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Invoking the Sacred in a Secular Age: Modernist Appeals to the Divine in T. S. Eliot and İsmet Özel

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative study of T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* and İsmet Özel's "Amentü" to examine how modernist poetry refunctions ritual language as an aesthetic and spiritual response to different modernities. Drawing on world-systems theory and the sociology of secularization, the study argues that Eliot and Özel exemplify two structurally distinct but related modern experiences: Eliot writes from within the West's internal fragmentation, while Özel speaks from the periphery of an imposed, Westernizing modernity. These divergent contexts produce contrasting religious modernisms—Eliot's introspective Anglo-Catholic poetics of inward renewal versus Özel's populist Islamic poetics of collective dissent. Both poets employ modernist form—fragment, refrain, montage—to reassert the sacred within secular conditions, yet with opposing cultural motivations. The comparison demonstrates that religious modernism is a transnational phenomenon, not a Western anomaly, and that literary modernism itself adapts to the asymmetries of global modernity. The article concludes by proposing "religious modernist poetics" as a comparative framework for studying faith and form across literary traditions.

Keywords: religious modernism; comparative poetics; secularization; Anglo-Catholicism; Turkish literature; global modernity

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1. Introduction

Modernism in the literature arose at the turn of the twentieth century as a reaction to far-reaching transformations in social order. If we recognize secularization—alongside democracy, the nation-state, and capitalism—as one of modernity's structuring forces, it follows that literary modernism often registers not only a revolt against "established values" but also a critique of secularization's cultural consequences (Taylor 2007; Lewis 2010). This raises a central tension: is modernism primarily an insurgency against inherited conventions, or a resistance to the accelerated disruptions that modernity itself unleashes? In the period marked by competing solutions to civilizational malaise—futurism, Marxism, socialism, psychoanalysis—some writers also persisted with, or returned to, religious traditions. Their works draw simultaneously on devotional inheritances and on the technical innovations of modernist poetics, suggesting that sacred forms and experimental form need not be antagonists (Lewis 2010).

Within this constellation, T. S. Eliot and İsmet Özel stand out. Eliot's long crisis—exacerbated by personal turmoil—culminated in his reception into Anglo-Catholic Christianity in 1927; with *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), this turn decisively reshaped his imagery,

rhetoric, and cultural criticism. Far from a merely private conversion, Eliot's poetics became a vehicle for re-sacralizing a disenchanted age through liturgical cadence, scriptural allusion, and an ethics of attention (Spurr 2010). The move was controversial: some contemporaries read it as cultural reaction, others as a renewal of the modernist enterprise by mythic and theological means. Either way, Eliot exemplifies the paradox of a modernist who criticizes modernity's secular face with recognizably modernist techniques (Spurr 2010; Lewis 2010).

Özel's trajectory, in a distinct yet resonant key, unfolded in 1970s Turkey—a context shaped by assertive secular nation-building and Westernizing reforms. After interrogating his own socialist commitments in the wake of 1968, Özel announced a return to Islamic belief in the poem "Amentü" (1974). The shift quickly made him a standard-bearer for a "new Islamist" poetic, a cultural counterpoint to secular elite sensibilities (Guida 2014; Büyükokutan 2018). Reactions were polarized: admirers hailed a paradigmatic narrative of guidance and renewal; critics decried apostasy and reaction. As with Eliot, the stakes were aesthetic and civilizational at once: Özel channels Islamic concepts, Ottoman-Turkish cultural memory, and an agonistic rhetoric to contest the spiritual and political settlement of secular modernity (Guida 2014).

Comparing these two conversion[1] narratives clarifies how, across West and East, poetic form mediates religious response to modernity's disorders. Globally, the twentieth century brought rapid social change, the erosion of triumphalist progress narratives, and a pervasive existential unease. Some writers answered by returning to religious frames—not as nostalgic ornament, but as resources for re-imagining personhood, community, and time. For Eliot, conversion entails a re-anchoring in Christian orthodoxy and European classicism as an answer to liberal-secular fragmentation. For Özel, it entails elevating Islam as a locus of resistance to Western hegemony and domestic secularism. Yet their kinship is unmistakable: both practice a densely allusive, ritually inflected modernism; both seek to reunite modern consciousness with enduring religious truth; and both leverage poetry as cultural critique aimed at re-enchanting the world (Spurr 2010; Guida 2014).

The purpose of this article is to examine religious modernist poetics through a comparative reading of Eliot and Özel. We analyze their poetry, the narratives of conversion that inform it, and the reception these works have elicited, to show how divine narratives, prayerful forms (e.g., lament, supplication, munâcât, na't), and political theology are reinvented within modernist technique. Methodologically, the study combines close reading and intertextual analysis with scholarship on secularization and conversion in modern literature. Our principal conclusions are twofold: first, both poets transform ritual into poetic action to address spiritual dislocation; second, differences in temperament and political-theological orientation (Anglo-Catholic conservatism versus Islamic populism) generate distinct tonal outcomes—Eliot's poetics of stillness and assent versus Özel's sustained rhetoric of rebellion. More broadly, the comparison challenges linear narratives of modernism's inevitable secularization, revealing instead a transnational pattern in which conversion and tradition catalyze modernist innovation. All translations from Turkish sources are our own unless otherwise noted.

2. Background: Religious Modernist Poetics

Twentieth-century literary culture unfolded under the long shadow of debates on secularization. The classic progressivist paradigm presumed that societies would advance from religiosity to secularity over time; Max Weber's well-known notion of *Entzauberung* (disenchantment) captured this trajectory as a passage from an enchanted world sustained by myth and religious narrative to one ordered by scientific fact and rational procedure (Weber 1946). Subsequent accounts, however, complicated this linear plot. Charles Taylor

contends that entry into a "secular age" is not merely the eviction of religion from public space; it is a transformation of the conditions of belief, within which faith becomes one option among others inside an "immanent frame." In Taylor's view, science did not simply cancel religion; it helped generate new spiritual possibilities. Even amid widespread unbelief, human beings pursue a sense of "fullness," and art and literature can open "a space for the spiritual" even for readers unaffiliated with organized religion (Taylor 2007). Talal Asad likewise warns against treating "the secular" as the natural successor to "the religious." Rather, the secular is a historically contingent formation through which modern power redefines what counts as religion and non-religion—and it unfolds differently across cultural settings (Asad 2003).

These insights matter directly for the present comparison. If secularization proceeds along divergent cultural paths, then the categories "secular" and "religious" cannot be treated as fixed universals when we juxtapose T. S. Eliot and İsmet Özel; they are historically variable positions. In the Turkish Republic—where secularization was a top-down state project entangled with Westernization—the objections of a poet like Özel acquire a distinct valence relative to Western European writers (Berkes 1998; Büyükokutan 2018). Framed by Taylor and Asad, modernist writers did not experience secularization only as declining belief; they registered it as a reconfiguration of the spiritual substrate upon which literature itself draws. Consequently, instead of merely mirroring a secular "spirit of the age," certain modernists attempted to re-imagine the sacred within a disenchanted world. Because modernism already carried a mythic impulse and an appetite for formal experiment, it offered an apt staging ground for this effort.

A growing body of criticism identifies this tendency as a religious modernist poetics. Pericles Lewis argues that major modernist novelists—James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust—pursue the sacred without naming it, recasting aesthetic experience as an alternate route to spiritual encounter. Even when orthodox formulations are avoided, these works cultivate epiphanic instants and sustained quests for meaning, transcendence, or forgiveness that echo religious experience (Lewis 2010). Poetry exhibits analogous patterns. Eliot's early modernist montage diagnoses cultural and existential fragmentation; yet even *The Waste Land* threads explicitly religious references through its collage, and it famously closes with the Upanishadic benediction "Shantih shantih shantih," alongside the *DA* triad from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. After his 1927 reception into the Church of England, Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* elaborate a poetics of prayer, attention, and renunciation grounded in Christian theology. While some contemporaries dismissed this as reactionary, later scholarship emphasizes how Eliot adapts modernist technique to religious ends, rather than abandoning modernism for apologetics (Spurr 2010).

A particularly revealing lens on the nexus of religion and modernism is the conversion narrative. In twentieth-century letters, conversion—turning toward faith after crisis—became a potent imaginative resource for writers navigating a landscape of meaning-loss. As Ann Marie Jakubowski shows, a notable cohort of modernists (Oscar Wilde, Claude McKay, Mina Loy, Hope Mirrlees, David Jones, Eliot, among others) forged a poetics of conversion that resists linear before/after plots in favor of ambiguity, recurrence, and momentary illuminations. In such works, conversion is less a tidy endpoint than a modernist literary event—fragmented, recursive, and formally inventive—thereby unsettling secular modernity's teleologies of progress and closure (Jakubowski 2024). Read through this lens, *Ash-Wednesday* stages spiritual struggle and partial illumination, not triumphal certitude: the poem's litanic refrains and renunciatory syntax enact an ongoing discipline rather than narrate an achieved state (Spurr 2010).

Against this backdrop, İsmet Özel's conversion acquires a distinct profile. In Turkey, "modernism" arrived not as a contemporaneous movement but as a translated and delayed

formation that took shape through literary journals and cultural modernization projects in the mid-twentieth century. As Barış Büyükokutan (2018) shows, Turkish modernism functioned as both imitation and contestation of Western models—its belatedness producing what we might call a reflective or second-wave modernism. Özel's poetics thus participates in modernism's techniques even as it redefines them from a post-1960s Islamic vantage. In the turbulence of 1970s Turkey—often described as a period of low-intensity civil conflict.[2] Özel's public "return" to Islam with "Amentü" (1974) functioned simultaneously as a spiritual declaration and as a repudiation of Marxist, secular-national, and modernizationist paradigms he had previously inhabited. His essays after 1974 articulate a sustained critique of imperialism, capitalism, and the Kemalist project of secularization, recoding his turn as resistance to Western hegemony and to an imported model of secular modernity.[3] Yet the poems themselves stop short of didactic sermonizing. Özel works on the aesthetic plane of modernist verse—free rhythm, dense imagery, ironic allusion, even to Western cultural artefacts—while mounting a counter-secular, Islamic articulation of self and community. In this sense, his practice rhymes with Eliot's: poetic form becomes the site where ritual speech and theological vision are performed rather than merely asserted.[4]

East–West dynamics sharpen the contrast without erasing kinships. Eliot's modernism frequently raids non-Western sources (Buddhist sermons, *the Upanishads*), seeking to refresh a desiccated Western imaginary, but ultimately his metaphysical renewal is anchored in Christian orthodoxy and European classicism. Özel, conversely, continues to read the West after his turn—drawing on Carl Schmitt (Etil 2019) and Martin Heidegger (Kaya 2021, p. 113), among others—yet he insists on Islam as the exclusive ground of truth and value, a stance that inflects both the rhetoric and polemical edge of his later work. The two trajectories thus display a family resemblance—religious modernist poetics as re-enchantment through form—while indexing different political-theological horizons: Anglo-Catholic order and assent in Eliot, versus an agonistic, populist Islamic counter-discourse in Özel. Taken together, these cases complicate any simple mapping of a "secular West" and a "religious East." Rather, they exhibit cross-pressures within global modernity: cosmopolitan intellectual circulation coupled with localized retrievals of religious tradition. Both poets leverage modernist techniques to resist the finality of secular explanations, keeping open the question of transcendence within a century that often claimed to have closed it.[5]

3. Eliot's Long Conversion: *Ash-Wednesday*[6]

Published in 1930, three years after Eliot's reception into the Church of England in 1927, *Ash-Wednesday* is widely read as his "conversion poem,"[7] though its rhetoric resists the neat teleology implied by that label (Spurr 2010). Barry Spurr has shown that Eliot's turn to Anglo-Catholicism was not a sudden Damascus-road epiphany but a protracted and intellectually mediated process, a movement whose texture *Ash-Wednesday* preserves through hesitation, recurrence, and liturgical cadence (Spurr 2010). In Hugh Kenner's canonical account, the poem's devotional gravity is matched by technical scruple: it is "a religious poem which contains no slovenly phrase, no borrowed zeal, no formulated piety," a union of sincerity and modernist craft that marks a decisive stylistic pivot after *The Waste Land* (Kenner 1965, pp. 261–76).

The title situates the poem within the penitential arc of Lent, and Eliot repeatedly draws on Scripture and prayer-book diction as he stages a spiritual itinerary from aridity toward conditional hope (Gardner 1950; Sawyer 2010). The six-part structure opens with the thrice-repeated renunciation, "Because I do not hope to turn again," whose refrain registers the speaker's willed dispossession and, by sheer anaphora, acquires a liturgical rhythm. Critics have long connected this motif of "turning" to Lancelot Andrewes's Ash

Wednesday sermon of 1619—one of Eliot's favorite divines—[8]which distinguishes a first turn (conversion) and a "turn again" (contrition), thereby supplying a theological grammar for Eliot's refrain (Andrewes 1841; Jones 2005). That the opening culminates not in despair but in purgative readiness is underscored by its closing petition, "Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still … Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death," which braids scriptural and Marian intercession into modernist syntax.

Section II intensifies the poem's purgatorial ascent through emblem and allusion. The macabre tableau of "three white leopards" feeding "on my legs my heart my liver" is followed by the Ezekielian question, "Shall these bones live?", staging the stripping of the flesh as a prelude to the possibility of renewal—an anatomy of penitence rather than a rhetoric of triumph. The Marian figure, at once "Blessèd sister, holy mother" and "spirit of the fountain … spirit of the garden," becomes the poem's recurrent icon of intercession and greening grace, often signified visually by "white" and "Mary's colour," blue (I–II, IV). The poem's central movement (III) recasts ascent as a "turning stair," where the speaker wrestles with "the devil of the stairs who wears/The deceitful face of hope and of despair." This dialectic of presumption and acedia will recur, transposed into dramatic form, in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), whose tempters Kenner explicitly reads as developments of the visions "left behind on the Ash-Wednesday stairs." (Kenner 1965, p. 276) Section IV's Marian processional—"going in white and blue, in Mary's colour"—figures the Lenten limen "between death and birth" as a space where fountains are made strong and rocks made cool, signs of desert-garden reversal that preface the climactic petitions of V–VI.

Throughout, Eliot sutures biblical and liturgical phraseology to an idiom of modern spiritual uncertainty. The poem explicitly incorporates forms from the Hail Mary ("Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death") and echoes the centurion's confession from Matthew 8—"Lord, I am not worthy … but speak the word only"—thus embedding the speaker's private crisis within transpersonal, ecclesial speech-acts (Spurr 2010; Matt. 8:8). The closing cadences ("Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood/Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still") reformulate modernist repetition as penitential discipline rather than mere rhetorical device; they are less resolution than rule of life.

Eliot's achievement, then, is not to abandon modernism for devotional plain-style, but to regenerate a recognizably modernist poetics—fragment, refrain, montage—by passing it through ritual forms. In Spurr's phrase, *Ash-Wednesday* is Eliot's "most liturgical poem," yet its liturgy remains inseparable from the exploratory, chastened voice that utters it (Spurr 2010, p. 139). The poem's careful interlacing of Marian intercession, Andrewesian "turning," Dantean ascent, and scriptural echo articulates conversion not as a single victorious moment but as a continuing practice of attention, contrition, and desire. In that sense, *Ash-Wednesday* both culminates and reorients Eliot's early career: the impersonality and corrosive irony of the 1920s give way to a first-person devoutness whose hope is real but provisional, earned in the "time of tension between dying and birth."

4. Crisis of Faith and Dogmatic Resolve in İsmet Özel's "Amentü"

İsmet Özel's poem "Amentü" first appeared in Sezai Karakoç's journal *Diriliş* (Özel 1974)[9], where its publication signaled—publicly and programmatically—Özel's turn from a socialist, engagé poetics to an overtly Islamic horizon. The title itself glosses the poem's theological frame: in Islamic usage, *âmentü* (from Arabic *āmantu*, "I believe") denotes the creed that summarizes the articles of faith (Yavuz 1991).

While unmistakably personal, "Amentü" is not merely private testimony. As Michelangelo Guida argues, the poem catalyzed a broader reorientation in Özel's oeuvre and reception—transforming him, within a few years, into one of the most cited Islamist intellectuals of the period (Guida 2014). Read against the secularizing cultural field of 1960s–70s

Turkish poetry (Büyükokutan 2018), "Amentü" functions as both spiritual declaration and cultural critique: an autobiographical credo that also stages a historical allegory of the Republic's trajectory from militant sacrifice to bureaucratic normalization. Özel himself offers a suggestive folk gloss on his program in *Üç Zor Mesele*, calling it "the 'three Kul huwallāhu and one al-Ḥamd' which the Turkish nation to which I belong recites for succor" (Özel 2014a, p. 12). However customary this formula may be, it also invites a modernist rereading: as a poetics of iterative minimalism in which compact, repeatable ritual units (threefold Ikhlāṣ plus Fātiḥa) are transposed into the poem's serial refrains and montage. In this sense, "Amentü" converts vernacular ritual into aesthetic action, tightening the essayistic critique into a creed-like, formally repeatable structure.

Formally, the poem entwines a first-person conversion narrative with montage: liturgical aphorism, family reminiscence, march lyrics, and commercial slogans are spliced into a fragmentary sequence[10]. The opening remembers a paternal maxim—"İnsan eşref-i mahlûkattır" ("Man is the noblest of creatures")[11]—whose meaning remains opaque to the young speaker until a crisis moment described as a metaphorical suicide ("bir eylül günü bilek damarlarımı kestiğim zaman") yields not blood but "sımsıcak kelimeler"—a figuration of speech/Word displacing mere physiology (Özel, "Amentü"). This scene can be cross-read with Özel's later prose clarification in *Üç Zor Mesele*, where he insists that it was "not a suicide but an attempt at *intibak* (attunement/adaptation)," glossing the threshold as follows: "The aim my attempt chose for itself was to penetrate the valid and operative world" (Özel 2014a, p. 11). The extra-textual testimony complements the poem's existential logic, recoding the September image as a willed transition from mere life-maintenance to a truth-oriented attunement. In later stanzas, Özel counterposes revolutionary euphoria with mass apathy and state loyalism through quoted refrains and state-formation emblems. The notorious couplet "Fly Pan-Am/drink Coca-Cola" punctures the romance of anti-imperialist posturing by showing the depth of commodity capture[12]; elsewhere the speaker recalls a wartime lyric urging Muslims to silence church bells, only to observe that, after victory, a "yabancı" (foreign) voice—"Tanrı uludur Tanrı uludur"—resounds from the minarets, a pointed allusion to the Turkish ezan reforms of the early Republic. The father, once a conscript and later a policeman ("polistir babam/Cumhuriyetin bir kuludur"), emblematises this passage from sacred defense to statist obedience (Özel, Amentü). Özel's own poetics foregrounds a participatory conception of truth. As he notes in the prefatory "Apology" to *Faydasız Yazılar*, "a truth that cannot be shared readily hardens into an idol" (Özel 2014c, p. 10). Read in this light, "Amentü" does not merely assert doctrine; it solicits collective assent by converting ritual speech into aesthetic action—precisely the tendency we have identified throughout as ritual's transmutation into poetic action.

Biographically and stylistically, "Amentü" marks a hinge in Özel's career. Early work associated with *İkinci Yeni* inflection and then with socialist militancy gives way, after 1968, to an introspective crisis that culminates in the 1974 creed poem and, soon after, in essayistic interventions that re-theorize modernity and technique from an Islamic vantage (Guida 2014). Özel himself later suggests that reading his poems in chronological order discloses the signs of this transition (Özel 2014b). Scholars have further traced Özel's intellectual entanglements with European thought—especially a Schmittian vocabulary of "the partisan" adopted by some interpreters to frame his poetic persona and political rhetoric (Alpman 2020; Etil 2019)—as well as resonances with Heideggerian critiques of modernity's technological enframing (Çitler 2020). These cross-referential readings help explain why "Amentü" can yoke a national-historical archive (war songs, Turkish ezan) to a modernist poetics of rupture without relinquishing the aspiration to doctrinal clarity suggested by its title (Yavuz 1991; Akar 2021).

Crucially, the poem reframes "conversion" not as quietistic resolution but as conflict re-tooled: the final movements set before the speaker two ways of life—one "kör batakların çırpınışında kutsal," the other "serkeş ama oldukça da haklı"—and affirm a posture of dignified insubordination, a "tevarüs edilmemiş asalet" coupled with "kadirşinas itaatsizlik." In this sense, "Amentü" deviates from smoother literary penitence scripts: it ends not with serenity but with a militant serenity, redirecting the will from ideological revolution to a theologically grounded dissent against what the poem calls the "yanık yağda boğulan" modern city (Özel, "Amentü"). As (Yıldız and Çengel 2024) emphasizes, "Amentü" thus occupies an emblematic place in understanding how religious nationalism and literary modernism fused in late-twentieth-century Turkey: a text where personal creed, collective memory, and aesthetic experiment converge.

5. Comparison

While both poets deploy modernist techniques—fragmentation, refrain, montage—their historical situations make "modernism" signify differently. For Eliot, modernism emerges within the crisis of early twentieth-century Western humanism; for Özel, it is a later inheritance filtered through translation, secular nationalism, and ideological conflict. Hence "modernist" in this study names not a fixed style but a set of adaptive formal strategies responsive to distinct modernities.

Both poems are modernist announcements of faith by two intellectuals who weather a complex spiritual struggle. Because they arise from distinct authorial temperaments, poetics, and cultural milieus, they exhibit both affinities and divergences. Formally, each work retains the shaping devices of modernist verses while drawing its deep structure from ritual traditions. As its title signals, Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* is explicitly liturgical: it takes its name from the first day of Lent, a penitential hinge in the Christian calendar, and incorporates prayer-book diction and direct petitions—lines from the *Ave Maria*, confessional cadences, and litanic refrains. These materials are not ornamental intertexts but sacramentalize the poem's language, relocating modernist technique within a ritual frame (Gardner 1950; Spurr 2010; Lewis 2010). By contrast, the ritual language of Islam is present in Özel's "Amentü" more obliquely. The very title (*āmantu*, "I believe") casts the poem as a creed-like manifesto, but many Islamic markers appear through allusion rather than quotation: for example, the line about clocks "set to *alaturka* time" gestures to a life ordered by prayer-times; the young speaker's inability to make sense of this temporal order signals his distance from an Islamic rhythm of life. At the same time, "Amentü" is more densely populated than *Ash-Wednesday* with images of world, society, history, and politics. Where Eliot's conversion is primarily interior, Özel's poem proclaims a new world-interpretation, pressing outward from the personal toward the social and articulating a desire to re-sacralize the public sphere (Guida 2014; Tüzer 2020).[13]

Despite their dense religious and literary intertexts, both poems are, at base, personal—indeed confessional—lyrics that pivot on lived experience. This is striking in Eliot's case: famous for the doctrine of impersonality, he adopts a first-person address and often writes in the posture of prayer; the movement from despondency toward cautious hope mirrors his own gradualist path to faith (Kenner 1965; Spurr 2010). Voices do enter and recede, but unlike the polyphonic, mythic personae of *The Waste Land*, they do not displace the poet's largely unmasked penitential "I." If *Ash-Wednesday* reads like a confession, "Amentü" reads like an autobiographical manifesto. Özel makes his own life the poem's material—his father's sayings, his youthful desires and confusions—culminating in the poetic resolution of a long-standing struggle between belief and denial. The poem records an existential crisis that ends in epiphany, but the "suicide" scene functions metaphorically (a renunciation of a former life) rather than as biographical reportage, underscoring the

poem's mythicization of lived experience (Tüzer 2020; Akar 2021). Eliot's speaker bows in contrition; Özel's speaker dramatizes a seizing of truth.

Even as they center on inner life, the poems are legible as documents of their historical conjunctures. In Eliot, the social and political remain in the background. Yet his self-description soon after conversion—"classicist in the literature, royalist in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion"—positions *Ash-Wednesday* within a conservative critique of a 1920s milieu saturated with rival ideologies (Eliot 1928, p. ix; Spurr 2010). The poem's renunciation of "worldly gifts" and its penitential quietism can be read as a counter-gesture to the exuberant culture and liberal-capitalist satisfactions of the decade. The unease with "the world's" texture is palpable but largely implicit (Lewis 2010). In "Amentü", by contrast, the spiritual and the political are inseparable. The poet's tension is simultaneously a conflict between a socialist–materialist horizon and an Islamic one; the montage of images openly critiques the Turkish modernization embraced by both leftists and nationalists, reading it—through a former socialist's eyes yet from an Islamic vantage—as a regime of economic and cultural expropriation. Eliot hints that modernity's socio-economic condition deepens alienation; Özel names modernity as the crisis's cause and locates redemption in an Islamic revaluation of life (Guida 2014; Büyükokutan 2018; Yıldız and Çengel 2024).

The most pronounced divergence appears in their handling of East–West dynamics. Different civilizational coordinates yield different stances toward "the West." In youth Eliot read widely in Buddhism and Hindu philosophy and channeled such sources in *The Waste Land*; *Ash-Wednesday*, however, relocates his answer to modern malaise in the Western Christian inheritance. The poem seeks cultural renewal from within Christendom's ritual memory rather than through explicitly Eastern spiritual recourse (Lewis 2010; Spurr 2010). Özel's poem, by contrast, frames East and West as antagonists. The "West" under critique is essentially the liberal-democratic, capitalist modernity that Eliot also resists, but for Özel the problem reaches deeper—into the founding narratives of the Republic and their secularizing impetus. Hence the War of Independence is imaginarily recast as a contest of bell and *adhan*; later essays will insist that any East–West "traditionalist alliance" against modernity is at best thin and temporary (Özel 2013, p. 101). In short, Eliot's poem recenters a Western sacred core; Özel's poem retrieves an Eastern/Islamic sacred core against a Westernizing order.

Both poets remap modernist means toward sacred ends. Each makes modernist form serve conversion: Eliot fuses allusion, refrain, and fragmentation to a penitential, liturgical cadence; Özel retains the free, imagistic idiom of the *İkinci Yeni* and retools it into a creed-poem that confronts public history. Both sanctify language by drawing on ritual tradition; both speak in a first person that turns modern lyric inward to the point of prayer. Yet the comparative arc diverges in scope: *Ash-Wednesday* renders conversion as a disciplined inward turn under the sign of Western Christian liturgy; "Amentü" renders conversion as a public world-retyping, the reclamation of an Islamic grammar of life against the secularizing West. Together they show that religious modernist poetics can be simultaneously modernist and devout, yet plurally inflected by history, polity, and civilizational horizon. Özel makes this correlation explicit: "Sahip olduğumuz estetik duygu… itikaden bulunduğumuz yerin de az veya çok belirtisidir" ("Our aesthetic sensibility is, to a greater or lesser extent, a sign of where we stand confessionally") (Özel 2014c, p. 71). This explicit claim sharpens the thesis of this paper that, for both Eliot and Özel, form operates as a politics of faith—poetic technique as the practical articulation of creed.

A concise comparison of their poetics can be sketched as follows: Eliot's poetic devices—fragmentation, liturgical refrain, and anaphoric prayer—draw on the rituals of Anglican devotion and Catholic penitence to produce a rhetoric of inward discipline and conditional grace. In contrast, Özel's devices—creedal repetition, direct address, and

rhythmic declaration—stem from Islamic confession and collective remembrance (*dhikr*), transforming modernist disjunction into a rhetoric of insurgent faith and public defiance. If Eliot reconfigures the modernist fragment into a penitential act of order-seeking, Özel converts it into an act of creed, affirmation, and dissent. The two poets thus share a family resemblance in using ritualized language to reclaim the sacred through modernist form, yet their rhetorical effects diverge: Eliot's introspective austerity leads toward submission and inward renewal, while Özel's assertive diction mobilizes belief as cultural resistance.

The foregoing comparison makes clear that the divergences between Eliot and Özel cannot be reduced to differences in temperament, personal belief, or literary inheritance. Their religious modernisms emerge from two fundamentally distinct historical experiences of modernity. Eliot's spiritual discipline and Özel's prophetic militancy are both artistic responses to crisis, yet the crises themselves are not of the same order: one arises from the internal disintegration of a Christian–European civilization, the other from the external imposition of Western modernity on a Muslim society. To account for these contrasts, it is necessary to move beyond textual affinity and examine the structural conditions that shaped each poet's imagination. The question, then, is not only how Eliot and Özel write as modernists, but what kinds of modernities they inhabit—and how those conditions translate into different modes of religious expression. In the sections that follow, the analysis widens its lens from poetic form to historical formation, drawing on world-systems theory and the sociology of secularization to map the asymmetries between center and periphery. This theoretical shift allows us to see Eliot and Özel not simply as two poets of faith, but as representatives of two interlinked worlds of modernity whose literary modernisms developed along diverging, even opposing, trajectories.

6. Different Modernities

The differences identified in the preceding comparative analysis between T. S. Eliot and İsmet Özel cannot be reduced merely to distinctions of temperament or to the theological frameworks they each embraced. The two narratives of religious conversion emerge, in a sense, from opposite poles of history and rely on modernist techniques to respond to two distinct experiences of modernity. Viewed through the lenses of world-systems theory and the sociology of secularization, Eliot and Özel can be understood as representatives of structurally different yet historically interconnected modernities. Eliot, writing as an American at a moment when the world-system's cultural and economic center was shifting from Britain to the United States, symbolically "returned" three centuries backward to his ancestral homeland. In doing so, he both resisted this geopolitical transformation and declared his deep belonging to the same transatlantic system. Özel, by contrast, wrote from its periphery—from a country secularized under Western influence and external pressures. His famous slogan, "Toparlanın, gitmiyoruz!" ("Gather yourselves—we are not leaving!"), articulates a clear stance against Turkey's integration into the Western world-system (Bora 2025). Thus, the modernities each poet experienced, and the attitudes they cultivated in response, diverge accordingly.

Modernity is not a monolithic phenomenon uniformly experienced across cultures; it is refracted through particular historical and social conditions. As Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) has demonstrated, the modern world-system distributes its effects unevenly between core and periphery. Western Europe and the Anglo-American world occupy the core of this hierarchy, serving as the engine of capitalist modernity and imposing its logic on the rest of the world. A process that developed largely organically within the core often appeared in peripheral societies as imported or imposed. This distinction is essential for understanding how Eliot and Özel, following their respective conversions, positioned themselves toward modernity. Eliot wrote from within—and about—the very heart of a

Christian–European civilization he saw as spiritually fractured. The erosion of Victorian moral certainties and the disillusionment following the First World War decisively shaped his vision of the world. Özel, by contrast, articulated the anxieties of a Muslim society forcibly and often aggressively Westernized in the twentieth century. As in many post-imperial and postcolonial contexts, modernization in Turkey was a top-down project: the Republican elite remade the nation in the image of the secular West through reforms in language, law, and education, and, as Özel himself notes in *Amentü*, even by "Turkifying" Islamic rituals. As Talal Asad (2003, p. 13) reminds us, "the secular" is not a neutral, universal process but one historically embedded in particular forms of power. Secularization in Turkey, therefore, differed fundamentally from that in Eliot's England or America. It was intertwined with nationalism and the rejection of the Ottoman–Islamic imperial legacy. This dynamic, especially after Atatürk's death, prompted both conservative and left-leaning Turkish intellectuals to begin questioning the moral and spiritual costs of modernity (Mardin 1991, p. 21).

The poets' distinct responses to modernity can also be illuminated through Charles Taylor's concept of the "immanent frame." In modern Western experience, Taylor argues, transcendence becomes merely one of several possible orientations; belief does not vanish but grows fragile within a disenchanted order (Taylor 2007, pp. 3–23). Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* emerges from this intellectual climate—a disciplined struggle of the secular mind to recover divine grace through effort, prayer, and attention. Özel's *Amentü*, by contrast, is conceived in the opposite direction. He refuses to settle for the limited possibility of private spiritual solace within a secular world; instead, he seeks to break the frame altogether. His aim is not to carve out a protected spiritual space within secularism, but to repudiate secularism's epistemic order itself. Consequently, while Eliot's modernity is internal—his critique closer to self-criticism—Özel's modernity is experienced as invasive and colonizing, prompting a more militant and confrontational rhetoric. The divergent forms of modernity they inhabit therefore shape the religious tones of their modernisms: Eliot, writing from the spiritual exhaustion of the West, turns inward to restore peace through inherited tradition; Özel, confronting an imported secularism, wages a cultural insurrection. The difference between them, then, is not only theological or civilizational but also structural—rooted in the distinction between the core and the periphery of modernity.

Another important axis of difference between Eliot and Özel is class. Eliot occupies the center of the world-system not only as an Anglo-American intellectual but as a member of the very capitalist elite that helped shape that system. Born into a prosperous Boston Brahmin family, he inherited the material stability and cultural capital that allowed him to study at Harvard and later continue his education in Europe (Gordon 1998, pp. 5–6). As Eric Sigg notes, Eliot's New England background was deeply patrician—his family "counted among its members a mayor of Boston, the current president of Harvard, prominent Unitarian ministers, and an array of literary and academic figures" (Sigg 2011, p. 18). This patrician lineage likely reinforced his conservative outlook: within the frameworks he inherited, Eliot sought inner order rather than political upheaval. Situated at the heart of Anglo-American high culture, he pursued spiritual illumination and cultural continuity as the twin goals of his art. Although he endured periods of financial hardship during the First World War (Ackroyd 1984, p. 63), Eliot's poetry betrays little concern with social equality or the collective welfare of the poor. His religious modernism is primarily introspective—a search for metaphysical peace rather than material justice.

Özel, by contrast, came from a lower-middle-class background. As he declares in "Amentü", his father was a police officer, a servant of the Republic. Unlike Eliot, born in one of the major centers of modernity, Özel spent his formative years in provincial towns

before moving to Ankara for secondary education (Tüzer 2020, p. 31). Even in his youth, he displayed a populist instinct that opposed the official Republican narrative in favor of the people's experience (Özel 2014b, pp. 32–33). His years in Ankara coincided with an era of intense politicization in Turkey, when socialist ideas gained significant traction among students. The populist sensibility he cultivated during this period persisted after his Islamic reorientation. In a 2009 television interview, he provocatively reaffirmed this synthesis: "They say I was first a communist, then an Islamist, and now a nationalist. I am still a communist. What else should a Muslim be? The Prophet says, 'Whoever deceives us is not one of us.' Could there be anything more communist than that?" (Habertürk 2009). For Özel, therefore, religious conversion did not signal withdrawal but transformation—the transmutation of an existing revolutionary impulse into a theological idiom. For him, becoming a Muslim signifies a deeper and more radical opposition to the capitalist world-system itself. Rejecting the orthodox Marxist view that capitalism represents a necessary stage preceding socialism, Özel adopts a stance that questions the very civilizational assumptions of the modern order—criticizing even its shared alphabets and calendars as instruments of hegemony and dependency (Demirel and Akalın 2024, pp. 34–35).[14] His Islam is both devotional and insurgent, aimed at the collective redemption of his people. Whereas Eliot's faith works as a stabilizing, consolatory force oriented toward personal reconciliation, Özel's functions as a continuation of revolt, recast as a spiritual program for national renewal. He concerns himself not only with the moral and cultural integrity of the Turkish people but also with their material well-being and the broader question of development.

The asymmetries of modern experience traced above—between Western self-fragmentation and peripheral Westernization—also find expression in the evolution of literary modernism itself. If Eliot's introspective poetics emerged within the metropolitan core of modernity, Turkish writers and poets confronted its arrival as a belated and politically charged import. The structural imbalance between center and periphery thus shaped not only the conditions of belief but also the aesthetic strategies available to artists in each context. In Turkey, where modernization was driven by state policy and shadowed by ideological struggle, modernist experimentation could scarcely remain a private or apolitical act. The following section therefore turns from the individual comparison of Eliot and Özel to the wider literary field, examining how Turkish modernism developed as a delayed yet distinctly political adaptation of the modernist idiom.

7. Different Literary Modernisms

The divergent trajectory of Turkish modernity, as examined in the previous section, also produced a distinctly different literary modernism. Because Turkey's encounter with modernity was belated, imposed, and ideologically contested, its literature absorbed modernist aesthetics in a more politicized and socially charged manner. While Anglo-American modernism often turned inward—probing questions of consciousness, perception, and belief—Turkish writers and poets confronted the traumas of rapid, state-directed Westernization, the contradictions of the independence struggle and postwar integration into the Western bloc, and the pervasive ideological tensions of the Cold War. As a result, Turkish modernism was never purely aesthetic or introspective; it emerged late and political, functioning as a mode of resistance and critique. Authors responded to disrupted cultural continuity and state-sponsored modernization through social allegory and political satire, using modernist form to expose the psychic and ethical costs of Turkey's modernization project.

In fiction, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar stands as a foundational figure of Turkish modernism, adapting the narrative techniques of Marcel Proust and James Joyce to the Turkish

novel (Enginün 2014, p. 347). Tanpınar's oeuvre dwells on the cultural dislocation produced by modernization. In *Huzur* (*A Mind at Peace*), he elegizes the loss of traditional values in a tone of melancholy that borders on lament, while *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (*The Time Regulation Institute*) satirizes the zeal for modernization and its bureaucratic absurdities in state and society alike. A generation later, Oğuz Atay, one of the central figures of Turkish modernist fiction, employed techniques such as stream of consciousness and metafiction to represent the intellectual and emotional confusion surrounding the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. His novels, *Tutunamayanlar* (*The Disconnected*) and *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* (*Dangerous Games*), depict Turkish intellectuals torn between ideologies—nationalism, Islamism, socialism—and unable to find meaning within the new secular order. The long poem "Dün, Bugün ve Yarın" ("Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow") embedded within *Tutunamayanlar*, a modernist pastiche reminiscent of Eliot and Pound, encapsulates this existential fragmentation and the alienation of a generation (Atay [1971] 2014, pp. 114–34). Through these works, Turkish modernist fiction internalized the anxiety of a society divided between its Ottoman heritage and its Western aspirations, making the novel a space of cultural self-critique rather than purely aesthetic experimentation.

In poetry, modernism became associated primarily with the *İkinci Yeni* ("Second New") movement of the 1950s. As Kenan Sharpe observes, this movement "appeared suddenly, almost as a coordinated assault" on the established literary scene, introducing an imagistic, surreal, and syntactically disruptive language that shocked readers and critics alike (Sharpe 2021). A group of young poets—Ece Ayhan, Edip Cansever, Cemal Süreya, Turgut Uyar, and İlhan Berk—challenged traditional forms and diction, creating poems dense with image and ambiguity. Their experimental syntax and opaque metaphors were accused of being incomprehensible (Sharpe 2021), yet this opacity concealed a profound ideological undercurrent. As the prominent critic Mehmet Kaplan argued, the Second New cannot be separated from Marxist thought; beneath its imagist surface lies a desire to transform the existing social order (Kaplan 2014, p. 187). Indeed, many of these poets—especially Süreya and Cansever—later articulated Marxist ideas more openly in their poetry and prose (Süreya 2013, p. 288; Öcal 2013, pp. 58–59). Their imagism thus served a double function: aesthetic rebellion and veiled political dissent during the anti-communist Menderes era, when explicit leftist expression was censored.

After the 1960 military coup, a relatively freer public sphere enabled more explicit political engagement in the literature. The new generation of poets—İsmet Özel, Süreyya Berfe, and Ataol Behramoğlu—grew up under the influence of the Second New but criticized its perceived apoliticism. They called for poetry to articulate ideology directly and began fusing avant-garde modernist techniques with a Marxist worldview. The journal *Halkın Dostları* (Friends of the People), around which Özel and his contemporaries gathered, became the nucleus of a politically conscious modernist poetry movement. Before announcing his turn to Islam with "Amentü" (1974), Özel was already a spokesperson for this new synthesis of radical politics and modernist aesthetics. The political–modernist poetic atmosphere of late 1960s Turkey thus formed the context of his early career. Özel's "Amentü" continued this tendency, transforming a new ideological orientation—Islamic thought—into modernist form, employing montage, repetition, and confessional voice to articulate spiritual and political dissent simultaneously.

Özel was not, however, the first to integrate Islamic themes into modernist poetry. The founder of *Diriliş* (*Resurrection*) magazine, Sezai Karakoç, had been writing modernist verse infused with Islamic sensibility since the 1950s.[15] Although a contemporary of the Second New poets, Karakoç maintained a distinctly religious worldview from the outset, demonstrating that modernist technique could serve not only secular or socialist but also Islamic intellectual projects. His poetry, marked by visionary symbolism and eschatolog-

ical tone, sought to reawaken the metaphysical imagination of the Turkish public within a modernist idiom. Thus, both Karakoç and Özel exemplify how, in Turkey, modernism became a trans-ideological vehicle—a form of expression through which writers of various convictions, from Marxist to Islamist, negotiated questions of identity, spirituality, and modernity.

In sum, Turkish literary modernism developed as a belated and politicized phenomenon. Arriving in the wake of state-driven modernization and Cold War polarization, it translated the psychological and cultural ruptures of Turkish modernity into aesthetic form. Fiction writers turned to modernist narrative techniques to expose the contradictions of Westernization, while poets transformed modernist fragmentation into coded or overt political critique. Unlike the largely introspective modernisms of Europe and America, Turkish modernism remained bound to the social and ideological dramas of its age—an art of reflection that was also an art of resistance.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

Eliot and Özel both exemplify how modernist poetry can reassert the sacred within a secular age, though their approaches diverge markedly. Each poet transforms ritual language and devotional form into modernist verse to confront modernity's spiritual dislocation. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* repurposes Anglo-Catholic liturgy as an introspective discipline of attention and hope, whereas Özel's "Amentü" refashions the Islamic creed into a public declaration of dissent. These parallel yet contrasting maneuvers show that tradition and innovation can mutually invigorate one another in literary modernism, challenging any notion that modernism was destined to be purely secular.

The sharp contrasts between Eliot and Özel stem from the different faces of modernity they encountered. Eliot, writing from within the West's own fragmentation and disillusionment after World War I, turned inward to seek renewal through an inherited religious framework. His conversion yielded a meditative poetics of stillness and assent—a quest for inner order rather than social upheaval. Özel, by contrast, experienced modernity as an external imposition—Turkey's top-down Westernization and aggressive secularism—and responded with a militant poetics of resistance. Re-embracing Islam became for Özel a way to repudiate the imported secular-nationalist order and to inspire collective renewal. Thus, what in Eliot remained a personal, penitential modernism emerged in Özel as an insurgent, politicized modernism. In other words, a Western modernity of internal crisis versus a peripheral modernity imposed from without gave rise to correspondingly introspective and politicized literary forms.

By comparing an Anglo-American modernist with a Turkish modernist, this study underscores the global diversity of religious modernism. Placing Eliot and Özel in dialogue reveals that the impulse to reassert the sacred was present across cultural and geographical divides. This juxtaposition highlights why the comparison is meaningful: it reveals both a family resemblance in how modernists re-engage religious tradition and a sharp divergence shaped by context. In doing so, the analysis moves beyond Eurocentric narratives of literary modernism and sheds light on a broader transnational phenomenon. Religious modernist poetics thus emerges as a productive analytic category for comparative literature—one that captures how writers from different societies reinvent sacred forms within modernist aesthetics to address their respective modernities.

Finally, this inquiry's broader implications point toward new directions for comparative literary studies. It invites a reappraisal of modernism's relationship with religion: far from being uniformly secular or confined to one culture, modernism often involved creative negotiations with faith and myth. Future studies might examine other faith-informed modernist works and conversion narratives across diverse traditions. For example, schol-

ars could compare religious modernist expressions in South Asian, Middle Eastern, or Latin American literatures, thereby testing whether the pattern observed here—conversion and tradition catalyzing formal innovation—constitutes a wider global trend. Interdisciplinary collaborations with religious studies and history could further enrich our understanding of how the literature mediates spiritual experience in modernity. By embracing the transnational scope of religious modernist poetics, scholars can continue to explore the multifaceted dialogue between modernism and the sacred.

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Notes

1 On conversion and mysticism, we draw on William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which defines conversion as the unification of a "divided self" through gradual or sudden "self-surrender," and describes mystical states by their ineffability, noetic character, transiency, and passivity (James [1902] 1985, Lect. IX–X, XVI–XVII). James's pragmatic injunction to judge "fruits, not roots" is especially germane here: both *Ash-Wednesday* and "Amentü" can be evaluated by the forms of life and artistic practice they engender, rather than by doctrinal genealogy alone.

2 Analogous to Italy's "Years of Lead," political violence pervaded everyday life in Turkey throughout the 1970s, from the student mobilizations of 1968 through the military coup d'état of September 1980. Violent confrontations—and, at times, terrorist attacks—occurred among the ultranationalist *Grey Wolves* (associated with the Turkish–Islamic Synthesis), the Islamist *Akıncılar* movement, and numerous Marxist organizations fragmented into Maoist and Stalinist factions.

3 In *Üç Mesele* (Three Issues), written after his religious conversion, Özel gathers his reflections on three interlinked themes: technique, civilization, and alienation. In a distinctly Heideggerian register, he argues that technique is not merely a set of tools but a formative horizon that structures individual perception and social values. He further contends that genuine civilizational renewal requires a return to a conception of civilization grounded in Islamic principles. Finally, he extends the Marxist concept of alienation beyond its economic register to encompass spiritual and cultural estrangement. See: (Özel 2014a).Drawing on his reading of Hegel's schema of alienation, Özel sketches a local/Islamic line of critique against the conceptual spine of "secular modernity." In his précis of Hegel, the equivalence of the Absolute with Reason slides into a modern ideal of immanence—reconciliation achieved through the subject's absorption into a rational totality—which Özel pointedly resists. Accordingly, his poetic program aims not at "adaptation to the outside" (dışarıya intibak) but at attunement to truth (hakikate intibak), a distinction that underwrites both his critical prose and the creed-like poetics of "Amentü" (Özel 2014a, pp. 124–25).

4 Özel roots poetic practice in an ethics of wording: "Şahsiyetimizin Müslüman şahsiyeti haline gelmesi … her sözün ehemmiyetini idrak ile kazanıldı" ("Our becoming a Muslim personality … was achieved by realizing the significance of every word") (Özel 2014a, p. 13). This maxim grounds the poem's creed-like diction as ethical regimen: ritual utterance (āmentü) becomes poetic utterance under a shared discipline of accountability.

5 Chapter Five of Dr. Fırat Ender Koçyiğit's work traces T. S. Eliot's influence on İsmet Özel, documenting Özel's explicit references to Eliot not only as a poet but also as a critic and public intellectual. Beyond citation, the chapter argues that Özel assimilates aspects of Eliot's form and theme, adapting them to his own poetics and intellectual horizon. The dissertation does not, however, stage a direct comparison between "Amentü" and *Ash-Wednesday*. Instead, it identifies more oblique resonances of *Ash-Wednesday* in Özel's corpus: the reiterated interrogative "Kimdi?" ("Who was he?") addressed to the Prophet in "Naat" (which recalls Eliot's patterned, litanic repetitions); the lynx and "turn/turning-point" imagery in "Of Not Being a Jew", suggestive of Eliot's leopards and "turning stair"; and antithetical phrasing used to name the "embrace" the speaker seeks—"Bir

kucak sadece genç ve diri değil/bir kucak sadece yaşlı ve yorgun değil" ("An embrace not only young and vigorous/not only old and weary")—which echoes the balanced paradoxes of *Ash-Wednesday* ("Lady of silences/Calm and distressed/Torn and most whole"). See: (Koçyiğit 2025).

6 All quotations from T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* and İsmet Özel's "Amentü" used in this article are taken from (Eliot 2023) and (Özel 2012), respectively.

7 Although *Ash-Wednesday* is the first of Eliot's poems to treat the theme of religious conversion, it is by no means the only one. The "still point" motif developed in *Four Quartets* (1936–1942) is likewise deeply connected to the poetics of conversion and spiritual renewal. For an excellent study of this theme, see MacKendrick (2019).

8 For Eliot, Lancelot Andrewes embodied the Elizabethan via media at its intellectual and spiritual height: a bishop whose sermons and *Preces Privatae* unite humanist learning with liturgical devotion and make the Church of England "worthy of intellectual assent." Eliot praises Andrewes's prose for its ordonnance, precision, and "relevant intensity," contrasting his disciplined, Church-anchored voice with Donne's more personality-driven rhetoric; Andrewes is, for Eliot, the first great preacher of the "English Catholic" Church. In this sense Andrewes serves Eliot as both historical authority and stylistic-theological model—an exemplar of how doctrine, prayer, and exacting language can converge to yield contemplative, enduring Christian eloquence. See (Eliot 1964, pp. 331–43)

9 Of particular relevance to T. S. Eliot is the paratext of the *Diriliş* issue in which İsmet Özel's "Amentü" first appeared. The lead essay by Sezai Karakoç extols Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot as "the last great poets" of the modern world, framing them as exemplary figures for a spiritually renewed literature. Immediately before Özel's poem, the issue includes a Turkish translation of Eliot's lecture "The Unity of European Culture," while immediately after it appears a Turkish translation of Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night." Taken together, these placements indicate that, in the mid-1970s, the *Diriliş* circle—and by extension the Turkish Islamist revival—regarded Eliot and his modernist contemporaries with exceptional esteem, treating them not only as major poets but also as intellectual touchstones in the project of reconciling modern art with moral and spiritual seriousness. See (Diriliş 1974)

10 Ataol Behramoğlu notes that Özel "çok erken yaşlarda şiirde 'laboratuvar çalışmalarının' önemini anladığını" and "meslek sırrı gibi biçim çalışmaları yaptığını"—i.e., that he grasped early on the value of laboratory-style formal experimentation (Behramoğlu and Özel 1995, pp. 13–14). This first-hand testimony buttresses our thesis that "Amentü"'s overtly creedal program is borne by a rigorously modernist poetics of form.

11 While the maxim is frequently assumed to appear verbatim in the *Qurʾān*, it is better understood as an interpretive distillation of Q 17:70 (al-Isrāʾ)—"We have certainly honored the children of Adam". See: (Sümer 2023)

12 Özel explicitly theorizes a "religion of humanism" in his essays and even speaks of its "amentü." "Bu okuduklarınız hümanizm dininin 'amentü'südür … hümanist kendini bir çözüm getirici olarak görür" ("What you are reading is the 'creed' of the religion of humanism … the humanist sees himself as a bringer of solutions") (Özel 2014c, pp. 89–90). This helps explain the poem's strategic coupling of commercial slogans with the title's creed form: the lyric converts extra-poetic critique into aesthetic ritual, countering the secular catechism of modern humanism.

13 A mnemonic axis already structures Eliot's "Dry Salvages", where "the river" is figured as "a reminder/Of what men choose to forget" (Eliot [1943] 1974, "The Dry Salvages," I.8–10). Özel's essays explicitly transpose this memorial logic into a critical-modern key: the "river" becomes a mnemonic counter-force within a world habituated to amnesia, so that Eliot's remembrance/forgetting poetics is recast in Özel as a mode of critical anamnesis—a remembering that resists secular modernity's erasures (Özel 2013).

14 İsmet Özel's fundamental opposition to the West is striking. It marks a sharp departure from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century generation of Islamist intellectuals in Turkey—such as Mehmet Âkif—who sought to adopt Western science and technology while preserving Islamic morality. In contrast, Özel's rejection of Westernization extends even to its symbolic instruments: he continues to oppose the adoption of the Latin alphabet and publishes his own works using what he calls the Türk Alfabesi (Turkish Alphabet), based on the Ottoman script. With this stance, Özel distinguishes himself not only from secular modernists but also from other Islamic modernist poets such as Sezai Karakoç and Cahit Zarifoğlu. Yet, his choice to write in modernist forms rather than in classical Ottoman or folk meters (though he openly admires Turkish minstrel poets such as Karacaoğlan) is especially noteworthy.This paradoxical combination of formal innovation and spiritual conservatism may be illuminated by a *hadith* he cites in his *Kırk Hadis* (forty *hadith*) compilation, listed as number seven:

> "Her kim İslam içinde güzel bir çığır açar ve bu güzel çığır kendisinden sonra da takip edilip sürdürülürse, kendi sevaplarından hiçbir şey eksilmeksizin onu sürdürenlerin sevaplarının benzeri kendi lehine yazılır."
>
> "*Whoever inaugurates a good practice within Islam, and it is followed after him, will receive a reward equal to that of those who act upon it, without their reward being diminished in the least.*" (Özel [2003] 2024, p. 66)

Özel interprets this as a message encouraging creative renewal *within* the boundaries of Islam (Özel [2003] 2024, p. 67). In this light, one may speculate that his poetic modernism—his adoption of avant-garde techniques and fractured modernist

language—reflects not an imitation of the West but a deliberate attempt to deploy modernist aesthetics as a means of struggle within Islam itself.

15 In the decades following 1960, Turkish poetry's avant-garde *İkinci Yeni* ("Second New") movement introduced a distinctly modernist poetics—free-form verse, disjunctive syntax, surreal imagery, and linguistic opacity. Strikingly, a group of devoutly Muslim poets, among them Sezai Karakoç, Cahit Zarifoğlu, and İsmet Özel, adopted these experimental techniques despite their ideological opposition to Western secular modernity. Sezai Karakoç (1933–2021), both a leading Islamist intellectual and a central figure of the İkinci Yeni, fused Islamic eschatological themes with the movement's imagistic and symbolic language. His literary journal *Diriliş* ("Resurrection") became, in the 1960s and 1970s, the nucleus of a "new Islamist" poetry that sought to rejuvenate faith through aesthetic innovation rather than nostalgic formalism. Karakoç's generation—including writers such as Nuri Pakdil and Zarifoğlu—rejected the ornate diction of pre-Republican verse and embraced the linguistic experimentation of the İkinci Yeni, merging religious sensibility with the avant-garde idiom of post-1950 Turkish poetry (Demir and Erol 2017, pp. 135–39; Çayır 2007, pp. 41–44).This convergence of sacred content and modernist form exemplifies a strategy of *hybrid appropriation* rather than imitation. Zarifoğlu (1940–1987) retained the fragmentary and associative qualities of *İkinci Yeni* poetry but reoriented them toward an Islamic metaphysics, producing what one critic calls "an interiorized surrealism of faith" (Arslanbenzer 2014). Likewise, İsmet Özel (b. 1944), who famously moved from Marxism to Islamism, continued to employ the free-verse and imagistic density of 1960s modernism while reconfiguring its secular despair into a rhetoric of conversion and dissent. In this sense, these poets embody the paradox of Turkish modernity that Besim Dellaloğlu describes:

> *"Modernizm modernliğe bir anlamıyla isyan etmektir… Modernistler tam anlamıyla modernliğin 'enfant terrible'idirler. Yani yaramaz çocuğu. Modernizm, modernliği ne sever ne de tam anlamıyla terk eder."* (Dellaloğlu 2016, pp. 49–50)
>
> *Modernism is, in one sense, a rebellion against modernity… Modernists are the 'enfant terrible' of modernity—its mischievous child. Modernism neither fully loves nor entirely abandons modernity.*

For Dellaloğlu, Turkey's experience of modernity itself was paradoxical:

> *"Türkiye ve Türk aydınları modern olamadan modernleşme kriziyle yüzleşmek zorunda kalmıştır… Türk aydın ve şairlerinin düştüğü ikircikli hal modern bilinci kültürel ve toplumsal olarak bellekleştiremeden modernist bilinci taşıyor olmalıdır."* (Dellaloğlu 2016, p. 50)
>
> *"Turkey and its intellectuals have had to confront the crisis of modernization without ever having become truly modern… The Turkish poet's predicament lies in bearing a modernist consciousness without having culturally or socially internalized modernity itself."*

This tension also explains the irony Dellaloğlu sees in Turkish cultural history:

> *"Tanpınar'ın Batı'dan aldığı referanslar kimdir?… Bunlar Batı'nın enfant terrible'leri. Bakın burada inanılmaz bir paradoks var. Türkiye'nin 'muhafazakârları' Batı'yı en avangard noktasından tutuyorlar."* (Dellaloğlu 2016, p. 51)
>
> *"Who are Tanpınar's Western references? … They are the enfant terribles of the West. Here lies an incredible paradox: Turkey's conservatives grasp the West at its most avant-garde point."*

In this light, the Islamist poets' appropriation of modernist technique is not contradictory but emblematic of Turkey's broader cultural dialectic: modernism itself, as Dellaloğlu suggests, is always both rebellion and inheritance. Their work thus demonstrates that modernist poetics in Turkey could serve not only as an aesthetic of fragmentation but also as a vehicle of re-sacralization and cultural renewal (Demir and Erol 2017, pp. 141–43; Çayır 2007, pp. 52–54).

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