciousness. Thus, *Fetret* defines the intellectual within the Second Constitutional Era under the dual obligation of correctly reading both the external (France) and the internal (Istanbul/Ottoman).

#### ***Hayret Bey: The Comedy of Misinformation, The Tragedy of Misguided Politics***

Hayret Bey is the novel’s clearest exemplar of the “false intellectual,” though his “error” transcends mere chronological blunders. In the interview at the *Servet-i Fünûn* printing house, he summarizes France as “falling-rising-yet living,” asserting that after the Revolution and Napoleon, “*a Louis XIV arrives, and things are restored.*” This single sentence

<sup>38</sup> In the context of the French Revolution, Keith Michael Baker explains the logic of revolutionary public language—which produces “liquidation” and “extraordinary necessity”—through the organization of discourse around “*notions of transparency, publicity, vigilance, and terror*”; consequently, political speech acquires an “emotional, even life-and-death significance” (Baker, 1990, p. 8). For the relationship between the rhetoric of “supra-legal necessity” and the production of political legitimacy, see especially (Skinner, 2002, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” pp. 58–89). This footnote emphasizes that the analogy in *Fetret* functions less as a “historical narrative” and more as a “position-establishing” discursive technique.

encapsulates the novel's critique: Hayret Bey's "Europe" is not a historical experience but a loose repository of analogies; names, eras, and regimes are piled together, resulting in a superficiality that easily legitimizes any political judgment. *Fetret*'s subtlety lies in showing how such speech, despite its frailty, manufactures "authority" in the public sphere. Hayret Bey arrives with "*sincere admirers*," seeking to project literary influence over the youth.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the novel frames the scene not as an individual drama of ignorance, but as the social circulation of misinformation and the economy of admiration. This is a critical diagnosis for the expanding press and salon culture of the Second Constitutional Era, where history ceases to be an experience to be "read" and becomes a rhetorical material for "immediate use."

Consequently, Hayret Bey's errors concern more than French history. The sharp tone used to correct his misattributions—such as crediting Mallarmé's "Albatross" or *Les Fleurs du Mal* to Verlaine—is a discursive intervention in the ethics of public speech: "*you do not know what you are saying... read, read much... perform inquiry (tetebbu).*"<sup>40</sup> Hayret

<sup>39</sup> "*Hayret Bey had come to the Servet-i Fünun printing house specifically for this interview. He did not fail the precaution of bringing several of his most sincere admirers along, just in case he needed to demonstrate his total literary influence over the Ottoman youth to this new disciple of literature. Though approaching sixty, perhaps due to his addiction to innovation (teceddüd), this famous poet—who was still associated with the younger generation—greeted Fetret from the zenith of his grandeur with a dignified humility and a half-hearted compliment, intending to leave him stunned by his wisdom and erudition. He spoke of having lived in France and England for a long time; merely by pronouncing their names, he mentioned Byron and Hugo, and finally expounded the following observation:*

—'We cannot be compared to these countries; they fall, they rise, and they live on. For instance, in France, a Great Revolution occurs, a Napoleon emerges, and everything is thrown into turmoil. Then, after that chaos, a Louis XIV arrives, and things are set right again.'

*Fetret could not restrain himself:*

—'It was not Louis XIV but Louis XVIII who followed Napoleon. There is a very great difference between the two...' he said. Though angered by this correction, Hayret Bey did not lose his composure for a moment and, with genuine dexterity this time, submerged the subject in a convoluted sophistry, saying: 'So it was not Louis XIV but Louis XVIII—that is not the point, the point is...' and moved on to another topic, prattling on about this and that.'" (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, pp. 14–15)

<sup>40</sup> "*My dear sir, do not take offense, but you do not know what you are talking about. In Europe, an individual at the intellectual, literary, and cultural level of your Hayret Bey would not even dare to write or publish a single work. Your attempt to compare this man to the French poets you mention at random—and I say 'at random' because pairing Verlaine with Fernand Gregh and then throwing Mallarmé into the mix—proves that you have read none of these poets, or if you have, you failed to understand them.*

Bey's comedy merges with a methodology; the young protagonist speaks not to humiliate but to remind that the right to employ analogy and judgment requires "the labor of reading." Referencing critics like Brunetière and Faguet is not mere posturing, but an attempt to redefine the source of authority. The primary function of these scenes is to "inoculate" the reader against the allure of such figures. While misinformation may be comical, the novel suggests its political consequences are not. History is a linguistic repository contemporary actors use for self-legitimation. Hayret Bey's flawed analogies, joined with romanticizing terms like *bedîa*, serve a climate where violence is polished as a "necessity" or "natural outcome." Thus, within the novel, Hayret Bey represents the risk map of misguided politics produced by the false intellectual.

### ***Selman Bey: The Ethics of Tettebbu and the Question "What Percentage of Us is Free?"***

The "true intellectual" model represented by Selman Bey generates a dual authority: (i) the power of historical distillation and (ii) the courage to assume the socio-moral burden of this distillation. In the newspaper polemic, Selman Bey does not frame his critique as a race for information; he implies that distilling names and motivations directly affects the contemporary potential for violence. Presenting Marat, Robespierre, and Danton as "united" despite being opposites "*in thought, spirit, and aim*," and ignoring Robespierre's purge of Danton through "*hatred and envy*," are not ordinary mistakes; they are toxic shortcuts spread through the public sphere by a "*deep lack of inquiry*." Crucially, Selman Bey concludes: "*But I wonder what percentage of us is still free of such stains?*"<sup>41</sup> This question shifts the definition of the intellectual from an individual plane to

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*You have clearly never even held Les Fleurs du Mal (The Flowers of Evil) in your hands; for that most famous collection of poems belongs not to Verlaine, but to Baudelaire. It was published during the time of the Second Empire and caused an immense upheaval in every respect. It opened a revolutionary chapter in literature and poetry, both in terms of form and meaning. It was even subjected to legal prosecution for being deemed contrary to established moral rules.*

*You are devoid of even this elementary literary knowledge. Indeed, attributing 'The Albatross' to Mallarmé demonstrates your complete lack of mastery over French literature. Read—read a great deal before venturing into such judgments and comparisons. At the very least, study what Brunetière or Faguet have written regarding this literature," he vented. Casting aside Eastern complaisance (hâtır-nüvazlık), he adopted an English bluntness. Just as this literary dispute was about to turn into a real conflict..." (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, pp. 15–16)*

<sup>41</sup> "*The author of the article is by no means cognizant of the facts concerning the history of the Great Revolution; [...] Yet, I wonder, what percentage of us are still free from such blemishes?*" (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35)

a collective reckoning. Selman Bey does not offload the responsibility for misinformation onto a single journalist; he says “us.” Thus, *Fetret* transforms the public sphere’s knowledge regime into the intellectual’s moral domain. Knowing is not a privilege but an obligation; correction is not a personal victory but an act of public hygiene.

Furthermore, Selman Bey’s call for *tetebbu* is enacted within the novel. “One day after” the debate, his piece in *Selâm* is noted for having “warned and tempered public opinion.”<sup>42</sup> This detail defines the second pillar of the intellectual model: the intellectual does not merely know the truth but circulates it. Here, the novel points to its own author, Ali Kemâl, whose identity as a journalist-author returns to the “newspaper” form within the fiction. Thus, *Fetret* positions the intellectual as the organizer of public reason rather than a mere “ornament of salon conversation.”

This model’s internal legitimacy is supported by the novel’s poetic declaration. The author states that in writing a “history-like” work, he relies less on imagination and more on “sources” (*me’ haz*) from history and literature, establishing a clear principle: “failing to extract every event and idea from a source... signifies amateurism and a lack of inquiry.” These lines elevate Selman Bey’s stance from a personal trait to the novel’s literary-political project. Legitimacy in public speech is bound to reading and inquiry; words produced through “hasty penmanship” (*icâle-i hâme*) remain dim and useless.<sup>43</sup>

The rationale for *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* reinforces this ethical line. Ali Kemâl notes his “meticulous adherence to historical facts,” his consultation of “various sources,” and his attempt to avoid the passions of different historians, emphasizing the “principle of neutrality” (*düstûr-ı bî-tarafî*) against

<sup>42</sup> “However, a day later, the following column published by Selman Bey in *Selâm* regarding this controversy laid bare the truth with clarity; it both alerted and moderated public opinion in a fitting manner.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 93)

<sup>43</sup> “Whether writing history or a quasi-historical work, failing to derive every event and every idea from a source, an authority, or a document signifies amateurism and a lack of inquiry. Mastery lies in synthesizing these borrowings according to a specific concern or aspiration and presenting them in a commendable style. Indeed, in my view, not only historiography but authorship in general must adhere to this precept to attain success. Consider those who write today: how lackluster, primitive, and futile are those who wield their pens on contemporary matters without reading or researching. Conversely, those who commit to the opposite path—those who take up the pen only after reading and under the guidance of such studies—manage to make their writings readable regardless of the subject, leaving the public significantly gratified and benefited.” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 4)

Aulard's admiration for Danton or the Michelet/Carlyle/Taine line.<sup>44</sup> These passages function as a "background repository" strengthening Selman Bey's authority. Selman Bey's action is not merely about loving or hating the revolution, but about debating the source-discipline behind the language used to discuss it. Read this way, the question "what percentage of us is free?" is a measure directed at the author himself as much as the Ottoman public, demanding that historical discourse transcend personal anger and factional passion through the ethics of the source.

### ***Civilization and History: Expanding the Argument through the Example of Istanbul***

*Fetret*'s insistence on historical consciousness does not only revolve around the French Revolution; the novel opens into the "history of the interior"—Istanbul. Istanbul is depicted as a "treasure" of both nature and history; it is argued that if its "legends and monuments were deeply examined," countless "subtleties" from architecture to morality and sociology would be discovered.<sup>45</sup> This passage removes historical consciousness from being solely about "knowing the exterior": the epistemic condition of Ottoman modernization is making its own urban experience "readable." In other words, *tetebbu* is necessary to understand Istanbul as much as Paris.

<sup>44</sup> "While penning this work, we pursued no concern other than a meticulous (*mûşikâfâne*) adherence to historical truths. We consistently consulted the various sources cited in the work's epilogue. Through our own personal preparations, we held a distinct perspective regarding each of these figures, and we did not waver from following that perspective. We did not succumb to the well-known passions that certain historians harbored for these individual men of the revolution.

For instance, Aulard is practically an admirer, a devotee of Danton; yet, he is the arch-enemy of Robespierre. While we appreciated such awe and devotion, we did not participate in that enmity to the same degree. We did not refrain from mentioning the virtues of that established era of oppression (*devr-i i'tisâf*). While studying the works of Michelet, Carlyle, and Taine, and among the later historians, Madelin, we never abandoned this principle of impartiality." (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, pp. 8–9).

<sup>45</sup> "Istanbul is, in every part and every corner, a ground of beauties graced with new wonders; it is a treasure of the unseen, a buried trove. It is so by nature; yet, in terms of history and the past, it is even more so—it is brimming with such marvels. It possesses a life that endures from ancient ages to the final eras. It is one of the world's most prosperous—indeed, one cannot call it merely prosperous—but ancient and renowned cities. It is a city that, through its life and saga—by turns awe-inspiring, at times heartbreaking and tragic, yet always moving and always didactic—constitutes a lofty chapter of world history. Indeed, if the legends and monuments of this capital, spanning up to the Ottoman Sultanate, were examined in profound depth, what subtleties would be discovered, ranging from the art of architecture and fine arts to military science, morality, and sociology." (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 112)

To concretize this claim, the novel provides an example: Ruskin's examination of Venice, work by work, to show a people's greatness and smallness through "moving from the work to the creator." It argues that the same genius, if applying the "same inquiry" to Istanbul, would arrive at "the same truths."<sup>46</sup> The emphasis is vital: historical consciousness is not nostalgia but a reading technique; the city should be read like the script of a civilization. The "provocative adventure" of Hagia Sophia and the way the Süleymaniye describes "a chapter from our social life" show that historical consciousness can be built through "material culture." Thus, through "speaking with history"—whether through revolutionary actors or the city and its memory—the novel moves the expression to a second plane.

This Istanbul passage also expands the Hayret Bey–Selman Bey contrast. Hayret Bey's superficial culture relies on pronouncing names borrowed from outside; the historical consciousness proposed by Selman Bey and the novel demands "deep reading" both externally (France) and internally (Istanbul). Here, "civilization" is framed as a responsibility bound to knowledge rather than a political slogan. The critique of Istanbulites who cannot appreciate Istanbul "because they have lived in it from cradle to grave" is a warning against the blindness of habit; historical consciousness is the act of breaking this blindness.<sup>47</sup> Its place in the novel's diagnostic/remedial scheme is clear: the diagnosis is a "lack of inquiry" regarding both

<sup>46</sup> "A great modern philosopher-educator of the English, for instance, Ruskin, by meticulously studying a city like Venice through its artistic monuments, demonstrates the greatness and smallness, the perfections and deficiencies, the sublimities and baseness of a people. By moving from the work to the creator (eserden müessire), he offers a lesson in morality and exaltation to the world, and especially to his fellow citizens. If a similar genius were to study and contemplate Istanbul in the same manner; would they not reach the same truths and results? They would, undoubtedly. For instance, the stirring saga of Hagia Sophia—that magnificent edifice—with all its intricacies, hidden secrets, and mysteries, what excitement would it not stir in a mind thirsty for knowledge; yet, what abundance of insight would it not bestow? Even the history of the Süleymaniye—that exalted mosque—though perhaps not containing the same degree of agitation, depicts a colorful chapter and contains a quintessence of our social life." (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 112)

<sup>47</sup> "A sensitive and perceptive traveler, while advancing directly from the Sea of Marmara or arriving from the Black Sea, falls into ecstasy and profound contemplation upon seeing and perceiving that resplendent landscape. Istanbul is such a site of manifestation for nature. Anyone who gazes upon Istanbul, whether from afar or near, loves it; the world perceives Istanbul as an eternal masterpiece (bedia-i ezeliyye). Those who fail to perceive it as such are, for the most part, the residents of Istanbul themselves. These Istanbulites, because they live within it from the cradle to the grave, cannot appreciate those marvels; at the very least, they are the ones who appreciate them the least." (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 111)

the exterior and interior; the remedy is transforming the city and history into a reading practice that “cultivates public reason.”

Consequently, the conclusion reached at the end of Section 4 is not a simple “intellectuals should read” exhortation. *Fetret* establishes the intellectual as an agent who organizes the public circulation of knowledge. Hayret Bey represents the speed of speech, the economy of admiration, and the ease of analogy; Selman Bey represents the ethics of the source, the courage to correct, and public intervention. The novel’s true severity lies in showing that these two types can become a fate rather than a choice. If *tetebbu* weakens, words like *bedîa* polish violence; if *tetebbu* strengthens, history transforms into a linguistic discipline through which liberty can be protected by law and public reason.<sup>48</sup>

## Diagnosis and Remedy in *Fetret*: A Politico-Ethical Laboratory for the Second Constitutional Era

### *Diagnosis: The Violent Potential of Slogans and Public Ignorance*

*Fetret*’s diagnostic force originates not from its status as a political novel targeting specific institutions or actors, but from a more nuanced engagement. It interrogates the political climate as a discursive regime—analyzing press styles, slogans, and salon analogies. Consequently, the “*Bedîa-i İhtilâl-i Kebîr*” polemic functions as a laboratory displaying how public

<sup>48</sup> Zürcher emphasizes the rapid expansion of the public sphere through the press immediately following the Second Constitutional Era:

“After the suffocating atmosphere of the later years of the reign of Sultan Abdülhamit, with its censorship and intolerance, the start of the constitutional period in 1908 witnessed an explosion of public debate on all kinds of political and social questions. The intensity of the debate was reflected in the number of new publications that appeared. The number of periodicals, which by the end of the old regime had dwindled to barely a dozen, increased thirtyfold in the year after the revolution.” (Zürcher, 2004, p. 126).

The same study demonstrates how political competition quickly radicalized: “The opposition to the CUP was now gathering strength fast ... it managed to win a by-election in Istanbul, defeating the CUP candidate” (Zürcher, 2004, p. 100). Carter V. Findley’s note on the “explosion” in the press sector after 1908 directly substantiates the issue of “newspaper style and public language” as portrayed in *Fetret*: “The newspapers in their hands are *Hürriyet*, *İttifak*, *Karagöz*, and *Tanin*, all launched in 1908.” (Findley, 2010, p. 195).

The emphasis on the emergence of hundreds of newspapers and magazines alongside the “constitutional freedoms” of the post-1908 era—reaching a total of 353 publications by 1910—makes the expansion of the public sphere quantitatively visible. These sources reinforce the argument that the call for “intellectual responsibility” in *Fetret* is not merely an abstract ethical appeal, but must be understood within the context of a concrete and increasingly aggressive public landscape.

reason is provoked and swept away, transcending a mere journalistic dispute. The logic of the provocative article in the newspaper is simplistic: through the July analogy, history is reduced to a calendrical coincidence; the Bastille–Constitution pairing binds the Ottoman revolution to the “ready-made legitimacy” of the French Revolution; Marat, Robespierre, and Danton are subsequently heroicized in a single line, culminating in the cry: “*Long live liberty, long live constitutionalism!*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 34). Ali Kemâl’s diagnosis proceeds on two levels. The first is epistemic: history demands a sense of distinction and proportion; however, this writing erases the internal tensions of events by converting revolutionary figures into a “monochromatic excitement.” Selman Bey’s sharp reaction against presenting “*Marat, Robespierre, and Danton as unified despite being opposites*” is not merely a concern for “*accurate information*” but an identification of the danger in a discourse that renders the mechanics of violence invisible (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35).

The second level is directly politico-ethical: the word “*bedîa*” (wonder/beauty) moves the revolution into the category of aesthetics; violence thus categorized ceases to be the “primary issue” and becomes mere decor. Selman Bey’s judgment that this is the “*work of a deep lack of inquiry*” (*fikdân-ı tettebbü*) gains meaning here: ignorance is not a passive deficiency but an active fault that opens space for violence in the public sphere (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, p. 35). Reading this point alongside Reinhart Koselleck reveals the sense of time within *Fetret*’s diagnosis. The calendrical analogy fails to construct a genuine “horizon of experience” to link the past to the present; instead, it inflates the “horizon of expectation”: invoking the Bastille produces a shortcut generating the feeling that “the revolution has begun here, too.” As expectation grows, political reality is perceived with impatience; liberty ceases to be a matter of institutions and procedures and becomes a trance demanded “right now” (Koselleck, 2004, pp. 282–285). *Fetret*’s journalist represents the language of this trance. Selman Bey, however, calls for distillation: history requires distinction, measure, and responsibility. In this framework, *Fetret* conducts an internal debate regarding the Second Constitutional Era’s “liberty” language, defending the constitutional ideal while exposing how a discourse that sanctifies this ideal through revolutionary romanticism can transform into a violence-driven economy that demonizes the opponent. Feroz Ahmad’s depiction of post-1908 political hardening resonates at the heart of *Fetret*: a public sphere expanding through the press while rapidly producing a sharpening polarization; the word “liberty” could be a legitimate demand as much as a weapon to declare the rival illegitimate. *Fetret*’s diagnosis captures the

linguistic symptoms of this transformation: the slogan operates independently of intent, imposing its own logic once in circulation.<sup>49</sup>

***Remedy: Moderation, Public Opinion, and the Idea of Law***

The “remedy” in *Fetret* is not presented as a codified political program; nor can Selman Bey’s intervention be reduced to a sermon on moderation. Remedy involves the dual axis of political reason—its capacity for measure and distinction—and the protection of law and judgment. Thus, the language of “disciplining” (*tehzib*) within the novel is vital. The text acknowledges the revolution as a “tremendous surge and clamor” (*cûş u hurûş*) but subsequently speaks of the “gradual disciplining” of the revolution and its entry into a “phase of evolution.”<sup>50</sup> Here, “*tehzib*” refers to the restraining of violence, but it also encompasses the education of public reason, the purification of political language, and the stabilization of institutions. *Fetret*’s remedial idea operates in this broad sense: liberty is not a moment of trance but a discipline requiring continuity.

*Ricâl-i İhtilâl* serves as a “repository of evidence” for this remedy, sharpening the novel’s implied distinctions through the concrete practices of historical figures. The description of Danton as a “moderate reformer” (*muslih-i mutavassıt*) is a key definition for Ali Kemâl’s political ideal (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 82). This “*tavassıt*” (mediation) does not signify indecision; it is bound to a concrete political technique of directing revolutionary energy toward external enemies, limiting the possibility of internal slaughter, and refusing to abandon justice to the “masses’ execution of justice” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 136). The language of Danton’s success operates here as a strategy of “blood reduction”: even if violence cannot be entirely eliminated, he attempts to prevent its expansion, focusing on consolidating the state and organizing national defense. The second axis of the remedy is built against the suspension of law. The Saint-Just narrative in

<sup>49</sup> In describing the establishment of the Liberal Union and the sharpening of political polarization through the press, Ahmad emphasizes that the opposition press instrumentalized Kâmil Paşa’s meeting with King Edward VII at Port Said for political purposes: “*The founding of the Liberal Union coincided with Kâmil Paşa’s meeting with King Edward VII at Port Said, an event which the opposition press exploited to further its own political ends.*” (Ahmad, 1969, p. 99).

<sup>50</sup> “*Indeed, the hopeful aspect of our actual revolution is that young people—like those we observe with such delight—will rise and multiply, and discover these ailments of ours; with an extraordinary determination, they will gradually refine (tehzib) and expand this revolution. They will transform it first into an inkâlâb (transformation), then into a tekâmül (evolution), and universalize it; in this way, they will grant a renewal to our national body and instill within it a brilliant essence of progress.*” (Ali Kemâl, 1329a, pp. 165–166)

*Ricâl-i İhtilâl* shows how a language of violence produces “impact instead of logic”: the “terrible discourse” (*lisân-ı müdhiş*) affects the assembly and the audience, making moderates “break into cold sweats” while bringing supporters of excess to a “trance.” Consequently, the law is directly bypassed: “There is no need to judge the King at length, he must just be killed... because there are no longer any laws left to judge him” (Ali Kemâl, 1329b, p. 36). This sentence crystallizes *Fetret*'s primary fear: when law is suspended in the name of liberty, liberty itself is suspended; the language of constitutionalism transforms into a machinery of purge working against its own promise.

Selman Bey's anger toward the revolutionary language polished as “*bedîa*” (wonder) converges with Arendt's warning that sentimentality publicized in the name of “virtue” can easily be annexed to a violence-producing politics: the slogan short-circuits judgment and accelerates the verdict. Therefore, Ali Kemâl's anti-radicalism is not a hostility toward the revolution at the level of principle. While defending constitutionalism, the text defends “judgment,” “distillation,” and “disciplining.” Remedy is shaped as a form of political ethics—as the survival of the opposition, the measurement of public speech, and the preservation of the legal ground. At this point, the tension between legitimacy and violence—a recurring problem in Arendt's revolutionary debates—provides a fertile background for reading *Fetret*.<sup>51</sup> *Fetret*'s insistence on “judgment/distillation/disciplining” meets Arendt's warning regarding the moralized justification of violence in the French experience on the same axis.

<sup>51</sup> Hannah Arendt crystallizes how the emotions mobilized in the name of “virtue” during the French Revolution—specifically pity—could easily be annexed to a politics of violence:

“Pity, taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself. ‘Par pitié, par amour pour l’humanité, soyez inhumains!’ - these words, taken almost at random from a petition of one of the sections of the Parisian Commune to the National Convention, are neither accidental nor extreme; they are the authentic language of pity.” (Arendt, 1990, pp. 89–90).

Arendt's demonstration that the “authentic language” of pity in the public sphere can lead to radicalization and a discourse that rationalizes cruelty theoretically anchors Selman Bey's suspicion in *Fetret* regarding the political impact of slogans—an impact that operates independently of their original intent. Furthermore, Arendt establishes a direct line between the boundlessness of the “sentiments of the heart” and the logic of “lawlessness / all is permitted” within the French revolutionary trajectory. This trajectory is particularly suitable for explaining the risk in the novel that the rhetoric of “wonder” (*bedîa*) might render extra-legal liquidation and violence invisible.

## Conclusion

Rather than an encyclopedic burden interrupting the plot, the extensive French Revolution discourses in Ali Kemâl's *Fetret* function as a constitutive apparatus that diagnoses the political language of the Second Constitutional Era and develops a proposed remedy. The novel's own poetic declaration demonstrates that this apparatus is a deliberate choice rather than a coincidence. With its claim to be a "history-like" product, the text aims to "describe and dissect" ideas that provide a "truly authentic tableau" of political life; thus, the historical dialogues are not narrative defects but a strategy for cultivating public reason. This strategy also reveals a tension hidden in the title: "*fetret*" signifies not only a vacuum of political power but also an interregnum where public judgment loses its equilibrium.

- This study shows that *Fetret*'s French Revolution "pauses" are not encyclopedic digressions but a deliberate diagnostic scene that tests (and exposes) the moral risks of constitutional-era liberty rhetoric.
- This study shows that Selman Bey's correction operates as an ethical intervention: it links historical accuracy to public responsibility by naming "fikdân-ı tettebbu" as a political danger, not a minor mistake.
- This study shows that the novel's analogical triad (Danton/Robespierre/Saint-Just) functions as a map of moderation, purge-logic, and extra-legal necessity—thereby proposing a remedial discipline of judgment and law.

The core contention is that Ali Kemâl reframes the French Revolution not as a didactic history lesson, but as a politico-moral laboratory for the Ottoman State. This is most evident in the "*Bedîa-i ihtilâl-i kebîr*" polemic. The newspaper piece's pairing of the Bastille with the Constitution and the cry of "*Long live liberty!*" represent the manufacturing of easy legitimacy by reducing history to a calendrical analogy; furthermore, the violent experience of the revolution is erased under the aestheticizing veil of the word "*bedîa*" (wonder). Selman Bey's intervention provides the "diagnosis" at this exact point: the problem is not the idea of constitutionalism itself, but its romanticization through sloganized history and the production of a linguistic regime that presents violence as a "natural outcome." Selman Bey's judgment of a "*deep lack of inquiry*" (*fikdân-ı tettebbu*) and his question—"what percentage of us is free?"—frames ignorance as a public danger rather than an individual flaw.

Furthermore, *Fetret* legitimizes its political stance through an analogical framework involving historical figures. Danton, Robespierre, and Saint-Just are not reduced to binary "good-evil" labels; they represent recurring

modes of political reason within constitutional publicity. Positioning Danton as a “moderate reformer” in *Ricâl-i İhtilâl* demonstrates that Ali Kemâl viewed moderation not as a weakness of the “middle way,” but as a political technique for limiting violence. Conversely, the Robespierre line exposes the logic of purge that delegitimizes the opposition through “suspicion”; Selman Bey’s insistence on Robespierre’s purge of Danton driven by “hatred and envy” serves as a way to debate the threshold of tolerance for opposition in contemporary politics. The Saint-Just narrative crystallizes the extreme legal outcome of this logic: the idea that “*there is no need for judgment... he must just be killed*” represents a politico-moral problem where the language of revolutionary virtue and the suspension of law merge in the same sentence. Thus, Ali Kemâl’s anti-radicalism is not “counter-revolutionary” but a critique directed at the possibility of revolutionary energy overstepping the law and causing constitutionalism to fail its own promise.

Thirdly, the debate over “true” and “false” intellectual models identifies the social carriers of this diagnostic/remedial scheme. Hayret Bey represents the comedy of misinformation, yet the novel suggests this comedy yields tragic political outcomes. Describing Louis XIV as arriving after Napoleon is not merely a gaffe; it symbolizes the reduction of history to a “repository of analogies.” Selman Bey, in contrast, establishes the ethics of *tetebbu* (inquiry) as a public responsibility; the fact that his piece in *Selâm* “warned and tempered public opinion” emphasizes that the intellectual’s duty is both to know the truth and to circulate it. This model transforms the historical dialogues in *Fetret* into an instrument of public hygiene: speaking with history is a discipline for speaking with the public.

These findings demonstrate that Ali Kemâl constructs the confrontation with history in *Fetret* not as a narrative choice to bless or curse the past, but as a project of public reason calling the Second Constitutional Era’s political language to measure. The figures and scenes of the French Revolution become masks and arguments through which contemporary political positions are debated; while defending “liberty,” the novel builds a threshold of judgment against its contamination by violence. This threshold represents an intersection of literature and politics that seeks an answer not only to “what happened?” but also to “what happens if we speak in this way?” In this regard, while *Fetret* is a novel about the Second Constitutional Era, it retains its relevance as a text debating the ethics of public speech.

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### Extended Summary

The article first examines the novel's deliberate pauses as a matter of poetics and strategy. By interrupting a plot organized around love and everyday conflict in order to accommodate extended historical argument, *Fetret* unsettles conventional expectations of narrative fiction. Rather than treating this as a formal defect, the article reads it in light of Ali Kemâl's own conception of the work as a *tarihimsi mahsûl-i tedkik u tettebbu*—a history-like product of inquiry and research. His references to Vogüé and Anatole France further indicate that the novel privileges the idea over the event. The text's discursive blocks therefore do not weaken its form; they constitute the very means through which it seeks to cultivate public judgment and intervene in the conceptual confusion of the period.

A second major focus of the article is the aestheticization of violence in the polemic of *Bedîa-i İhtilâl-i Kebîr* ("The Wonder of the Great Revolution"). In the novel, the French Revolution is romanticized through a journalistic rhetoric that exploits the calendrical coincidence between the storming of the Bastille and the Ottoman constitutional moment. By collapsing Marat, Robespierre, and Danton into a single heroic bloc, this rhetoric turns historical analogy into a shortcut of legitimation and converts violence into an object of aesthetic admiration. Selman Bey's intervention is therefore not merely corrective but ethical: he identifies such discourse as a symptom of *fikdân-ı tettebbu*—a lack of disciplined inquiry—and exposes its wider consequences for public reason. The article accordingly reads *Fetret* as a critique not of constitutionalism itself, but of the transformation of liberty into slogan and revolutionary romanticism into political authorization.

The article further argues that the revolutionary figures debated in the novel form an analogical map of contemporary political positions. Danton represents pragmatic moderation, Robespierre the logic of delegitimizing opposition through suspicion, and Saint-Just the rhetoric of extra-legal necessity through which law and judgment are suspended. Selman Bey's insistence on preserving the distinctions among these figures serves as a warning against the possibility that the language of liberty may slide into radicalization and a politics of purge. Methodologically, the study supplements this reading with Ali Kemâl's *Ricâl-i İhtilâl*, but only in limited and carefully controlled ways, using it to sharpen the novel's implied distinctions without displacing *Fetret* from the center of analysis.

Within this framework, "diagnosis" and "remedy" function as the article's principal analytical coordinates. Diagnosis names the normalization of historical ignorance, the concealment of violence beneath political slogans, and the reduction of political struggle to a logic of liquidation. Remedy, by contrast, names a political reason grounded in moderation, legality, and *tettebbu* as an ethic of intellectual responsibility. The article thus presents *Fetret* as an intervention in both the didactic discourse of the Ottoman novel and the rhetorical machinery of the Second Constitutional public sphere. By reading the novel's debates as speech acts rather than inert historical exposition, it shows how literary form becomes a vehicle for political judgment.

The study's main scholarly contribution lies in moving beyond the familiar "opponent/traitor" dichotomy through which Ali Kemâl has often been understood and repositioning his work as an attempt to construct historical consciousness and public reason. In this reading, *Fetret* does not treat the French Revolution as a repository of information about the past, but as a political and moral apparatus for diagnosing the crises of constitutional Turkey. By turning revolutionary figures into masks through which contemporary conflicts can be debated, the novel invites the reader to move beyond the spell of slogans toward the level of judgment. Its final implication is that Ali Kemâl speaks with history not in order to address the past, but in order to discipline the present. In this respect, the article shows how literature can serve both as a medium of political thought and as an instrument of remedy.

