



The Fall of an Empire, the Birth of a Nation’s Friend: The Turkish Reception of Pierre Loti

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Abstract

Pierre Loti's novel *Aziyadé* (1879), which tells the story of an affair between a Western soldier and a married Muslim woman, is a celebrated work of the nineteenth-century French Orientalism. The novel has been translated into Turkish several times and the name “Pierre Loti” has become a part of Turkish collective memory. Despite *Aziyadé*'s Orientalistic and stereotypical portrayal of the Ottoman culture, the author has been described as a “beloved friend” of Turks. This paper proposes to discuss the reasons behind the positive reception of Loti's Orientalism by the Turkish literati. I argue that this transnational encounter should be understood in the context of the Ottoman decline and anxiety of imperial collapse. The Turkish reception of Pierre Loti's work is a significant case that shows how politics and national anxieties may lead to a misreading of a novel and shape intellectual scene.

Keywords

Orientalism, anxiety, transnational encounters, Pierre Loti, Turkish literature

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The French novelist Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* (1879), a fictionalized autobiographical representation of the writer's encounter with the Ottoman/Turkish culture and Muslim world, is a celebrated work of the nineteenth-century Orientalist literature. The novel enjoyed immense popularity over the past century both in France and Turkey.[†] It has been translated into Turkish by numerous translators, among them the prominent Turkish novelist Nahid Sırrı Örik. A major street where the French author had visited is named after him: Pierre Loti Street is a major street in today's Istanbul. The name Pierre Loti is also identical with Orientalism in the Turkish cultural scene: on the cover of the Turkish edition of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, there is a photograph of Pierre Loti showing the moment he set foot on Istanbul soil.[‡] In the year 2000, the Turkish Ministry of Culture celebrated Loti's 150th birthday with a special event. *Aziyadé* is regarded as the most popular Orientalist literary work about Turkey, and the image of its writer has been kept alive in Turkish collective memory.

This paper proposes to discuss the Turkish reception of Pierre Loti and his novel in the context of Ottoman imperial decline. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, pioneering Ottoman/Turkish intellectuals were fierce opponents of Western stereotypes about their culture. However, in this anti-Orientalist atmosphere, the Ottoman literati regarded Loti as a “beloved friend” and ignored the French writer's excessive use of Orientalist clichés. I argue that the sympathetic approach towards Loti can be explained by the anxiety of imperial collapse. This paper examines Loti's portrayal by prominent Turkish writers, intellectuals, and politicians in the early twentieth century to show that the historical context, the period when the Ottomans desperately needed to find an ally in the Western world, shaped the mainstream reception of Pierre Loti.

French Orientalism before Pierre Loti

The image of the Turk in the West was largely shaped by the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The word "Turk" was a synonym for "Muslim" and "impostor" (Parla 17). When the Ottoman power reached its peak in the sixteenth century, an open relationship between Turkish sultans and French kings began. The first important diplomatic progress was Sultan Suleiman's help to I. François to be released from enthrallment in Spain. Simultaneously, a scholarly interest on the Ottomans became more visible. A book titled

[†] For example, Gundermann mentions "Aziyadé parties" in Paris in the early twentieth century where the guests dressed up as characters from Loti's novel (152).

[‡] Said, Edward W. *Şarkiyatçılık*. Translated by Berna Ülner. Metis, 1999.

La Genealogie du grand Turc à present regnant (The Genealogy of the Great Turk to the Reigning Sultan) by Teodoro Spandugino was published in 1519. Spandugino's book traces the Turkish rulers down from the first sultan and describes the manners and customs of the Turks. It was the most remarkable book published in Paris in the early sixteenth century (Ibn Warraq 154). After the assignment of the first French ambassador to Istanbul in 1536, in a short period, the Franco-Ottoman alliance solidified the image of "magnificent and powerful Turk" in French imagination (Rouillard 64). Although the Turk was still seen as a danger in the Christian world, the strategic alliance served the interests of both sides.

The affinity between the Ottoman Empire and France showed its real impact on French literature a century later. Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) and Racine's *Bajazit* (1672) were popular plays influenced by the memoirs of French ambassadors to Istanbul. The seventeenth century also marks a growing interest by French scholars in the Ottoman culture: historians and writers Michel Baudier, Francois Eudes de Mezeray, Gilbert Saulnier du Verier published works on Turkish history. André du Ryer's *Rudimenta grammatices linguae turcicae* (1630) and Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697) are among the significant Orientalist works of the century.

French intellectuals of the Age of Enlightenment were seeking a new essence in the exoticism of the Orient while criticizing the corrupt institutions of the West (Parla 57). M. C. F. Volney's travelogue *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie* (1782-1784), which was published with the claim of objectivity, is the landmark work on the Orient prior to the Napoleon era. Edward W. Said, who considers Napoleon's invasion of Egypt as the starting point of Orientalism as a system, argues that, the works of the eighteenth-century Orientalists can be classified as the first two types of the Orientalist writing: "One: the writer who intends to use his residence for the specific task of providing professional Orientalism with scientific material, who considers his residence a form of scientific observation. Two: the writer who intends the same purpose but is less willing to sacrifice the eccentricity and style of his individual consciousness to impersonal Orientalist definitions" (*Orientalism* 157-8). Volney's account is an example of the second-type Orientalist writing.

The Ottoman-French alliance endured until Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. The French emperor's Eastern campaign, which included an enormous contingent of scientists and scholars, is a significant break in the history of Western interest in the Orient. As Said points out, "before Napoleon's that very little could be done in advance of

the project to prepare for its success" (168). As an outcome of the campaign, a significant work on the Orient, *Description de l'Égypte* was published between 1809-1829 on Napoleon's orders. Said notes that during the nineteenth century, French Orientalist literature formed its character: "[F]rom one end of the nineteenth century to the other – after Napoleon, that is – the Orient was a place of pilgrimage, and every major work belonging to a genuine if not always to an academic Orientalism took its form, style, and intention from the idea of pilgrimage there" (168).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the romantic writer François-René de Chateaubriand depicted Turks as barbarians in his 1806 travelogue. Even the name of the book gives a hint about the views of the French poet: *Travels in Greece, Palestine, Egypt, and Barbary*. In 1829, Victor Hugo published *Les Orientales*,[§] in which he uses the fashionable theme of the era: the contrast between the freedom-loving Greeks and the imperialistic Ottoman Turks. The mid-nineteenth century marks an era of personal aesthetics in French Orientalist literature: in 1845, Gustave Flaubert began to write a novel called "Conte Oriental." Although he never finished it, the author used its material in his later works *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, *Salammbô*, and *Herodias*. The romantic poet Gérard de Nerval published *Voyage en Orient* in 1851. The patterns employed by these Orientalist precursors, such as eroticism, untouched beauty of the Orient and Western male domination, would later be seen in Pierre Loti's work.

The decline in the number of works about the Orient between 1835-1850 had something to do with the economic and political relationship between the Ottoman Empire and European powers (Puryear 102). These developments transformed the Eastern question into a more important issue. Finally, in the Crimean War (1853-1856) the alliance of the Ottoman Empire, Britain, France, and Sardinia fought against Russia. After that war, the Ottoman Empire was no more "magnificent and powerful" but a weak ally in need of Western support. This period coincides with Istanbul visits of some prominent French authors.^{**} Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was no more "magnificent and powerful," but was a weak ally that needs Western support. According to Jale Parla, Crimean War marks the end of the Turkish myth in the Western imagination (73).

[§] Loti's protagonist quotes *Les Orientales* in *Aziyadé*.

^{**} See Pamuk 339-387.

Pierre Loti and *Aziyadé*

Pierre Loti was born Julien Vivaud in 1850, in an era when the Western Orientalist imagination was heading towards the east of the Mediterranean and myth of the "exotic Turk" was declining. After an art-oriented childhood, Loti decided to become a soldier. At the age of 20, he traveled to the Ottoman land for the first time and arrived at İzmir (Smyrna) in 1870. Six years later, Loti traveled to Salonika, an Ottoman territory at the time, because of the "Salonika Incident." The incident was a Muslim public outrage caused by the kidnapping of a Bulgarian girl by Christians based on the reason that she wanted to embrace Islam, and the following public displays resulted in the murder of French and German consuls by a Muslim mob on May 6, 1876 (Torunoğlu 8). In Salonika, Loti fell in love with a married Muslim woman. His novel *Aziyadé*, based on this romance, published anonymously in 1879.

The fictional preface of the novel explains that the story is recounted through the notes and letters of an English naval officer who was killed in the service of Turks. It is remarkable that Loti employs an English protagonist to reflect his views on the Orient and separates the author/narrator from the fictional imperial adventure hero. According to Alec G. Hargreaves, Loti's attitude can be described as Anglophobia (31). In the novel, the young lieutenant arrives in Salonika and catches sight of a young woman named *Aziyadé*. She is one of the four wives of an Ottoman notable. Soon after, the English officer manages to arrange a meeting with her. In this dangerous meeting, the two fall for each other. When the protagonist's ship sails on to Istanbul, *Aziyadé* promises to contact him again. A few months later they meet again, this time in Istanbul where *Aziyadé* followed her husband on a business trip. During Istanbul days, *Aziyadé* visits the protagonist every night at his home in Eyüp, the Muslim neighborhood of the city, where he disguised as a Muslim. Before long, the lieutenant leaves again and returns to England. When he revisits Istanbul several months later, he finds the city in ruins and his loved one dead.^{††} In the end, a newspaper piece informs the reader that the English officer is dead in Eastern Turkey in the war against Russians.

Aziyadé follows the patterns of the nineteenth-century Orientalist literature writing in numerous ways. In the very beginning, the initial tableau functions as a primal scene to depict tyranny and gloom in Oriental city:

^{††} Returning to the Orient is a familiar theme in Orientalist travel writing: When Lamartine made his second trip to the Orient, his excitement was already gone. He was not seeking to discover new exotic dimensions of the Orient, instead, he was seeking his past excitement and self, like Loti's protagonist.

Quand les canots étrangers arrivèrent, les bourreaux, sur les quais, mettaient la dernière main à leur œuvre : six pendus exécutaient en présence de la foule l'horrible contorsion finale... Les fenêtres, les toits étaient encombrés de spectateurs ; sur un balcon voisin, les autorités turques souriaient à ce spectacle familial. (...) L'exécution terminée, les soldats se retirèrent et les morts restèrent jusqu'à la tombée du jour exposés aux yeux du peuple. Les six cadavres, debout sur leurs pieds, firent, jusqu'au soir, la hideuse grimace de la mort au beau soleil de Turquie, au milieu de promeneurs indifférents et de groupes silencieux de jeunes femmes^{‡‡}. (Loti 5)

The encounter between the protagonist and Aziyadé is depicted as a love-at-first-sight scene. This motif bears resemblance with the first novel of Turkish literature, *Taaşuk-u Talât ve Fitnat* (The Affair Between Talât and Fitnat) (1875) by Şemsettin Sami. There is no record of whether Loti read Şemsettin Sami's work, but given the fact that during Loti's stay in Istanbul between 29 July 1876 and 17 March 1877 the novel was immensely popular,^{§§} Loti's familiarity with Sami's work does not seem unreasonable. The protagonist's journey from the Balkans to the East ends in Istanbul, the city that is identical with beauty and purity in his imagination. Behind the passionate love story, the novel accounts the narrator's observations of the Ottoman capital. Young Aziyadé and Istanbul represent beauty and sexual freedom for him.^{***} Roland Barthes finds an exoticist archetype in the letters of the written name Aziyadé, with its A's, Z, D and É, and reads a reiteration of Scheherazade in the heroine's name (186).^{†††}

Loti's Orient is a world frozen in its past and in many respects always the same, whether it be Turkey, North Africa, or East Asia. In *Aziyadé*, the Orient gets constructed as the domain of desire and identification. The protagonist does not make his linguistic appearance as "I," in the beginning. The narration, later positioned as the author's voice,

^{‡‡} When the foreign boats arrived, the hangmen on the wharf were putting the finishing touches to their work: in the presence of a crowd six hanging prisoners were accomplishing their horrible last contortion... Windows and roofs were packed with spectators, from a neighboring balcony the Turkish authorities smiled at the familiar spectacle (...) Once the execution was over, the soldiers withdrew and the dead remained exposed to the eyes of the people until nightfall. Until the evening the six corpses, erect on their feet, grinned at the glorious Turkish sun with the hideous grimace of death.

^{§§} *Taaşuk-u Talât ve Fitnat* was serialized in *Hadika* magazine from 1872 to 1873, and appeared in book form in 1875.

^{***} "Azade" (Aziyadé) means "free" in Turkish.

^{†††} Scheherazade is the narrator of *The Arabian Nights*, first introduced to European readers by Antoine Galland's translation in the seventeenth century and became a central topic of Western Orientalists.

tries to maintain a disengaged, objective position outside the scene. But later in the novel, the author starts to inscribe himself deeper in the Oriental picture and constitutes himself as the subject of the text. The protagonist is split into his Western persona Loti and his Turkish counterpart Arif, and they are entirely different characters: "Arif et Loti étant deux personnages très différents." (48) He dresses up in ethnic drag, learns the Turkish language, and adopts a Turkish lifestyle before he vanishes in a final contortion.

The Turkish Reception of Loti

Beginning from the mid-nineteenth century, Ottoman/Turkish intellectuals published works to refute Orientalist stereotypes. During this period, awareness of imperial decline overlapped with bitter anti-Westernism, observable in writings of pioneering authors such as Namık Kemal (1840-1888). The cultural, political, and military decline of the empire had a profound impact on their oeuvres. Namık Kemal published a pamphlet called *Renan Müdafaaamesi* (1883; The Defense Against Renan) to refute Ernest Renan's views on Islam and science. Ahmet Mithat Efendi, arguably the founding figure of the Turkish prose fiction, wrote a defense against materialism and stories to show the corrupt state of the Western world. The novelist and critic Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar asserts that these authors could not tolerate Russia's defeat of the Ottomans in the 1877-78 War, and the boldness central to their writing style was the product of a disappointment (*XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* 167). The anxiety of witnessing to the fall of an empire shaped their approach towards the West.

However, Pierre Loti, a popular name of Orientalist literature, was neglected by even the harshest Turkish critics of the West. A literary survey conducted among the Turkish literati in the early twentieth century sheds light on Pierre Loti's privileged status for the intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire. *Şehbal*, a Turkish literary magazine, published a special issue on Pierre Loti in September 1915. The issue brings together the views of writers, critics, scholars, and politicians on Pierre Loti. The survey was titled "What do the Ottoman intellectuals think about Loti?" The magazine also published a letter by Loti stating that he received the translation of the survey and he is grateful to the contributors. Loti describes the country as "our Turkey" in his short letter and announces that he would continue to defend Ottomans under any circumstances (Konur 18-26).^{†††}

The views of Ottoman/Turkish writers about Loti in *Şehbal* show anger towards

^{†††} Zeki Konur did the transliteration and published *Şehbal's* survey in *Toplumsal Tarih* magazine. See Konur.

the West and appreciation for Loti simultaneously. It is clear from the survey that Loti's praises for the Ottoman Empire during a difficult period encouraged Turkish intellectuals. Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem, the first 'realist' writer of Turkish literature, in his short note in *Şehbal*, refers Pierre Loti as a "great writer." According to Ekrem, Loti has even more important qualities than being a great writer: his "struggle for supporting the Ottomans" and "the appreciation of this great nation". Halid Ziya, another pioneering figure of the Turkish literature who is regarded as the author of the first modern novel in the Turkish language, notes that Pierre Loti's name will shine on the Ottoman land like a candle forever. Another novelist, Aka Gündüz compares the level of his respect for Loti "to the respect for the heroes who would save India from English domination." Gündüz's reference to anti-colonialism in his one-sentence note neglects the fact that there are several colonialist stereotypes in Loti's works.

Abdülhak Hamid Tarhan, a major poet of the early twentieth century, who is also known as *Şair-i Âzam* (the greatest poet) writes: "My words are not sufficient to express my respect for Pierre Loti, the only French poet advocates and feels affection for Turks, the most unfortunate people in the world." The significance of these words –which are actually not surprising, considering the pompous literary style of Tarhan– is his definition of Loti as a "poet." Tarhan, who had lived in Europe for years, was well aware of the Orientalist clichés and the Western prejudices about his country. It can be argued that, by calling Loti a poet, Tarhan attributes him a poetic license and recognizes him as a privileged artist. A similar approach can be observed in the words of Şahabettin Süleyman, a prominent playwright and essayist. He describes Loti as the "the only writer after Chateaubriand" and relates him to the nineteenth-century French romantic tradition. Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, a pioneering literary historian, states that Loti provided compassion to the soul of humanity with his writings. The poet Cenab Şahabettin, who was an admirer of classical Persian literature,^{§§§} compares Loti with the masters of classics: "If Iranian poets had read Loti, they would call him as the master of words." Cenab Şahabettin not only ignores Pierre Loti's Orientalism but also justifies its discourse by equating a French Orientalist's work with the canonical works of Middle Eastern literatures.

^{§§§} See Bayıldırın 179-180. Bayıldırın argues that although he was a first-class poet, because of excessive use of Persian and French words in his poetry, Cenab Şahabettin is mostly forgotten today.

The Anxiety of Imperial Decline

Examining *Şehbal's* survey, one can observe that the anxiety of the Ottoman decline and emerging nationalist discourse shaped the mainstream view on Loti. It is sobering to remember that the survey was conducted in September 1915, just months after the outbreak of World War I which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. For example, Mehmet Emin, the emblematic poet of Turkish nationalism in the twentieth century, argues that Pierre Loti's name will never be erased from the hearts of the Turkish people: "The latest descendant of the Turk on earth, who is not perfidious, will salute this hero of justice and truth with respect." Ali Canip, another pioneering nationalist writer, comments on Loti: "I am Turkish and this man made me feel my Turkishness." In his answer to the survey, Mehmet Rauf, the author of *Eylül* (1900; September), the first psychological novel of modern Turkish literature, argues that Loti has great power in the world with his art and genius, but the fact that he defends the Turkish people is much more important. According to Mehmet Rauf, by advocating for the Turks, Loti proved that "his heart is bigger than his genius." Another novelist, Mithat Cemal Kuntay, laments that the Turkish people recognized Pierre Loti's genius belatedly: "How unhappy we should be as a nation since we could only feel the greatness of Pierre Loti after our borders shrank."

In *Şehbal's* pages, some of the most interesting passages come from eminent statesmen and politicians. Commander-in-chief Enver Pasha, who was practically the prime minister at the time, argues that Loti loves the Turkish nation without grudge, feels pity for the nation, and expresses his affection sincerely. According to Enver Pasha, Loti's "greatness is timeless." Cemal Pasha, commander of the navy, describes Loti as a "genius." Nine months after the publication of *Şehbal's* survey, Enver and Cemal would lead the Ottoman Empire to the ultimate end. In the survey, the minister of education Emrullah Bey expresses his respect and admiration for Loti as well.

In *Şehbal* magazine, intellectuals outside the literary scene also salute Loti with respect and excitement. Celal Nuri, a public intellectual, writes: "If I were the Sheikh ul-Islam [the highest ranked religious leader], I would entitle Loti as an honorary Muslim." A leading materialist and Westernized intellectual of the late Ottoman period, Abdullah Cevdet mentions that Pierre Loti wants to clean the stain on his "motherland" Europe by advocating the Ottoman Empire. "Stain," according to Abdullah Cevdet, is imperialism. Dr. Adnan Adıvar, an important member of the group that founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923, salutes Loti as one of the rare advocates of Turkey. According to historian İsmail

Hami Danişmend, “Loti is the advocate of not one Dreyfus like Zola, but 300 million Dreyfuses.”

It is important to note that Şehbal’s survey was conducted shortly after the Balkan Wars (8 October 1912 – 28 September 1913) which was a heavy defeat for Ottomans. At the end of the Balkan Wars, the empire’s borders changed, and Albania became an independent state. Russia was the prime mover in the establishment of a Balkan League, and the Great Powers did not support Ottomans. All the names in Şehbal’s survey were prominent figures of the Ottomans at that time, who were anxious about the ongoing World War I and desperate for international support. Their opinions on Loti should be considered under these circumstances. In early 1913, Pierre Loti had written a book titled *La Turquie agonisante* to inform the world about the Balkan Wars. An English translation, *Turkey in Agony*, published same year. Obviously, Loti’s support for the Ottoman cause as a popular Western writer made Turkish intellectuals feel grateful. In those years, Pierre Loti was the writer of *La Turquie agonisante* for the Turkish literati. Even though *Aziyadé* is Loti’s most popular work, it was published in Turkish for the first time in 1923, the year Pierre Loti died.

Loti as an “imperialist”

In the mid-1920s, the newly established Republic of Turkey was heading towards becoming a fully Westernized country. As Hilmi Yavuz argues, Orientalism was internalized during that period, and the elites of the new republic refuted the Ottoman legacy with self-Orientalist arguments (54). The loudest criticism of Pierre Loti came from the poet Nâzım Hikmet during that period. In his 1925 poem “Piyer Loti,”**** Nâzım Hikmet accuses Loti of serving for Western colonialism and imperialism. Nâzım describes Loti as a “bourgeois” and an “imperialist,” and asserts that the imagery of the East created by Loti does not comply with reality. For Nâzım Hikmet, one should read Loti’s work in the context of European imperialism. Given the fact that Loti was always on a military or diplomatic mission in his trips to the Orient, for Nâzım Hikmet, Loti’s official role was an inseparable part of his identity. Nâzım Hikmet had become a

**** "... / Imams with green turbans recite the azan in the wind / That's how the Western poet sees the East! / Here it is / the East of / the books published in one million! // But / there is, was, will never be / an East as such / yesterday, / today, / and tomorrow./ (...) Even you, / Pierre Loti! / The louse typhus / that our yellow oilskins contaminate / is closer to us than yourself! / You, the French officer / forgot the grape eyed Azade / easier than a slut! / You hailed the stone of Azade / that you sew to our hearts / like a wooden target!"(21) [my translation].

communist in the late 1910s after observing the poor in Anatolia, pastoral lives of the people, and Orientalist representations within the Ottoman Empire (Blasing 38). Later in his twenties, he attacked Western imperialism in his early poems and addressed Orientalist clichés. Pierre Loti was the most renowned Orientalist in the country, and *Aziyadé* was his most celebrated book. Nâzım unhesitatingly chose Loti as a subject to give his message about imperialism and Orientalism. It should be noted that this poem "marks convergence of anti-imperialist politics and modern poetics," (40) belongs to the first phase of Nâzım Hikmet's body of work and generally was kept out of literary selections. His criticism of Pierre Loti was shadowed by Nâzım's own political struggle during the next couple of decades while he spent 12 years in prison because of his political views.

Loti as a “belated romantic”

The mainstream Turkish view of Pierre Loti was best articulated by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar who wrote an article for Loti's 100th birthday, titled “On Pierre Loti.” The piece was published in *Cumhuriyet*, the leading daily newspaper of the period. Tanpınar was not only a canonical novelist and poet but also a professor and his book *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler* (Essays on Literature) is a mainstream textbook in Turkish literary studies. Tanpınar's essay, arguably still the most well-known and most-circulated text on Loti in Turkish, begins as follows: “There is never a single way that goes on the right path. Among the great mystics and pious people, there are ones who go through sin, rebellion, and even a sharp doubt and denial as well as the ones that go through love for God, faith, affection and pain. And Loti is one of the former” (*Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler* 481). Throughout the text, Tanpınar labels Loti as an adventurer among the mystics and a belated romantic. While ignoring the colonialist discourse in Loti's novels, Tanpınar portrays him as the “first world citizen,” and he says one should read *Aziyadé* in this context (483).^{††††} Tanpınar further asserts that Loti's compassion is not “Christian in the strict sense” and emphasizes his love for humanity (481).

^{††††} Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes Loti's literature of exoticism from his colonialist novels. He interprets Loti's first two novels *Aziyadé* and *Le Mariage de Loti* as the realms of enchanted exoticism due to his reading of a glorification of and enchantment with foreign realms and foreigners. (See White)

Conclusion

The interest in Pierre Loti and his work has been kept alive in Turkey throughout the twentieth century. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Turkish Ministry of Culture commemorated Loti's 150th birthday and sponsored the publication of his letters in Turkish.^{††††} The same year, in the Turkish press it was discussed whether Loti was a French spy or not (Demirci 2000). The discussions on Loti coincided with the rise of conspiracy theories in Turkey in the early 2000s. However, Pierre Loti has remained as a major Western figure when it comes to defending Turkey on the international scene. In March 2015, nationalist Kaynak Publishing published Loti's book titled "Massacres and Turks in Armenia" in three languages to defend the official Turkish discourse on the Armenian genocide on its centennial.^{§§§§}

Examining at the Turkish reception of Pierre Loti, one can observe that the image of the French writer has always been adjusted according to the national agenda. However, Loti's Orientalism has not been discussed extensively, even after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in Turkish, in 1989.^{*****} In the late nineteenth century, the novel was a new genre in Turkish literature, and a French novel about Turkey was embraced with the awareness of belated modernity. But the Turkish intellectuals were not aware of the fact that the Western formal influence presented the Orientalist stereotypes as local materials. Besides, the deep respect for Loti by Turkish elite in early twentieth century emerged from the anxiety of the imperial decline. The political discourse made the French author's Orientalism invisible. Speaking of Flaubert and other nineteenth-century Orientalists, Edward Said remarks that "the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex" (190). The image of a submissive Muslim woman and the dominant Western man in *Aziyadé* connects the novel to this Orientalist tradition. However, this aspect of the relationship between *Aziyadé* and the protagonist is barely discussed by the Turkish literati. The decline of the empire and the feeling of isolation can be considered as the primary reasons for the Turkish affection for Loti. In a time of crisis, his support for the Turkish cause made Loti "the beloved friend of Turks." I argue that the image of "the Orient frozen in the past" painted by Loti in *Aziyadé* can be read as a consolation for Ottoman intellectuals as well.

^{††††} *Büyük Dost Pierre Loti'ye Mektuplar*, Ed.: Orhan Koloğlu, 2001.

^{§§§§} Loti, Pierre. *Ermenistan'daki Katliam ve Türkler*. Kaynak, 2015.

^{*****} *Oryantalizm: Sömürgeciliğin Keşif Kolu*. Trans. Selahattin Yaz. Pınar, 1989.

Today *Aziyadé* is the only book by Pierre Loti that is being regularly reprinted in Turkey. Even for those who have not read his works, Pierre Loti is a part of the collective memory. As Christian Gundermann asserts, Orientalist imaginary "continues to be consequential for the collective identity of nations like Turkey." (152) The Turkish reception of Pierre Loti's work is a significant case that shows how politics and national anxieties may lead to a misreading of a novel and shape intellectual scene.

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