

Cem Yılmaz Budan
Kocaeli University, İzmit
[cemyilmazbudan@gmail.com]

Künstlerroman in Turkish Literature and an Original Work of The Genre: Nahid Sırrı's Novel “Yıldız Olmak Kolay Mı?”

Abstract: *The künstlerroman, which can be defined as a narrative form that deals with the problematic existence of the artistic subject and the journey of the artist's pursuit to direct the process of artistic development, is a genre shaped within the circle of German literature, but over time it has begun to find representation in the literary traditions of different nations. The transition of the Künstlerroman genre into contemporary Turkish literature coincides with its first representative in the West, about a century later. Nahid Sırrı Örik's novel Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı? (Is it Easy to be a Star?), published in 1944, represents an unique precedent that breaks the monotony of the works written in the genre of künstlerroman in the history of Turkish literature. The novel, which deals with the story of a young woman who take a step into to life as a vocal artist, with its unique thematic structure and figurative characters, eliminates the dominance of masculine discourse over the texts of the künstlerroman. In this study, the structural transformations of the künstlerroman during the adaptation into the Turkish literature will be reviewed around the novel Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?; the similarities and differences between the local works of the genre and its representation in the Western literature will be examined within the framework of the aforementioned work.*

Keywords: *Künstlerroman; Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?; Turkish novel; Culture industry; Gender.*

Introduction

The künstlerroman (artist novel), a genre that emerged in the historical development process of German literature, constitutes a sub-branch of the bildungsroman, which can be translated into English as “novel of formation”. The künstlerroman genre, of which characteristics in the archaic examples can be found in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), differs from the bildungsroman category with its thematic structure in which the artist's personality is problematized. The prominent characteristics of the künstlerroman genre are the artist's practice of aesthetic production, the dilemmas s/he faces in the process of developing his/her

art, and the narration of his struggle with the cultural status quo caused by the time s/he lives in. It is possible to argue that James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1916, becomes a milestone in the development of this genre. It can be seen that Joyce's work published for the first time in Turkey in early 1966, was printed in only five thousand copies and was only available to a very limited audience (Belge, 1983, p. 101). On the other hand, it should be noted that the pioneering works of the *künstlerroman* genre in the history of Turkish literature began to be seen in the late 19th century, and narratives based on fiction, in which various debates on aesthetic preoccupation are focused through the priority given to artist figurations, can be analyzed in almost every period. It can be put forward that the body of texts that can exemplify the *künstlerroman* genre, constitutes a voluminous literature in the context of the history of Turkish literature. A significant number of these texts share a schematic discourse in terms of both the typological positions of their protagonists and their thematic and fictional structures.

Among the *künstlerroman* novels Nahid Sırrı Örik's *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* (Is it Easy to be a Star?), which was published in 1944, is a unique work of the category with its image of a female aesthete rebelling against normative morality, as well as the art circle it depicts and the popular culture criticism it contains. The main element that distinguishes *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* from the other works of the *künstlerroman* is that the protagonist deviates from the typology of the masculine author. The fictional structure of the novel, which tells the story of a young woman training to become a singer, is centered not on any literary circle, but on musicians and stage life. This unique character of the work as an precedent of a *künstlerroman* necessitates an analysis of the literary and technical parameters that distinguish it from its peers. Therefore, this study will focus on the the place of Nahid Sırrı's *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* among the artist novels written throughout the history of Turkish literature based on the analysis of its relationship with the genre of *künstlerroman*; the dialogue between the sociological information pointing to the cultural, moral and ideological problematics caused by the modernization experience specific to Turkish society and the intellectual structure of the text will be analyzed. In this way, the historical, aesthetic and sociological value of the work will be discussed by determining how views regarding Turkish nightlife of the 1940s is reflected in an original text within the boundaries of the *künstlerroman*.

Künstlerroman with its Theoretical Background and Reflections on the History of Turkish Literature

The bildungsroman, focusing on the multifarious stages of the protagonist's experience of maturing his/her personality by discusses the individual and social factors that give acceleration the material and spiritual development of the protagonist in the process of subjectivation, and which ultimately tells the story of the protagonist's becoming a harmonious component of the public order, appears as a genre that bourgeois ideology paved the way for its development. As the bildungsroman is a genre rooted in bourgeois ideology, it also refers to a narrative category that is predominantly subjected to the demand of bourgeois society. According to Georg Lukacs, it is no coincidence that both bourgeois and socialist literature have an affinity for the autobiographical bildungsroman as “both types of society, unlike previous societies, are in a state of constant and dynamic change. A person growing up in these societies has to learn the facts on his own and find a place for himself within that order” (Lukacs, 2000, p. 127). The final stage of the relationship of individual with the bourgeois society, in which s/he has a partial autonomy in the process of constructing his/her personality and determining his/her class affiliation, is the obligation to submit to the yoke of public authority. For the bildungsroman, the reconciliation of hero with the social reality surrounding him is a kind of ontological necessity. Therefore, the stereotypical hero of the bildungsroman is an individual tamed and harmonized by his/her time and society. Additionally, “the sub-genre called artist novels (künstlerroman) emerges as by the end of the 19th century, artist protagonists replace the young heroes taking a step into life with great hopes but then face with reality and become disillusioned” (Parla, 2024, p. 42).

Along with its widely accepted definition in the literature, künstlerroman refers to the genre of “the novel in which the personality of the artist and the artist's existence are treated as the focal problem” (Aytaç, 2003, p. 366). In attempts to conceptualize the künstlerroman genre in depth, the problematic nature of the interaction of the artist individual with his/her environment is emphasized. Thus, according to Hugh Holman, the künstlerroman corresponds to the form of “a novel of apprenticeship in which the struggles of the artist or writer protagonist in the course of his development from childhood to maturity, both in the face of a arduous environment and in accordance with the goal of understanding his/her creative mission” (Holman, 1985, p. 241). It is noteworthy that Holman prefers the term “protagonist” to describe the artist

hero whose struggle is narrated in works belonging to the *künstlerroman* genre. When considered within the framework of its theoretical background, it is seen that the use of this term is not accidental. According to Hakan Sazyek, the protagonist is “the equivalent of the main character in the modernist novel system. Individualized alienation, which is the dominant problematic of the modernist novel, and its important indicator individual anomie, is the sense of disconnection between the individual and the social structure or institutions that force him to conform to his own norms and values” (Sazyek, 2023, p. 358). This sense of disconnection appears as an inevitable parameter in the creation of the novel genre. The depiction of the tensions and conflicts generated by the dichotomic relationship between the individual and society represents the existential purpose of the novel. In fact, “the novel is considered as an epic genre, but it focuses an irresistible conflict between the hero and the world, which distinguishes it from myth or fairy tale” (Goldmann, 2005, p. 19). Aforementioned conflict, shaping the dominant characteristic of the novel genre, is replicated in the *künstlerroman* by distilling it to an intellectual opposition between the artist and the social structure. The conflicting relationship between the idealized set of values distinct to the middle class thought by bourgeois society and the portraits of artists who endeavour to reach a certain level of transcendence is the basic trajectory of *künstlerroman*. Unlike *bildungsroman*, the artist in the *künstlerroman* prefers to become isolated by not adopting the harmonious personality that social values compel him/her to have. This voluntary isolation indicates to the tendency of absolute alienation that the artist develops in the face of social impositions and his choice to attribute a value to aesthetics above the crude and limited reality of life. While listing the technical and thematic parameters of the *künstlerroman*, Jale Parla notes the following about the experience of isolation of the artist stereotype created by this genre:

“... In the *künstlerroman*, the values of bourgeois society are negated, art is placed above life, aesthetic values and debates about these values are brought to the main axis of fiction, and a writer or poet is referred as the protagonist. This writer is almost always an unsuccessful writer; as the main plot of the *künstlerroman*, that is, the claim to place art at the center of life, includes the debates on good art and bad art, the artist's sense of being trapped between his conscious efforts and the call of the unconscious, an increasingly personal journey through which the artist will fully define themselves, unique and solely their own, and the artist's maturation process, and therefore the novel is about the personifications of writers who have not reached perfection” (Parla, 2024, p. 42).

The bildungsroman is a genre in which the dominant discourse of liberal culture, which sanctifies the individual, paves the way for its development; on the other hand, künstlerroman heralds the collapse of liberal ideology and bourgeois relationships. The image of the crushed in spirit and alienated artist of the künstlerroman is a representative figure destined to be dissatisfied in order to symbolize this decadence.

The first and prominent work regarding the künstlerroman genre in the history of Turkish literature is the *Mai and Siyah (Blue and Black)*, published in 1896 by Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866–1945), the most important novelist of the Servet-i Fünun generation. In fact, it is not coincidental that the first representation of the künstlerroman in Turkish literature is encountered in this period. Influenced by the decadent sensibility emerged in France, the novelists of Servet-i Fünun developed a morbid, centimantal and pessimistic feeling under the influence of the censorship policy instrumentalized by the regime of oppression imposed by Abdülhamid II. For these literary artists, who were prevented by the political conjuncture from engaging in politics, art represents the highest ideal. The conflict between imagination and reality, which is frequently encountered in the works of Servet-i Fünun novelists, generally results in disappointment. “Their inability to deal with social issues made them stay indoors, interested in nature and the poor, and led them to elaborate on all emotions, especially the feeling of pity. Pessimism, melancholy, shun, desire for solitude, distraction, depression are common themes in their prose and poetry” (Enginün, 2017, p. 328). These themes are also the basic themes of the künstlerroman. Ahmet Cemil, the idealist artist of *Mai and Siyah*, who is doomed to experience an absolute tragedy by failing to realize his dream of becoming a successful and famous poet, is the spokesperson of his generation on the intellectual plane and exemplifies the romantic artist image of the künstlerroman. This image is markedly different from the archetype of the sage Eastern writer, idealized in many respects, encountered in the works of Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844–1912), one of the founders of the Turkish literature of the modernization period and a member of the preceding generation. The representation of the Künstlerroman in Turkish literature should be discussed on the basis of the distinction between the authors' attitudes towards modernization and westernization movements. The ideological agenda of modern Turkish literature, which Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar states began with a kind of “crisis of civilization” (Tanpınar, 1977, p. 101), was constituted by the search for the attitude

to be adopted in the face of the experience of westernization. The representations of artists in the works of conservative novelists, who favored a cautious transformation in the process of integration with Western civilization, appear as idealized author figures who have a credible identity in the eyes of the large masses of people they lead and who have achieved perfection in every respect. The fictionalization of these heroes as idealized figures is the direct result of the need to preach the conservative suggestion that one should be cautious in the face of modernization/westernization movements to the public. As these figures monopolized the authority to determine the limits, direction and nature of the westernization adventure experienced by Turkish society. Therefore, unlike the typical heroes of the *künstlerroman*, they considered art as a kind of pulpit of indoctrination rather than a sublime refuge. It is possible to evaluate the prominent artist figurations in this context in the works of writers such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Mizancı Murat (1854–1917) and Peyami Safa (1899–1961). The presupposition of the Orientalists that Western civilization is soulless; useful like a calculator but far from humanistic behaviors, that great economic accomplishments and high technology can be achieved with this way of thinking, but that it is “incapable of grasping the most important things in life because it is devoid of spirituality and far from understanding the human suffering” (Buruma and Margalit, 2022, p. 63) is also embraced by these authors. The following words spilled by the ideal writer hero of Peyami Safa's novel *Bir Tereddüdin Romanı* (*A Novel of Hesitation*) to Vildan, an *alafranga* bohemian artist type portrayed as a morally deprivileged, pejorative figure, are quite remarkable:

“The whole of Europe feels the same hesitation: Germany, France and England are going between right and left wing. National and international movements, religious and secular movements, Catholic marriage and free love movements, moral and immoral movements are dividing the human will and making it hesitate. That's why marriages are declining and young people are hesitating; marriage is to believe in at least one thing. In this mad, rabid age of hesitation and doubt, marriage is the institution feeling tremors the most” (Safa, 2020, p. 169-170).

Aforementioned citations contain discourses that prove that the perspective of conservative Turkish intellectual on the experience of westernization is based upon Occidentalism principals, and that are capable of representation due to the common characteristics of their derivatives. Although their heroes rely on artistic figurations, it is not pos-

sible to evaluate these texts within the normative stereotypes of the *künstlerroman*. In the works of authors adopting the idea that the modernization experience should be constructed in a way that constitutes a radical break from the epistemological accumulation of the traditional Turkish-Islamic civilization, the conventional hero figuration of the *künstlerroman* is encountered. Rather, these figures, appearing as representatives of modernist and postmodernist literary orientations, develop a more fundamentalist perspective of westernization by excluding ideological engagement from artistic activity. In other words, “unlike the first category of perfect and active author figurations who see the inevitability of change and develop ideas to control and manage cultural transformation, these second category of writers are incapable and passive, far from controlling and managing suggestions and tendencies, and in the face of the inevitability of change, they envision not a controlled change but a total metamorphosis” (Parla, 2024, p. 13). The common characteristic of the artistic heroes of the leading writers of twentieth-century Turkish fiction, including Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–1962), Oğuz Atay (1934–1977), Vüsat O. Bener (1922–2005), Bilge Karasu (1930–1995) and Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952), is to transform through metamorphosis and the inability to hold on to the conventional values created by their contemporaries. The notion put forward by these novelists, who saw the novel as an aesthetic preoccupation aimed solely at itself, away from being an apparatus of indoctrination charged with being the mouthpiece of political ideals and ideological considerations, was deemed too avant-garde by the socialist intellectuals of the young Republic. In Oğuz Atay's *Tutunamayanlar*, the figure of the intellectual alienated from his time and society, defined by a metaphorical expression that effectively instrumentalizes irony, is portrayed in the following terms:

“*Tutunamayan* (disconnectus erectus): A clumsy and cowardly animal. There are even human-sized ones. At first glance, they resemble humans in appearance. They do not have family organization. After birth, mother, father and offspring go to separate places. They do not know how to live collectively and have not been seen to unite against external dangers. Their instincts are not fully developed. They do not know how to protect themselves. However – due to their gene mimicry - they do get into fights, imitating the fighting of other animals. No disconnectus erectus has ever been seen to defeat another animal in a fight. Since they live close to cities, it is high time to thought about preventing their numbers from decreasing by keeping them inside the city, in a fenced park for the disconnectus erectus” (Atay, 2008, p. 194-151).

The representation of the Künstlerroman in the history of Turkish literature establishes focus on narratives in which the “disconnected” writer or poet individuals live a life of absolute isolation, considering artistic production as an existential necessity by disconnecting from social reality. The narrator of Vüsat O. Bener's *Bay Muannit Sahtegi's Notları* shares the fate that the “disconnectus erectus” described above is destined to experience. In the work, which tells the story of a retired lawyer's writing experience while he is alcohol addict, there is a narration of selected excerpts from a life devoted to bodily pleasure and intellectual preoccupation. The narrator, who is disconnected from his time and society in many respects, believes that “writing, not speaking, will save [him]” (Bener, 2022, p. 11). This belief is a dominant motif in other precedents of Künstlerroman. Also in the narratives of Sait Faik, who brought to Turkish literature the depiction of ordinary situations and details of the daily reality of ordinary people, we encounter that the dominant tendency of the idealized artist profile is to purify through writing. In his fictions with autobiographical elements, the narrator glorifies art and the act of writing, just like his counterparts, in the face of the social reality he has difficulty adjusting to. The persistent attitude of the author's narrator, “No one can remove the decision to make a living with his writing alone from his mind” (Abasıyanık, 2021, p. 13), is the product of the absolute dedication of the defeated and helpless artist figuration to aesthetic production. This state of devotion expresses an absolute commonality that appears in different precedents of the genre of the Künstlerroman from various periods in the history of Turkish literature.

However, at this juncture one matter should be emphasized. The local works of Künstlerroman, which take their subject matter from the communal order of art circles or the conflict between the aesthetic ideals of artists and the social structure to which they belong, witness the absolute hegemony of male heroes. Among the aforementioned works, it is not possible to come across any work that appoints a female artist as the protagonist. It is also observed that almost all of the heroes constituting the figurative characters of these texts are literary men. Despite the modern achievements of the secular revolution, Turkish society's failure to completely eliminate the remnants of the legacy of Islamic culture, which prohibited engagement with the plastic arts, may also have contributed to this situation. From this point of view, it can be said that the prioritization of Künstlerroman of masculine domination and its

contentment with treating literary activity as the sole artistic preoccupation constitute a remarkable thematic uniformity in Turkish literature. Nahid Sırrı Örik's work *Yıldız Olmak Kolay Mı?* breaks this monotony by presenting stage life from the perspective of a young female soloist and represents the most original and marginal example of the artist novel in the history of Turkish literature.

The Story of a Young Woman Who Brought the Künstlerroman to the Stage: *Yıldız Olmak Kolay Mı?*

Nahid Sırrı Örik's second novel, *Yıldız Olmak Kolay Mı?*, which is one of the works that affected its essence in terms of the development of the genre of *künstlerroman* in Turkish literature, was published in Tanin newspaper in 1944. Living in cities such as Paris, Vienna, Rome, Berlin and Copenhagen between 1915 and 1928 (Kurdakul, 1985: 482), Nahid Sırrı's first story *Zeynep, la Courtisane* (Necatigil, 1989: 249), published in *Les Oeuvres Libres*, deals with the journey of a female hero, just like the novel *Yıldız Olmak Kolay Mı?* It is possible to understand from Nahid Sırrı's works that special importance is attributed to female protagonists. In his work *Kadınlar Arasında (Among Women)* (1941), the author describes the women in his family, and in his narratives we encounter plots in which weak male heroes are consumed by strong women. According to İnci Enginün, "the reason why the author includes strong, even destructive women in his works may be due to the existence of strong women in his own family who can easily cope with thousands of problems" (Enginün, 2018, p. 332). The female protagonists we encounter in Örik's works are often portrayed as powerful figures. Women who do not have this privilege are portrayed as powerful individuals participated in the struggle for power as active figures and who are characterized by their actionist personalities. This value that the author attributes to the female image has led him to embody an unique work that creates a different perspective to the *künstlerroman*.

Unlike the conventional precedents of the *künstlerroman* in Turkish literature, the work centers on a female voice artist candidate as the protagonist figure. Another feature that distinguishes the novel from its counterparts is that it contains the story of a voice artist emerging as a product of the popular culture environment instead of any poet or writer. Hayriye Hanım, who is known as *giglet*, lives a very modest life with her daughter Selma in their house in the Beşiktaş which is a district of Istanbul. In the first part of the novel, there is a scene in which Selma tells her mother that she has quit her job at the company owned by Ali

İlhami Bey. Selma has left the company, where she worked as a typist for only ten days, because her boss, Ali İlhami Bey, has proposed her for marriage. The decision to raise Selma as a singer capable of becoming a star is made possible thanks to the conversation her mother Hayriye Hanım has with Kemani Celal, whom she meets on her way down the Abbasaga slope to Beşiktaş. Kemani Celal, depicted as the dearest violinist of one of the most famous saz places¹ in 1940s Istanbul, decides to present Selma, whom he learns from her mother that she has an impressive voice and a stunning beauty, to his boss Hasan Arif as a young starlet. What Kemani Celal tells his boss, Hasan Arif Bey, about Selma's artistic merits reveals the conditions under which one can become a star in Istanbul's stage life:

“The girl doesn't want to be anything. But after talking to her mother and going through my memories of her childhood, I thought we can train her to be a star.’

‘A star... Is she going to be a star tomorrow night?’

‘No, not tomorrow night, but maybe if we train her seriously until the beginning of the winter season.’” (Örik, 2008, p. 35).

Although Selma has been enamored of singing from an early age, she does not dream of becoming a star with her own will. In this respect, Selma is portrayed as a figure who was initially forced to adopt the career that those around her admired for her. It is decided that Selma will start taking lessons from Kemani Celal in order to ensure that she is qualified to be ready to go on stage as a conceived project. This is because she is a rival “to be put up against Seniha Hikmet, who has been spoiled for two years and has become truly intolerable” (Örik, 2008, p. 28). The dialogue between Kemani Celal and Hayriye Hanım, who exchange ideas about whether this passive subject possesses the characteristics of the star cult as a whole, draws attention to the fact that visual appeal is as important as artistic competence in becoming a famous singer. At the heart of the tragedy Selma is threatened with as an aspiring artist is the ontological incompatibility between the destructive competitive conditions of the world she is forced into and her own ideals. This tension constitutes the dominant conflict element of the *künstlerroman*. Selma is on the verge of stepping into a world full of intrigue, a world in which many female singers who dream of fame have

¹ The term “saz place” is an expression used in Turkey, especially in the first half of the 20th century, for musical entertainment venues. This term refers to entertainment venues where bands of musicians playing instruments such as oud, cümbüş, bağlama and violin take the stage.

to settle for the secondary status of being a singer. In this environment where the price of being a star includes parameters such as the ability to adapt to intrigues, moral compromise and aesthetic appeal, Selma tries to maintain her idealistic attitude. Refusing to resort to the help of any instrument other than her voice, which she tries to train through the singing lessons she attends, Selma finds the suggestions that she can compensate for her technical deficiencies with her visual appeal unacceptable (Örik, 2008, p. 39). Selma's renouncing to be content with the privilege of her physical superiority and focusing solely on developing her artistic virtues proves that she is a figure reconcilable with the *künstlerroman's* image of the heroine, who takes it upon herself to attribute an existential value to aesthetic preoccupation. As seen in various precedents of *künstlerroman*, she is portrayed as an individual endeavouring to overcome the psychological pressure of the obstacles she encounters during the process of developing her art. The first obstacle Selma will face while climbing the ladder of fame as a star-to-be will be Madame Kirkor of Armenian origin, the life partner of her future boss Hasan Arif Bey. It is also noteworthy that the ethnic belonging of this opposing force, which is presented as an obstacle to the protagonist figure of the novel, is frequently referred to. Furthermore, It is also possible to read this preference in relation to the author's ideological agenda. Madame Kirkor, drawing portrait that is negated as a whole with both her mental and physical characteristics, appears in almost every passage of the novel as an insulted individual. She is even involved in the thoughts of different characters about each other with the same impression. Hayriye Hanım, while dreaming of Hasan Arif Bey, rants about the anger she has felt for years for “that porky Armenian wife, gross with her beard and mustache” (Örik, 2008, p. 75). It is certain that the caricaturized visual image we encounter in these depictions is attempted to be associated with an ethnic representation. Madame Kirkor's function in the narrative system is to keep Selma away from the attention of her life-partner Hasan Arif Bey. Selma, imagined as a young and beautiful starlet, is an crucial threat for Madame Kirkor, to whom it is possible for Hasan Arif Bey, whose philandering she has no problem tolerating, to lose his heart to her. Madame Kirkor's main concern was that Selma would take advantage of Hasan Arif's financial influence and exploit him. It can be emphasized that Madame Kirkor was partially right in her prediction. Hasan Arif did indeed talked with Hayriye Hanım to let him marry with Selma, whom he was passionately in love with. However, this incident, which constitutes an important breaking point for

the plot of the novel, is also a first step in the construction of the most important dramatic tension element of the narrative. As Selma, who has existed as a passive and isolated future artist until this part of the text, reinforces her personality and artistic ideals with her rejectionist attitude in the face of the offer she is exposed to. With this refusal, Selma also challenged the patronage oppression that was being put on her. The idealistic attitude she adopts during the process of developing her art leads her to reject a patron who is ready to take on her patronage, and transforms her into a revolutionary/marginal figure for her era and society. Selma's words to her teacher Celal are noteworthy in terms of showing how much she is inclined to persevere in her art:

“But to become a star...!”

‘To become a star... We talked about it before. Big advertisements, the stubbornness of a boss to create a star, or...!’

Selma's chest was rising and falling with excitement. ‘Or else... Why don't you continue, teacher? Or else there is a voice, a marvelous voice that will overthrow and dominate everything. However, you don't have that either!’ Tears gathered in her eyes...” (Örik, 2008, p. 82).

Selma's words spilled from her mouth show that she, as a *künstlerroman* subject, is willing to share the common stories of the protagonists of educational and developmental novels. The obstacle that the protagonist faces in the process of keeping her artistic ideals alive is not the pressure created by the sociocultural and moral rules specific to bourgeois society, as seen in Western European novels, but the tax patronage system of Eastern societies. Selma rebels against an institution that has existed for centuries by refusing to obey the absolute authority of a patron who can provide her with the economic influence and social prestige she needs to sustain her artistic activity. The priority of this institution is to fix the normative role assumed by the artist subject within the family to which he or she belongs and to present him or her to the masses with an identity subjected to the control of the protector. Weber emphasizes this aspect when he evaluates patrimonialism as the adaptation of the patriarchal household relationship in Eastern societies to the masses (Weber, 2008, p. 61). The equivalent of the sultan or the ruling elite, who appears as the protector of the poet in the tradition of classical literature, in 20th century Turkish society is the civilian capitalist. Selma, as a woman and a stage actress, is a subject who tends to break this cycle. However, this subject who did not initially dream of becoming a star, decides to watch Seniha Hikmet, whom she is preparing to replace herself, at the saz place where she performs in order to provide the motivation she needs to overcome the despair caused by the

marriage proposal she receives when she is on the verge of stepping into the world she is forced to be a part of.

The night she watches Seniha Hikmet at the saz place run by Hasan Arif Bey constitutes the turning point creating the real stimulating effect on Selma. The social environment in which she participated also helped to reveal a very important component of Selma's personality that had remained hidden until then. Her observations of stage life encouraged Selma, who was being groomed as a starlet, to continue developing her art. This turning point recalls the importance that W. J. Harvey attributes to the network of human relationships in which the novel's character is placed. According to Harvey, "much of our personality can be illuminated in our relations with other people" (Harvey, 2010, p. 177). This is also true for the heroes of the novel. Indeed, according to Hermann Broch, the primary function of the novel genre is to clarify the anonymous, obscured existential integrity of the hero (Broch, 1975, 204). The distinctive qualities of Selma's personality, her uncompromising loyalty to the perspective of artistic development, her willpower and perseverance, become visible only when she starts to become part of stage life. Paradoxically, however, the more she socialized, the more isolated she becomes. The reason is that Selma is forced to make compromises that make it possible for her to conform to the moral and cultural standards of the social environment with which she comes into contact. The resistance she shows against the standards imposed by the established order leads her to isolation. For the thematic structure of the *künstlerroman*, which Lukacs calls "the novel of disappointment", the process of isolation is a kind of absolute fate:

"Loneliness is neither accidental nor the fault of the individual in the novel of disappointment; it is an indication that the longing for the essence will always take one out of the world of social structures and intimacies; it is an expression that intimacy is only possible on the surface of life and only through compromise" (Lukacs, 2007, p. 138).

The understanding that Selma has a multi-layered personality and a temperament prone to taking refuge in her inner self can be grasped by emphasizing the problematic nature of her relationship with her environment. With her longing for her own self and essence, she steps out of the world of social structures and becomes lonely. The contact she established with the social reality surrounding her also led Selma to realize how inclined she was to devote her life entirely to her artistic development. Further development foreseen by this realization is the process of isolation that emerges as an inevitable necessity for the idealist

artist prototype. The aforementioned process of isolation is also a factor making it possible to depict the artist personality in depth. However, the elements deepening Selma's artistic personality in the novel are not detailed psychological analyses or the revelation of a deeply penetrated state of consciousness through the technique of interior monologue. The narrator is content with revealing Selma's personality, which signifies her dedication to her art, through a few inconspicuous actions, words and gestures. The protagonist of the novel is, in James Wood's words, a portrait that "the narrator lifts and moves with a few brush strokes" (Wood, 2000, p. 70). Therefore, despite her flat character appearance, Selma is a figure whose psychological content, ideals, aspirations and desires the reader can grasp as a whole. However, what makes Selma an interesting and original hero of the *künstlerroman* is that she dares to struggle not only with the artistic environment she tries to become a part of, but also with the feudal social values of her time as a revolutionary individual. At the center of this struggle is "sexual morality", which is a kind of taboo for the traditional Turkish family structure.

Despite her artistic and physical virtues, Selma is aware that the prerequisite for her to achieve star status is to respond positively to Hasan Arif's marriage proposal. However, as a young and beautiful woman, she refuses to let the first man she will have a relationship with be "a rough, fat, fifty-year-old man" (Örik, 2008, p. 127) who will offer her the opportunity to become a star. Having her first sexual experience with Cevat Servet, a literature student she has been seeing for a while, goal of Selma is to become Hasan Arif Bey's mistress. With this act reflecting her rebellion against the imposed gender role, Selma underlines the fact that she realizes that her art is the only means that makes her strong. Selma says the following to Hasan Arif Bey, whom she meets after her first sexual intercourse:

"Now, when I sing, I listen to myself as if I were a foreign person. The presence of this voice, which resembles a second being, prevents me from being a woman who sits at home and sewing while waiting for her husband. Yes, this voice has become a second being inside me. It has more necessities, domination, desires and wishes than me. I could have imprisoned myself within four walls, but this voice would not consent let me. I do not have the will to turn back from this new path that you have dragged me to, and to accept to live as a lady at home" (Örik, 2008, p. 139).

Selma's words, which can be interpreted as a kind of feminist manifesto, reflect the determination of a progressive female individual seeking to transcend the imposed gender role through her passion for

her art. The function of the female image, shaped by the traditional values of Turkish society, is limited to fulfilling the doing houseworks, being a faithful wife and obediently serving the continuity of the lineage. Selma, on the other hand, opposes the restraining her function as a woman to domestic obligations by obeying the call of her inner voice inviting to devote her existence to her art. Selma's realization of this goal depends on proving her artistic maturity. Therebeside, she informs Hasan Arif Bey, in whose casino she will perform, that she has agreed to be his mistress. However, her acceptance to be the mistress of her boss is basically a revolutionary behavior. As a matter of fact, with this behavior, Selma not only refused to be the wife of her boss, whose help she needed while becoming a star, but also gained the freedom to have a voluntary union with the young man she fell in love with. Selma's attitude is reminiscent of the views expressed by feminist theorists about the relationship between women and masculine authority. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "woman, although she roughly accepts the superiority and authority of men and worships their gods, from a more general point of view, resists male domination step by step; this is where the curiosity of running afoul, which is attributed to women, comes from" (Beauvoir, 1978, p. 26). Selma's decision enabling her to resist the patriarchal order is her willingness to leave both men in her life behind for the sake of her artistic ideals. As a woman destined to have status and power, Selma "knows all the weaknesses of the male order and never misses an opportunity to expose them" (Beauvoir, 1978, 26). For her passion for art and her aesthetic development, Selma sacrifices both her love and the conventional moral system of the society she belongs to. Selma, considering the traditional loyalty to men as a burden for her artistic development, carries the feminist struggle trajectory to the *künstlerroman*. Her struggle against the dominant artistic environment of her age, in which values, norms and institutions are shaped by patriarchal domination, not only leads Selma to absolute loneliness but also makes her a problematic individual. Selma's development as a star candidate contains both parameters. Selma not only turns into a problematic individual with her identity as an artist, but also develops to a level of artistic competence that will enable her to reach the level of artistic competence that will impress even Seniha Hikmet, whom she is put up against as a rival, with her voice (Örik, 2008, p. 206).

One of the most important characteristic of the *künstlerroman* is the tendency to define the artist individual, whose various stages of development are described, through the sense of inadequacy dominating his/her mood. Selma, similar to other *künstlerroman* heroes, dreams of achieving aesthetic perfection despite her talents. Her desire to always take her art one step further encourages Selma, who is “clearly informed that she can only become a star if she can sing in a very methodical way because she does not have a loud and big voice” (Örik, 2008, p. 48), to work for days without leaving her house. The constant sense of inadequacy and incompleteness she felt gave Selma the motivation to dedicate herself to her artistic development. This feeling will also be the main cause of the tragedy Selma will experience. On the first night she performs in the casino run by Hasan Arif Bey, Selma fails to show the sultry, light-hearted, and libertine demeanor that the customers demand from a starlet, and the protest to which she is subjected makes the emotional disconnection that will eventually lead her to death inevitable. This fate to which the protagonist of the novel is cannot escape overlaps with the eternal fate of the image of the artist, whose struggle in the *künstlerroman* usually ends in disappointment.

The salient point here is that Selma is the subject of an unfamiliar field of struggle with her identity as a *künstlerroman* hero. The stereotypical artist subject of the *künstlerroman*, which we encounter in Western European literary traditions, is problematic as it denies the dominant values of bourgeois society. However, Selma is not confronted by an institutionalized bourgeois class against which she has to engage in an existential struggle. The fundamental cause for this is that Turkish society in the 1940s had not yet created a fully-fledged bourgeois stratum. Feroz Ahmad states that the Turkish bourgeoisie was still trying to assert its existence as a “small and undeveloped” (Ahmad, 2014, p. 17) stratum in the 1920s during the War of Independence. This class, which was still in the process of formation, had not yet gained the identity of a powerful, effective and inclusive social actor that would alienate the artist subject from her own cultural values by the 1940s. The opposing force of Selma's struggle to keep her artist identity alive is not bourgeois society, but the culture industry. Due to this distinction, Selma, as the subject of the *künstlerroman*, is not portrayed as a figure who continues her struggle against institutions such as religion and family, which function to perpetuate the ideology of the middle class. The bourgeois class is not the institution that causes the difficulties she encounters in the

process of developing her art. Selma is a member of a society that, without internalizing the bourgeois ideology, has produced a unique artistic environment through the culture industry established with media tools imported from the West. As a member of this society, Selma's field of struggle is the media competition environment caused by the entertainment industry. Selma, prioritizing her efforts to improve her art over the social prestige promised to her, expresses her longing for a modest life (Örik, 2008, p. 81), but becomes isolated as time passes in the face of the destructive conditions of the media competition she is forced to participate in. Success in stage life depends on having strong network in the media world. Unlike Seniha Hikmet, whose position she aspires to, Selma lacks the entrepreneurial temperament that will enable her to acquire this network. The intrigues of the media world are fierce and dirty enough to break her will to struggle. The necessity to develop her art on a medium contrary to the founding values of her personality prepared Selma's catastrophic fate and deprived her of the opportunity to realize her dreams.

Another characteristic that distinguishes the novel from its Western counterparts is that it does not contain autobiographical elements. Harry Levin states that artist novels overlap more with the author's life than developmental novels; this feature makes the *künstlerroman* more realistic (Levin, 1959, p. 42). On the other hand, *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* is a work in which it is not possible to establish any biographical parallel between the protagonist and the author who brought him into existence. In fact, it cannot be claimed that Örik had a direct relationship with stage life. The author's interest in stage life should rather be explained by his passion for music. It is understood from some of his writings that Nahid Sırrı was familiar with *alafranga*² and *alaturka*³ music and made remarkable observations about the adventures of vocal singers as they stepped into stage life.⁴ It is possible to argue that the author, who wrote a work titled *Sanatkârlar* (Artists), consisting of three stories in which he included only stories of artists, was a typical aesthete. According to Kayahan Özgül, who prepared all of Nahid Sırrı's works for publication, the theme of his narrative *Sanatkârlar* is “the personal and artistic problematics of a poet, a sculptor and a

² It is a stereotypical expression meaning “belonging to Western civilization”.

³ It is a stereotypical expression meaning “belonging to Eastern civilization”.

⁴ For more detailed information: Nahid Sırrı Örik, “Alaturka Musiki-Alafranga Musiki Harbi-III, Tanin, Nu: 4454-1461, 21 Eylül 1947.

painter” (Özgül, 2008, p. 7). This shows that Nahid Sırrı attached particular importance to the contemporary art debates of his time and the life practices of artists from different disciplines. The following views expressed in an interview with him provide an insight into the source of his interest in artist novels:

“I would like to embrace the theory that art is for society. However, when I see some people hiding behind the motto “art is for society” and trying to impose as literature some empty things that have no artistic value encouraging no artistic excitement, I have no heart for advocating this theory” (Örik, 1934).

These statements show that the author attaches the same importance to artistic preoccupation in the theoretical context as he does on the fictional plane. While choosing the subjects of his works, Nahid Sırrı prefers to take the local reality of art circles as an axis and suspends the obligation to perform aesthetic production for the public good. In his imagination, artistic production is not characterized as a practice that would guide sociocultural development movements. For him, the artist is an individual destined to experience ontological conflicts with conventional categories shaped by social norms. As a distinctive element of his society, the artist finds his/her deepest tragedy in this conflict s/he is destined to experience. Nahid Sırrı himself experienced this conflict in its most severe dimensions and was largely neglected by the literary canon of his time. The main reason for this neglect is the author's homosexual identity. Nahid Sırrı's sexual orientation not only clashed with the superordinate identity based on the heterosexual, Sunni, White Turkish image idealized by the official ideology of the Republican regime, but also paved the way for his marginalization by the leading literary circles of his time. It is also known that this practice of marginalization sometimes became harassment as well. The most dramatic behaviour of this harassment is when Ertuğrul Şevket tears the pants of the writer, who does not portray a typical male image with his manners, portrait and style (Kemal, 1967, p. 51). The aforementioned behaviour seems to have been realized in order to convey the message that a garment symbolizing masculine power does not suit him. Nahid Sırrı is a figure prone to sympathizing with the female identity. The author wrote his 1928 essay *Kadın Hayatını Canlandırma* (*Revitalizing Women's Life*) under a woman's name, Ayşe Nesrin. It is inevitable to read Örik's preference as a rather marginal move for the Turkish society of the 1920s. This situation also gives us an idea about the possible reason for the author's preference for the stories of female protagonists in his

works. All these information show on which biographical grounds the literary parameters that make *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* the most original work of a *künstlerroman* in the history of Turkish literature developed.

Conclusion

Nahid Sırrı Örik's novel *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* which was published in *Tanin* newspaper in 1944, is the most remarkable work of *künstlerroman* in the history of Turkish literature with its unique figurative characters, unfamiliar artist portraits, marginal themes and conflict elements. Until the publication of *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?*, the *künstlerroman* in Turkish literature was a genre dominated by male artist figurations. In the traditional narratives constructed around these artist profiles, almost all of whom were poets or writers, the literary circles were predominantly at the forefront. An iconoclastic move in the context of the *Künstlerroman* tradition, *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* first of all shakes the foundations of the gender representations that have been repeated in the fictionalization of artist novels in Turkey. The narrative replaces the male literary figure of an aspiring male literary artist with a young woman preparing for stage life, and includes observations on the developmental processes and competitive environments of vocal artists. On the other hand, the narrative constructs the young female artist whose story is the axis of the narrative as a portrait of a woman who cannot reconcile with the idealized value judgments of her society; devoted to her artistic development; and whose aesthetic development journey ends in disappointment. In this respect, the work is faithful to the thematic template of the *künstlerroman*, which is particularly represented in German, English and French literary traditions.

The *künstlerroman* genre has undergone a number of technical and thematic transformations while being adapted to local idiosyncrasies due to the fact that the social reality that gave birth to it has not been personally experienced by Turkish society. The heroes of *künstlerroman* in Turkish literature, just like their western counterparts, become problematic figures by retreating into their inner worlds during their journey of artistic pursuit. However, the opposing force against which these aforementioned heroes struggle during their artistic journey is not bourgeois society, but feudal culture and the climate of religious fundamentalism. Nahid Sırrı's novel *Yıldız Olmak Kolay mı?* adds a new link to this chain of distinction. For it is not the bourgeois society or feudal/religious bigotry that hinders Selma's artistic development as a hero of a *künstlerroman*. Since she could not reconcile with the norms and

values of the entertainment industry, developed under the guidance of the culture industry in Turkey in the 1940s, she retreated to her ivory tower and became isolated; she continued her journey of artistic pursuit as a problematic subject. Her journey of search is accompanied by many themes and motifs ranging from gender inequality to media criticism, from the problematic of popular culture to class conflict. Therefore, the novel is a work with lines that go beyond the schematic representation of the *künstlerroman* within the circle of Turkish literature. Despite all these differences, the main message of the novel conforms to the dominant discourse of the *künstlerroman*. This discourse is based on the belief that the impossibility of the idealist artist's reconciliation with social reality is an archetypal condition.

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