Entanglements between *the Tanzimat* and *al-Nahḍah*: Jurjī Zaydān between *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah* and *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*

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Abstract

This article analyzes comparisons between Arabic and Turkish literatures in literary histories from the late Ottoman period, with a particular focus on works by Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914). Drawing upon Alexander Beecroft's concept of "literary biomes," it argues that these comparisons overlooked intersections of Arabic and Turkish literatures in the "Ottoman literary biome" and depicted them as belonging to two separate "biomes." I define the "Ottoman literary biome" as the transcultural space of the Ottoman Empire that allowed the circulation of a multilingual textual repertoire and cultivated a cultural elite. Through foregrounding the transcultural context of Ottoman literary biome, I demonstrate that modern Arabic and Turkish literatures morphed in a reciprocal entanglement. My work finally calls for the fields of Arabic literature and comparative literature to further flesh out the diversity of literary biomes in which Arabic texts circulated.

Keywords

Jurjī Zaydān – *nahḍah* – *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* – world literature – literary biomes – *tanzimat* – Ottoman literary biome – comparative literature – Namık Kemal – Rūḥī al-Khālīdī

Shaden Tageldin notes that the nineteenth century witnessed "epistemological transformations that spurred the reinvention of Arabic literature ... as a

fundamentally *comparative* literature.”¹ Here, Tageldin argues that translations from French to Arabic by Rifā‘ah al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-1873) testify to a moment when numerous *nahḍah* thinkers had started to view Arabic and French literatures as comparable with and translatable to each other.² Social and political transformations in the beginning of the nineteenth century “compelled both French and Arabic literatures to rethink themselves in each other’s eyes, in translation: in short, to rethink themselves as *comparative* literatures.”³ While Tageldin analyzes the impact of Western imperialism on Arabic literature, my article takes an alternative angle that will further shed light upon the reinvention of Arabic literature as comparative literature. It examines literary histories of the late Ottoman Empire that compared Arabic and Turkish literatures—in particular works by Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914) who has been studied as a pioneering figure of modern Arabic literature—to demonstrate that Turkish and Arabic literatures also often rethought “themselves in each other’s eyes, in translation.”⁴

Tageldin demonstrates that comparisons perpetuated a false sense of equivalence between Arabic and Western European literatures (French and English in particular) and thus overlooked unequal power dynamics in which the West had the upper hand. Comparisons in late Ottoman literary histories between Arabic and Turkish literatures also generated a sense of equivalence between the two. This sense of equivalence perpetuated the assumption in Arabic

1 Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 115.

2 Critics have often used the term *al-nahḍah* to refer to cultural and literary transformations throughout the Arab world that emerged in the nineteenth century under increasing Western influence. This article will draw upon recent scholarly works that have undermined this understanding of the *nahḍah* as a stark rupture from an authentic classical tradition that initiated modernity. For a compilation of representative *nahḍah* texts, see Tarek El-Ariss (ed.), *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2018).

3 Shaden M. Tageldin, “One Comparative Literature?: ‘Birth’ of a Discipline in French-Egyptian Translation, 1810-1834,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 47:4 (2010), 443.

4 As I examine comparisons that authors like Zaydān made, this article does not provide an extensive comparison of modern Arabic and Turkish literatures. Stephan Guth and Ḥusayn Muḥib al-Miṣrī have substantially compared Arabic and Turkish literatures. Stephan Guth writes the history of what he calls “the Turkoarabic novel,” an umbrella term that encompasses Arabic and Turkish literature from the nineteenth century to the present day. Stephan Guth, *Brückenschläge: Eine integrierte ‘turkoarabische’ romangeschichte (Mitte 19. bis mitte 20. jahrhundert)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003). Ḥusayn Muḥib al-Miṣrī has also written extensively on what he calls “comparative Islamic literatures” (*al-adab al-islāmī al-muqāran*). As an example, see Ḥusayn Muḥib al-Miṣrī, *Fī al-adab al-‘arabī wa-l-turkī, dirāsah fī al-adab al-islāmī al-muqāran* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1962).

writings that Turkish literature, like Arabic literature, underwent a similar historical trajectory and experienced *nahḍah* in the nineteenth century after a period of slumber. This article especially pays attention to another impact of the sense equivalence that translations and comparisons may generate. Literary comparisons can be made based on the assumption that their objects of comparison circulate within the same kinds of “literary biomes.”

As an alternative to much of the scholarship that has categorized literatures in strictly national, chronological, or civilizational terms (e.g. Arabic literature, pre-modern literature, Islamic literature etc.), Alexander Beecroft uses the term “literary biomes” to refer to diverse cultural settings with “particular patterns of ecological constraints operating on the circulation of literary texts in a variety of different historical contexts.”⁵ Beecroft provides definitions of six ecologies: epichoric, panchoric, cosmopolitan, vernacular, national, and global.⁶ I focus for this article on his characterization of cosmopolitan literary biome which refers to “a vast, transcultural, translingual, transpolitical space within which a single literary language dominates.”⁷

I find Beecroft’s notion of the cosmopolitan biome useful for understanding the literary landscape of the Ottoman Empire. This article coins the term “Ottoman literary biome” to refer to the transcultural space of the Ottoman Empire that allowed the circulation of a multilingual textual repertoire and cultivated an imperial cultural elite whose intellectual formation was shaped by this repertoire. Ottoman literary biome has many characteristics of a cosmopolitan biome, but it is not shaped by a single literary language. Indeed, Beecroft notes that “many parts of the Middle East under Ottoman rule

5 Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 2015), 25. By the term “ecological,” Beecroft emphasizes both intertextual relationships as well as relationships between texts and their environment, i.e. diverse contexts in which they are situated.

6 Beecroft accepts that these concepts are what he calls “mental isolates” that have explanatory power but they do not claim to objectively capture the full complexity of cultural landscapes (27-28). Specific case studies can further nuance these concepts and point out biomes that carry characteristics of several of the six biomes that he designates.

7 Beecroft, 105. Beecroft notes that his literary biomes are not emic concepts—concepts that derive from the culture that one studies—and notes that his work may attract criticism because he does not use emic terms. He argues that while area studies tends to privilege emic terms, comparative literature needs to rely on etic concepts to make claims on discrepant literary traditions that it studies. Furthermore, Beecroft notes that methodologies that privilege only emic concepts run the risk of essentializing these concepts and overlook discrepant and even contradictory meanings that these terms can have within the cultures that they study (31).

simultaneously inhabited the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish cosmopoleis.”⁸ This article opts to demonstrate that late Ottoman Arabic and Turkish literary histories often overlooked the fact that various intellectual elites of the Ottoman literary biome simultaneously inhabited multiple cosmopoleis (Turkish, Arabic, and Persian). In particular, it argues that these works depicted histories of Arabic and Turkish literatures as two trajectories that did not intersect with each other, contributing to the current conceptualization of classical Arabic heritage as the root out of which modern Arabic literature grew. It has become easier to envision Arabic texts as belonging only to a national biome, especially when Arabic literature is compared with Turkish literature or Ottoman literature, because “national literatures are from the beginning constructed as elements of an *inter-national* system of literatures; English literature, in other words, can only exist *as such* if it can be set against French literature, German literature, and so on.”⁹

My article foregrounds the transcultural context of Ottoman literary biome to reveal various entanglements between the histories of Arabic and Turkish literatures. Historians such as Axel Havelmann, Thomas Philipp, and Anne-Laure Dupont have already situated authors like Zaydān within such a context by noting that while Zaydān advocated a vision of Arab cultural nationalism, he did not call for Arabs to secede from the Ottoman Empire. He often advocated the unity of the empire because for Zaydān and other thinkers of his time such as Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī (1876-1953) and Shakīb Arslān (1869-1946), “Arabism was and should be compatible with Ottomanism, i.e. political loyalty to the empire”.¹⁰ Yet historians have focused on these thinkers’ attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire as a political entity. I pay attention to their attitude toward cosmopolitan Ottoman culture in which Arabic has had important cultural capital. As Muhsin al-Musawi puts it, “Arabic was used and practiced since the mid-tenth century in the shadow of ‘world conquerors’ and non-Arab empires

8 Beecroft, 108.

9 Beecroft, 199. Many of the literary histories that I examine in this article use the terms “Turkish literature” and “Ottoman literature” interchangeably, often equating the two.

10 Axel Havemann, “Between Ottoman Loyalty and Arab ‘Independence’: Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī, Ğirġi Zaydān, and Šakīb Arslān,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (1987-1988), 351. Axel Havemann also demonstrates that Zaydān’s belief in this compatibility was “rather typical for the intellectual and political mood of his time” (353). Also see Thomas Philipp, “Jurji Zaydan and the Ottoman Revolution: Between Arab Nationalism and Ottomanism, 1908-1914,” *Jurji Zaidan’s Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature* (Bethesda, MD: Zaidan Foundation, 2012), 145-163 and Anne-Laure Dupont, *Ğirġi Zaydān (1861-1914), Écrivain réformiste et témoin de la Renaissance arabe* (Damascus: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2006), 543-626.

and dynasties” since leaders such as Timur could claim to become the rulers of the world when they had “knowledge of other tongues especially Arabic.”¹¹ This article will show that for Namık Kemal (1840-1888), a crucial figure in the history of modern Turkish literature, Arabic had prestige and Arabic literature played a key role in his vision for Ottoman literature.

The first section of this article focuses on Jurjī Zaydān’s perspectives on Turkish literature. My focus on Zaydān is deliberate, since, as Michael Allan puts it, “[t]o this day, Zaydān’s historical understanding of Arabic literature remains a central influence on the formation of the discipline—as much for the methods he undertakes as for the meticulous cataloguing of sources his work provides.”¹² I demonstrate that Zaydān’s works generate a sense of equivalence between Arabic and Turkish literatures as they highlight similarities between the two. I give a close reading of an article in the famous journal that Zaydān edited, *al-Hilāl*, on Namık Kemal, who is often regarded as a pioneer of modern Turkish literature. The article, like works by Rūḥī al-Khālīdī (1864-1913) and Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī (1875-1945), describe Namık Kemal as a pioneer of a modern “Turkish *nahḍah*.” By describing Namık Kemal as a pioneer, this article could render the Ottoman cultural landscape familiar for Arabic readers and overlook Namık Kemal’s vision of a new Ottoman literature in which Arabic literature played a key role. I then focus on another article in which Zaydān writes about the “history of Turkish language arts” (*tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah*) and point to similarities between this article and one of the most foundational works in the field of Arabic literature, *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* (The History of Arabic Language Arts;¹³ first serialized in *al-Hilāl* in 1894 and 1895 and eventually published as a multivolume work in 1911-1914). These similarities reinforce the depiction of Arabic and Turkish literatures as

11 Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 40; 76.

12 Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 83-84. At the same time, I do not claim that Zaydān’s opinions on Turkish literature were shared by all other *nahḍah* thinkers. I focus on Jurjī Zaydān and Arabic works on Namık Kemal, since much of the scholarship has studied these two intellectuals as pioneering figures who have shaped how we envision Arabic and Turkish literatures today. However, the late Ottoman period witnessed multiple and even contradictory understandings of the concepts that I discuss throughout this work, such as *al-nahḍah* and Ottoman culture. Further research can reveal other kinds of comparisons that were made during the late Ottoman period between Arabic and Turkish literatures and provided alternative perspectives on these concepts.

13 Critics have provided different translations of the title due to the multilayered character of the term *ādāb*. I here use Michael Allan’s translation, “language arts” because it captures the capacious nature of the term (85).

akin to mirror images, which look alike but never intersect in the Ottoman literary biome.

The second section will examine literary histories by Jurjī Zaydān, Rūḥī al-Khālīdī, and ʾIsmāʾīl Hakḳī [Eldem] (1871–1944). It will demonstrate that these histories establish a linear historical trajectory for both Arabic and Turkish literatures and emphasize relations of anteriority and posteriority between these literatures. In particular, Arabic literature in the works on Turkish literature exists only as a source of influence that existed prior to Turkish literature. To further substantiate these points, I analyze how these histories employ the term “classics” in their own writings. While classics is a “non-emic” term that did not originate in the literary traditions that these authors wrote about, they mobilize this term to stabilize Arabic and Ottoman literatures within a linear historical trajectory. My work demonstrates that debates on cultural and literary heritage in Arabic writings should be analyzed in conjunction with similar debates in Ottoman Turkish writings due to entanglements between the histories of modern Arabic and Turkish literatures. Furthermore, it suggests that histories of Arabic literature can further flesh out the diversity of literary biomes in which Arabic texts have circulated.

Jurjī Zaydān and the Turkish *Nahḍah*

Sooyong Kim notes that the incorporation of lands in which the majority spoke Arabic—Syria, Egypt, the Hijaz, Iraq, and much of the Maghreb—into Ottoman domains in the sixteenth century played a key role in generating a cosmopolitan Ottoman culture whose universalist aspirations strove to subsume the major Islamicate literary traditions, mainly Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.¹⁴ For Kim, crafting poetry served to consolidate the social identity of *medrese* graduates who insisted that good Ottoman poets needed to master Arabic and Persian as well. As Kim puts it, “[I]n emphasizing linguistic ability as the chief measure of a poet’s worth, the *medrese*-trained literati offered at once an exclusive and inclusive definition of what makes an Ottoman poet. That is, *anyone can be an Ottoman poet, and by extension an Ottoman*, who holds this qualification [of linguistic ability].”¹⁵

Kim focuses on the constitution of a cosmopolitan literary biome in the sixteenth century that allowed poets who mastered particular poetic and

14 Sooyong Kim, *The Last of an Age: The Making and Unmaking of a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Poet* (London: Routledge, 2018), 138.

15 Kim, 127; italics mine.

linguistic traditions to affiliate with an elite Ottoman intelligentsia. The late nineteenth century, however, witnessed changes in what Beecroft considered the “most important determinants” of literary biomes, which include linguistic situation, the political world, economics, cultural politics, and technologies of distribution.¹⁶ As Benjamin Forta and Nergis Ertürk have demonstrated, classical Arabic and Turkish works that were part of the repertoire that constituted the cultural formation of a literary elite circulated to a much larger audience in the late Ottoman Empire. This resulted from many socioeconomic changes such as: the establishment of large printing presses in Cairo and Istanbul, which led to the diffusion not only of Western novels but also compilations of Arabic and Ottoman Turkish poetry, the rise of an urban middle class that constituted an audience for these works, and the rising popularity of novels that were serialized in newspapers and written in a fairly accessible language.¹⁷ As Ertürk puts it, the “[c]ommunications revolution of the mid-nineteenth century, which freed ‘Ottoman’ from the cultural authority of Arabic and Persian, paved the way for its demise at the same time [...]. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rise of Turkish nationalism saw the recoding, through the Orientalist discipline of Turcology, of a ‘vulgar’ Turkic linguistic element (in counterposition with ‘cultivated’ Arabic and Persian) as the foundation of Turkish-speaking Muslim identity.”¹⁸

Another key transformation in the historical context was the rise of Ottomanism in the late nineteenth century, which emphasized that regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, denizens of the empire all shared a political allegiance to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ This opened up new possibilities for people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the Ottoman Empire to lay a claim to Ottoman identity without having to “master” a multilingual textual repertoire. For example, in one of his letters to his son, Zaydān praises his son Amīl because he has started to learn Turkish, “the language of [their] government” and notes in another letter to Amīl that his son Shukrī’s

16 Beecroft, 25-27.

17 For the impact of these printing presses especially on disseminating classical Arabic and Turkish works in the Ottoman Empire, see Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Benjamin Forta, *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Johann Strauss, “Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th-20th Centuries)?,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6:1 (2003): 39-76.

18 Nergis Ertürk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

19 For more on Ottomanism, see Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24.

“patriotic duties demand” loyalty to the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ At the same time, one finds discrepant and even contradictory understandings of the term “Ottoman” in late Ottoman writings, further testifying to historical shifts that would put the survival of the Ottoman literary biome at risk. For some writers, the Ottoman language was simply synonymous with the Turkish language. For example, Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem (1847-1914) insisted that the adjective “Ottoman” signifies not a culture but instead a political allegiance to the Ottoman dynasty; therefore, he notes that one should simply call the official language of the Ottoman Empire Turkish rather than Ottoman.²¹ Other writers considered Ottoman a hybrid language that resulted from the combination of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages. For example, Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) complains that a minority that reads a hybrid language which is composed of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish rule a majority that does not understand this language. In other words, he thought that “the minority rules the majority,” as an Arab, Turk, or Iranian could never understand an Ottoman text.²²

Literary histories also testified to these key shifts. In particular, Zaydān’s works often depicted histories of Arabic literature and of Turkish literature as akin to mirror images of each other that had parallel historical trajectories and never interacted with each other within a cosmopolitan Ottoman literary biome.²³ I observe this kind of depiction especially in two articles in *al-Hilāl* that made comparisons between Arabic and Turkish literatures. One of these articles provides a biography of Namık Kemal.²⁴ The other is a part of a series in which Zaydān shares his observations on Istanbul during a visit in 1909.²⁵

20 Jurji Zaydan, *The Autobiography of Jurji Zaydan: Including Four Letters to His Son*, trans. and ed. Thomas Philipp (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), 78; 84.

21 Quoted in Bedri Gencer, *İslam’da modernleşme, 1839-1939* (Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2008), 750-751.

22 Ahmet Midhat Efendi, “Osmanlıcanın ıslahı,” in Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Birol Emil, and Zeynep Kerman (eds.), *Yeni Türk Edebiyatı Antolojisi*, (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1994), 3:71.

23 I do not argue that Zaydān’s histories generated shifts in literary biomes of the late Ottoman Empire, although I claim that they played an important role. It would be more useful to interpret these histories as responses to particular socioeconomic transformations of their time. Stephen Sheehi reminds us that we need to pay more attention to these transformations rather than considering “pioneers” like Zaydān people who started modernity. More research is thus needed on socioeconomic factors that led to dynamics of comparison that I observe in various late Ottoman Turkish and Arabic texts. See Stephen Sheehi, “Towards a Critical Theory of *al-Nahḍah*: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43:2-3 (2012), 269-298.

24 “Muḥammad Nāmīq Kamāl Bek”, *al-Hilāl* 5:5 (1896), 161-167.

25 Muḥammad Ḥarb, *Riḥlat Jurjī Zaydān ilā al-Astānah fī ‘ām 1909* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilāl, 2004). Ḥarb’s book is a compilation of Zaydān’s articles in *al-Hilāl* about his journey in

Much of Zaydān's works reinforced strict distinctions between Arabs and Turks.²⁶ In her analysis of the representation of Turks in modern Arabic novels, Şükran Fazlıoğlu argues that Zaydān's novels depicted Turks as the foreign other and even as the enemy.²⁷ Indeed, Arab, Iranian, and Turk often seem clear-cut categories also in *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah* (henceforth referred as *Tārīkh*). Zaydān defines Saljuks and Ottomans simply as Turks and characterizes the Abbasid period between 232 AH-334 AH as the "Turkish age" due to the strong influence of Turks on state affairs.²⁸ Like many Western thinkers such as Volney, Zaydān argued that the Turkish rule of Ottoman period had a negative impact on Arabic cultural production, since he claims that poetry and art underwent a significant decline during the Ottoman rule of much of the Arab world.²⁹ In another article in *al-Hilāl*, Zaydān notes that if the Ottoman Empire had completely Turkified its population, one would not encounter the resurgence of interest in Arabic language and literature in the nineteenth century, suggesting that he may have considered the Ottoman Empire a potential future threat against the cultural revival of Arab world.³⁰ At the same time, one needs to keep in mind that Zaydān did not openly call for overthrowing the political system and emphasized in many of his writings that the Ottoman Empire had to remain strong to defend itself against foreign intrusions.³¹

Istanbul. Harb also provides a useful introduction on Zaydān's life and works. For articles on Istanbul in *al-Hilāl*, please see Jurjī Zaydān, "al-Astānah al-ʿaliyyah" *al-Hilāl* 18:1 (1909), 3-38; Jurjī Zaydān, "al-Astānah al-ʿaliyyah" *al-Hilāl* 18:2 (1909), 27-107; and Jurjī Zaydān, "al-Astānah al-ʿaliyyah" *al-Hilāl* 18:3 (1909), 131-165. For his perspectives on Turkish literature, see "al-Astānah al-ʿaliyyah," *al-Hilāl* 18:2 (1909), 93-107.

- 26 Zaydān's writings constantly employ the categories of "Arab" and "Turk." As Kamran Rastegar puts it, "While my own compulsion is to pluralize the term Arab society, to do so may do a kind of violence to Zaydan's own thinking—he clearly worked within a conceptual framework that idealized a singular Arab culture and society." "Literary Modernity between Arabic and Persian Prose: Jurji Zaydan's Riwayat in Persian Translation," *Comparative Critical Studies* 4:3 (2007), 374.
- 27 Şükran Fazlıoğlu, *Arap romanında Türkler* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2006), 244. In contrast, Shawqī Abū Khalīl interprets Zaydān's novels as a treason against Arabs. See *Jurjī Zaydān fī al-mizān* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).
- 28 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 3:127; 2:168.
- 29 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 3:307.
- 30 Jurjī Zaydān, "ʿAjāl al-duwal aw aʿmāruhā qadīman wa-ḥadīthan," *al-Hilāl* 21:8 (1913), 459. Also quoted in Thomas Philipp, *Jurji Zaydan and the Foundations of Arab Nationalism: A Study* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 50.
- 31 Philipp, 115. Muḥammad Harb also notes that Zaydān supported Ottoman rule, considering this rule an important defense mechanism against European intrusion. See Harb, 20.

In fact, Zaydān was highly engaged with literary changes in the late Ottoman Empire. For example, the famous journal *al-Hilāl* dedicates an article to Namık Kemal and depicts him as a pioneer of a “modern Turkish awakening.”³² This article is part of a series that appears in almost every issue of *al-Hilāl*, “The Most Famous Events and Most Renowned People” (*Ashhar al-ḥawādith wa-aʿzam al-rijāl*). M. Kayahan Özgül has recently called for overcoming the tendency to consider Namık Kemal the pioneer of modern Turkish literature. He has demonstrated that although earlier scholarship has described Namık Kemal as “the homeland poet” (*vatan şairi*) for popularizing certain sentiments such as love of the homeland among Turkish readers, many poets who lived before Namık Kemal had written about the homeland and called for important thematic and stylistic changes in Turkish literature.³³ My article proposes that it was not just Namık Kemal’s peers or today’s literary critics who have considered Namık Kemal the pioneer of modern Turkish literature. Many “pioneers of modern Arabic literature” such as Jurjī Zaydān and Rūḥī al-Khālidi also viewed Namık Kemal as the pioneer of a modern Turkish *nahḍah*.

Namık Kemal indeed called for a new literature but this literature also had cosmopolitan characteristics that did not neatly fit into what we think of modern Turkish literature today. Although many Arabic writers considered themselves the heirs of a “highly developed literary, political, and religious culture that did not always conform to the culture present at the Ottoman court,” works in the classical Arabic poetic heritage constituted an integral element of the cosmopolitan literary biome that shaped the intellectual formation of

32 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 164. Namık Kemal is particularly known for popularizing concepts of freedom, nation, and homeland among Turkish readers. After attending numerous educational institutions such as Beyazıt Rüştiyesi and Valide Mektebi, Namık Kemal worked at the Translation Bureau in Istanbul, which played a fundamental role in the intellectual formation of many other late Ottoman *tanzimat* intellectuals. He would eventually join the organization of Young Ottomans which called for a constitutional government and sought a synthesis between Islamic and Enlightenment values. Namık Kemal suffered from exile and censorship due to his political viewpoints that were deemed controversial during his lifetime. His exile in Europe would make him a stronger advocate for the values of civilization and progress. Some of his most famous works include *Vatan yahut Silistre* (Homeland or Silistre, 1873), *İntibah* (Awakening, 1876), and *Cezmi* (1880). For an anthology of his critical works, see Kazım Yetiş (ed.), *Ölümünün 100. yıldönümü münasebetiyle Namık Kemal’in Türk dili ve edebiyatı üzerine görüşleri ve yazıları* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1989). There exists a plethora of secondary sources on Namık Kemal. For a comprehensive list of the scholarship on Namık Kemal in various languages, see Ömer Faruk Akün, “Nâmık Kemal,” *Türkiye İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013), 32:377–78.

33 M. Kayahan Özgül, *Kemal’le ihtimal yahut Namık Kemal’in şüirine tersten bakmak* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2014).

thinkers such as Namık Kemal.³⁴ He was drawn to the cultural capital of Arabic for his future aspirations of a new Ottoman literature. While Namık Kemal criticized Persian literature for its detrimental influence on Ottoman poetry, many of his writings, in particular his famous 1866 article “*Lisan-ı Osmanî’nin edebiyatı hakkında bazı mülahazatı şamildir*” (Some Contemplations about the Literature of Ottoman Language) emphasized that Arabic literature would provide a good role model for the future of Ottoman poetry.³⁵ In fact, Namık Kemal considers works from Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī and al-Mutanabbī the best examples of poems that display subtlety (*incelik*)³⁶ and works from Imru’ al-Qays the best examples of poems that excel in description (*tasvir*).³⁷

Namık Kemal notes that “literature of Arabs” (*edebiyat-ı Arab*) includes works from the *jāhiliyyah*, Abbasid, and al-Andalus periods; however, he believes that the *qāṣīdah* poems that were written during his lifetime in Egypt and Tunisia do not belong to the “literature of Arabs” due to their egregious quality.³⁸ His words testify to unequal power hierarchies within the Ottoman Empire, as Arabic can be worth contemplation for Namık Kemal only as works of an Ottoman cosmopolitan biome and not as the language and literature that many of his contemporaries, like Zaydān, drew upon to forge their own cultural visions.³⁹ One can interpret this particular attitude of Namık Kemal as an

- 34 Bruce Masters, *Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918: A Social and Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6. While some intellectuals such as Ebussuud Efendi (d. 1574) composed works in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, many others complained about the difficulty of learning these languages. It would thus be a mistake to think that Ottoman poets had a perfect command of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages. For example, Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) notes that if one were to dedicate his life to learning the Arabic language, one would still fail to master it. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, “Osmanlıcanın ıslahı,” 3:71.
- 35 Fatih Altuğ, “Namık Kemal’in edebiyat eleştirisinde modernlik ve öznellik” (PhD dissertation, Boğaziçi University, 2007), 199-200. Altuğ notes that Arabic would become more “provincialized” (*taşralaştırıldı*) after Namık Kemal as Arabic works would not be considered sources of emulation for the future of Ottoman literature (204).
- 36 Necmettin Halil Onan, ed., *Namık Kemal’in Talim-i Edebiyat üzerine bir risalesi* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1950), 46.
- 37 Onan, *Namık Kemal’in*, 54.
- 38 Namık Kemal, “Kemal Bey’in bir makalesi [İntibâh Mukaddimesi]” *Şark* 1:5 (1298 AH [1881 AD]), 99. Also quoted in Altuğ, 91. In contrast, writers who are considered pioneers of modern Persian literature had a deep engagement with Persian translations of Zaydān’s works. See Rastegar.
- 39 For a comprehensive description of how some Ottoman Turkish writings appropriated Orientalist themes and tropes to describe cultures and places that their authors consider “less civilized,” see Christopher Herzog and Raoul Motika, “Orientalism Alla Turca: Late 19th/ Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim ‘Outback,’” *Die Welt des Islams* 40:2 (2000), 139-195.

author from the hegemonic “center” looking down on works from what some historians have considered the empire’s “periphery.”⁴⁰

In contrast, Jurjī Zaydān notes that Namık Kemal has a special place in the history of Turkish literature and praises Namık Kemal as the pioneer of a Turkish *nahḍah*. In the beginning of his article on Namık Kemal, Jurjī Zaydān indicates that *al-Hilāl* has published an article on Mustafa Reşid Pasha (1800–1858) and will publish more works on other famous Ottoman writers.⁴¹ Zaydān then writes that he asked a friend who lives in Istanbul to write a biography of Namık Kemal, although the reader does not know who composed this article.⁴² Zaydān also notes that he is providing certain excerpts from this friend’s work. The article describes Namık Kemal not as a “Turkish” author but instead as an “Ottoman” author since he uses the term “one of the famous Ottomans” (*min mashāhīr al-’uthmāniyyīn*) to refer to Namık Kemal. At the same time, we read nothing in regards to Namık Kemal’s engagement with the classical Arabic heritage, which now seems to be under the purview of people like Zaydān who are considered pioneers of a modern Arab identity.

40 I use the terms center and periphery cautiously here and put them in quotation marks since they often obscure rather than shed light upon complex cultural dynamics of the Ottoman literary biome. The central Istanbul administration infringing on domestic affairs in many regions of the empire more than ever in its final years; nevertheless, the paradigm of a clash between a hegemonic imperial Turkish “center” and an Arab “periphery,” which has significantly influenced the field of Ottoman studies, cannot capture the complex literary relations in the late Ottoman Empire especially because Arabic had high cultural capital for the Ottoman literary biome.

41 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 162. Critics have often pointed out that Zaydān shares many characteristics with another author from Ottoman Turkish literature, Ahmet Midhat, because both were prolific writers, came from modest socioeconomic backgrounds, and wrote many historical novels that aimed to educate their audience. Dupont also remarks that Zaydān may have become familiar with and even seen himself in Ahmet Midhat during his visit to Istanbul (28). In fact, Zaydān wrote a brief biography of Ahmet Midhat in *al-Hilāl* after he passed away. This biography introduces Ahmet Midhat as one of the most important Turkish authors. See Jurjī Zaydān, “Aḥmad Midḥat: Al-kātib al-turkī al-shahīr,” *al-Hilāl* 21:6 (1913): 355–357.

42 The author notes that his biography draws significantly upon the work of Ebūziyya Tefvīk (1849–1913), who was Namık Kemal’s close friend (“Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 162). The same piece with minor changes will appear later in *Tarājim mashāhīr al-sharq fī al-qarn al-tāsī’ ‘ashar* (1910; Biographies of Prominent People of the Orient in the Nineteenth Century) by Zaydān. See Jurjī Zaydān, *Tarājim mashāhīr al-Sharq fī al-qarn al-tāsī’ ‘ashar* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, n.d.), 115–121. It is also interesting to note that in *Tarājim*, Namık Kemal is in the same section with other important *nahḍah* figures such as Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī, and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī.

Later, the author identifies the audience as “readers of Arabic and Turkish languages” (*qurrā’ al-lughatayn al-‘arabiyyah wa-l-turkiyyah*).⁴³ Such an identification suggests that the article addresses linguistic communities rather than national or ethnic ones such as “Arab people.” It also suggests that their shared “Ottoman subjecthood” (*al-tābi‘iyyah al-‘uthmāniyyah*)⁴⁴ necessitates the intensification of cultural interactions between them. Thus, the author promises to provide the audience more information on other “prominent Ottomans,” such as Şinasi Efendi, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, and Ebüzziya Tevfik in upcoming issues.

Akin to works that establish a sense of stark rupture between classical and modern Arabic literatures, the article on Namık Kemal posits a stark rupture between classical and modern Turkish literatures. The anonymous author notes that *Tasvir-i Efkar*, the newspaper which Namık Kemal edited, initiated the modern Turkish *nahḍah* (*al-nahḍah al-turkiyyah al-ḥadīthah*) and that Namık Kemal was the pioneer of a new Turkish prose style (*al-inshā’*).⁴⁵ While the article mentions that Namık Kemal can recite poetry in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and French, it overlooks the fact that Namık Kemal called for a new Ottoman literature that would build in part upon works by poets like al-Mutanabbī and al-Ma‘arrī.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the article indicates that Turkish language arts (*al-ādāb al-turkiyyah*) entered a new age with Namık Kemal as prose branched (*nawwa‘a*) into new directions, while Turkish writers before him showed no innovation in either their prose or their ideas over the past six hundred years.⁴⁷ Many years later, Zaydān would himself praise Namık Kemal as someone who had “a special significance in the history of Turkish language arts” (*sha’n khāṣṣ fi tārikh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah*), in particular for his role in initiating a Turkish *nahḍah*.⁴⁸

Once certain cultural transformations in the late Ottoman Empire are described as “the modern Turkish *nahḍah*,” the history of modern Turkish literature no longer describes a foreign, unfamiliar literary landscape, but could function like a mirror image that further reinforced the idea among Arabic readers that Arabic literary history had a similar narrative and was undergoing a stark rupture and its own *nahḍah*. Unlike Namık Kemal who quotes from classical Arabic poetry and ignores modern Arabic works, Arab intellectuals such as Rūḥī al-Khālidi, Ma‘rūf al-Ruṣāfi, and Jurjī Zaydān did engage with

43 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 162.

44 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 162.

45 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 164.

46 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 166.

47 “Muḥammad Nāmīq,” 165.

48 Ḥarb, 134.

Namık Kemal's works.⁴⁹ I propose that Arabic literature becomes reinvented as comparative literature because writers like Zaydān and al-Khālidi translated the "Turkish *tanzimat*" into an "Arabic *nahḍah*" as they described changes in the Ottoman literary landscape as a modern Turkish *nahḍah*.⁵⁰

Thirteen years after the article on Namık Kemal was published, Zaydān writes about what he calls "the history of Turkish language arts" (*tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah*), which has notable similarities with his more famous *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*. This history of Turkish language arts is part of a series of articles in which he shares his observations on the Young Turk Revolution. Zaydān travelled to Istanbul in 1909 to share his observations about this revolution and wrote extensively about his trip in *al-Hilāl*.⁵¹ He informs readers about various aspects of Istanbul, including its geographical location, monuments, palaces, museums, and political situation. In the beginning of the section "Its scientific and literary condition" (*ḥālātihā al-ʿilmiyyah wa-l-adabiyyah*), Zaydān notes that one needs to study Turkish language arts to understand Istanbul's cultural landscape since Istanbul is a Turkish place (*balad turkī*). Furthermore, Ottoman becomes a marker of a particular Turkish identity when Zaydān notes that one needs to distinguish Ottoman Turks (*al-atrāk al-uthmāniyyīn*) from other Turks like Uzbeks.⁵² Upon defining Turkish and Ottoman in clear terms, Zaydān starts to generate comparisons between Arabic and Turkish literatures.

While Zaydān does not write extensively about what he calls "the history of Turkish language arts" (*Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah*) in contrast to the voluminous *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah*, both works share many characteristics. They both describe not just works of "literature" in the modern sense, but also of historiography, geography, and philosophy. If *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah* emphasizes numerous times that Turkish language arts has recently entered a *nahḍah* after a long period of slumber, *Tārīkh ādāb*

49 Ma'rūf al-Ruṣāfi translated Namık Kemal's *Rüya* (Dream, 1908) into Arabic as *al-Ru'yā fī baḥṭh al-ḥurriyyah* (Dream about the Search for Freedom, 1909). See Ma'rūf al-Ruṣāfi, *Āthāruhu fī al-naqd wa-l-adab* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2014), 3: 613-642.

50 Many historians of the Ottoman Empire often use the term *tanzimat* (literally reorganization) to refer to political and cultural transformations that occurred throughout the empire in the nineteenth century as a reaction toward the increasing Western influence. Literary critics use the term *tanzimat* literature (*tanzimat edebiyatı*) to refer to literary works from the late Ottoman Empire. Like in "*nahḍah* studies," more works in "*tanzimat* studies" in the past few years have challenged these typical definitions of *tanzimat*. See Ertürk and M. Kayahan Özgül, *Divan Yolu'ndan Pera'ya selamette: Modern Türk şiirine doğru* (Ankara: Hece Yayınları, 2006).

51 Ḥarb, 125.

52 Ḥarb, 125.

al-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah emphasizes that Arabic language arts has entered its last *nahḍah* after a period of decline.⁵³ *Al-nahḍah* functions as a point of rupture also for Turkish language arts (*ādāb*), and this is evident in the titles of sections, such as “Turkish language arts before the last *nahḍah*” (*ādāb al-lughah al-turkiyyah qabla al-nahḍah al-akhīrah*).⁵⁴ Arabs experienced *nahḍahs* during certain moments in the Abbasid period and Turks experienced a *nahḍah* during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566).⁵⁵ Furthermore, the “last *nahḍah*” (*al-nahḍah al-akhīrah*) of both Arabs and Turks corresponds to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and displays similar qualities such as deeper engagement with Western language arts (*ādāb al-ifranj*) and aspects of modern civilization (*ʿawāmil al-ḥaḍārah al-ḥadīthah*).⁵⁶ Both works list libraries, journals, and printing presses in their histories of “the last *nahḍah*” of Turkish and Arabic language arts. Zaydān’s writings envision Turkish language arts and Arabic language arts as two parallel trajectories that do not, despite their deep similarity, ever meet in the cultural admixture that constituted Ottoman literary biome.

A practice of comparison that designates Arabic and Turkish as two distinct traditions of two separate biomes becomes necessary for Zaydān to lay the groundwork for his vision of Arabic language arts. Because of this centrality of comparison, I call for analyzing the histories of modern Arabic and Turkish literatures in conjunction with each other. I find the concept of “entanglement” useful to undermine narratives of emergence that have characterized the typical understanding of these histories. Meliz Ergin builds upon Jacques Derrida’s concept of entanglement for her ecocritical reading of modern Turkish and American literatures and defines the concept in the following terms: “[E]ntanglement is embedded with relational difficulties, and has both constructive and destructive implications. It entails both a risk and a promise, because it roots identity in reciprocal relationships and perceives the mutual dependence between self and other as a productive and irresolvable tension rather than a moment of deviation exterior to their relation.”⁵⁷ Interactions between Arabic and Turkish literatures in the late Ottoman Empire did not constitute “a moment of deviation exterior to” that relationship. Rather, modern

53 Ḥarb, 129-130; Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 4:9.

54 Ḥarb, 127.

55 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 2:246. Zaydān notes that the first Abbasid period (*al-ʿaṣr al-Abbāsī al-awwal*; 132-232 AH [750-847 AD]) and the third Abbasid period (*al-ʿaṣr al-Abbāsī al-thālith*; 232-334 AH [850-945 AD]) experienced *nahḍahs*. Ḥarb, 130.

56 Ḥarb, 133 and Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 4:13.

57 Meliz Ergin, *The Ecopoetics of Entanglement in Contemporary Turkish and American Literatures* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 36.

Arabic and Turkish literatures morphed in a reciprocal entanglement, making the histories of their “emergence” intertwined with each other.

Arabic Literature and the Debate on Classics

Even if many of their writings may have de-emphasized the cosmopolitan characteristics of the Ottoman literary biome, authors like Zaydān were part of its translingual and transcultural space. Some authors who are today considered pioneers of modern Arabic literature read works of *turāth* during their time in Istanbul. Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839-1904), who is “recognized and (re-)created as the founder of Arab nationalism, coinciding with the revitalization of the utopian vision of this movement,”⁵⁸ worked as a civil administrator in Istanbul. *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, the Arabic newspaper which was founded by Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858-1930) in 1898, included “extracts from Arabic literature, including essays by al-Jāḥīz and poems by Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, which Muḥammad had transcribed in Istanbul’s Fatih Library during his stay there.”⁵⁹ One of the most prominent figures of the *nahḍah*, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805-1887) also made extensive use of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish works in Istanbul. As Geoffrey Roper notes, “His assiduous work in the libraries of Europe and Turkey enabled him to study, appreciate, copy, and later edit great works of the Arabic literary heritage, many of which had not yet been published and had lapsed into obscurity in their homeland.”⁶⁰ Many Orientalists encountered what they considered classical masterpieces of Arabic literature in Istanbul’s libraries. For example, Rūḥī al-Khālīdī notes that the prominent Orientalist Richard Boucher discovered the works of al-Farazdaq at the Ayasofya Library in Istanbul, before providing a commentary on them and translating them into French.⁶¹

Zaydān also drew upon Arabic texts that shaped Ottoman literary biome. Dupont remarks that Zaydān’s travel to Istanbul in 1909 provided him with the opportunity to become acquainted with both Turkish and Arabic works

58 Terri DeYoung, *Mahmud Sami al-Barudi: Reconfiguring Society and the Self* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 2.

59 Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī, *What ʿĪsā ibn Hishām Told Us, or, A Period of Time*, ed. and trans. Roger Allen (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 1:xiii.

60 Geoffrey Roper, “Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and the Libraries of Europe and the Ottoman Empire,” *Libraries & Culture* 33:3 (1998), 234.

61 Rūḥī al-Khālīdī, *Tārīkh ʿilm al-adab ʿinda al-Ifranj wa-l-ʿArab wa Fiktūr Hūkū* (Qatar: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah waʾl-Funūn waʾl-Turāth, 2013), 52.

in Istanbul's libraries that he would use for the *Tārīkh*.⁶² She also notes that Zaydān started to learn Turkish to keep up with the latest political developments in the empire.⁶³ Furthermore, Zaydān himself observes during his visit in Istanbul that most works in Istanbul's libraries are in Arabic.⁶⁴ He notes in the beginning of Book 3 of the *Tārīkh* that Aḥmad Taymūr (1877-1930) provided him with books in several languages from Istanbul.⁶⁵ The Arabic sources that Zaydān consulted for the *Tārīkh* include the tenth-century *al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm as well as works that played a key role for the formation of Ottoman intellectuals such as *Kashf az-ẓunūn* by Katib Çelebi (1609-1657) and *Miftāḥ al-sa'adah* by Taşköprüzade Ahmed Efendi (1495-1561).⁶⁶

Situating the *Tārīkh* within the context of an Ottoman literary biome can allow critics to reassess its role in the history of Arabic literature. Based on the conceptual repertoire that Beecroft's work provides, I would reframe the *Tārīkh*'s crucial role as contributing to the constitution of a literary biome in which Arabic language and literature played a central role. This biome carried some characteristics of vernacular and some characteristics of national biomes.⁶⁷ Zaydān may be seen in many ways as one of what Beecroft called "founding authors of the vernacular" who are "likely to be situated within the cosmopolitan ecology, if frequently on its periphery".⁶⁸ He notes that these "founders" also have a deep understanding of the cosmopolitan ecology. Furthermore, unlike many authors of national literary biomes, Zaydān did not call for Arab political sovereignty and hence did not advocate a vision of Arabic literature that would serve the goal of political sovereignty.

At the same time, national biomes advocate a break with the cosmopolitan past and emphasize "evolution over autochthony" as they pick certain works from the past as a part of this national literature and interpret them as the beginnings of a linear and national literary history.⁶⁹ In this respect, the *Tārīkh*

62 Dupont, 28.

63 Dupont, 580.

64 Ḥarb, 151.

65 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 3:3.

66 Zaydan, *Tārīkh*, 1:7. İlhan Kutluer notes that *Miftāḥ al-sa'adah* crystallizes the intellectual formation and philosophical worldview of Ottoman intelligentsia. İlhan Kutluer, "Miftahu's-Saade," *Türkiye İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988-2013), 30:18.

67 Vernacular literatures emerge when a local language in a cosmopolitan biome attains enough cultural resources so that a significant number of people start to use it for producing literary works (Beecroft, 34). National literature "interprets texts through the lens of the nation-state, whether as that state's embodiment, as the dissent tolerated within its public sphere, as its legitimating precursors, or as its future aspirations" (197-198).

68 Beecroft, 183.

69 Beecroft, 199.

is akin to the foundational texts of national literary biomes. I analyze the use of the term “classics” in literary histories from the late Ottoman period to analyze how these literary histories designate certain texts from the past as a part of the evolution of their national literatures. Thought to be first used by the late antique writer Aulus Gellius (130-180), the term “classics” eventually came to signify a work of first quality among Roman thinkers and retained this signification to this day. In this sense, the term has a wide appeal, since writers such as T. S. Eliot defined classics as works that represent the apex of a nation’s linguistic expression. Furthermore, since many Western European intellectuals sought in ancient Greek and Roman works their cultural roots, they also eulogized these works and have continued to categorize them as classics.⁷⁰

Ultimately tied to the project of canonization, debates on classics in Arabic and Turkish writings also attempt to project their respective literatures as akin to Western literatures that also had their own classics. Many intellectuals who are today viewed as pioneers of Arabic and Turkish literature, such as Zaydān and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962), forged their visions of “classics” as they engaged with Western literatures. Works by these authors often mobilized the term “classics” to demarcate the canon of texts that their readers should master. For example, as this article will show, many Ottoman Turkish writings treated Arabic writings as their classics while Arabic works such as the *Tārīkh* also classified these works as the classical pedestals of a modern Arabic literature.

The way in which Zaydān uses the term “classics” reveals the manifold comparisons that he makes for situating Arabic literature within a global literary field. The term “classics” comes up twice in Zaydān’s work, both in volume two. In the first instance, he uses the term to describe how a style that became prevalent in the late Abbasid period was imitated by later generations:

يمتاز هذا العصر بنضج العلم على الإجمال، وفيه تكونت المعاجم اللغوية واستقر الإنشاء على أسلوب أصبح قاعدة يقلدها أهل العصور التالية بما يعبر عنه الأفرنج بقولهم “كلاسيك”⁷¹

This era is distinguished by the full maturation of arts and sciences, including the composition of large lexicons and the establishment of prose style that became the norm for the following centuries, in a way that Europeans call “classics.”

70 Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1991), 173-174.

71 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 2:255.

Zaydān puts a quotation mark around the word “classics”, suggesting that this concept, which is a European (*ifranj*) expression, was foreign to his audience. Zaydān indicates that although his audience may be unfamiliar with the concept “classics”, this concept could describe a particular style in Arabic writings.

Zaydan also uses the term “classics” to emphasize the high quality of particular Arabic works and compares these works with Greek and Roman classics for emphasizing the important role they play for the cultural formation of their respective communities. Below is an example from the *Tarīkh* that makes such an emphasis:

صار للإنشاء في هذا العصر طريقة اتخذها أهل العصور التالية نموذجاً نسجوا على منواله. وهي الطريقة المدرسية في اصطلاح الافرنج (كلاسيك) وبعبارة أخرى إن الطريقة المدرسية للترسل العربي نضجت في هذا العصر كما نضج الإنشاء الروماني في عصر شيشرون ثم أخذ في التقهقر.⁷²

Epistolary (prose) writing of this age became the style that later generations took as a model to be pursued. It is the scholastic style that is called in the words of Europeans (classics). In other words, the school of Arabic epistolography reached its fullest expression in this age just as the Roman prose style reached its fullest expression in the age of Cicero and then began to decline after that.

Here, Zaydān notes that prose writing achieved its golden age in the final years of the Abbasid Empire. This classical tradition that Zaydān is referring to has various features such as rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), paronomasia (*jinās*), and rhetorical embellishment (*badīʿ*).⁷³ Because the word “classics” is put in parenthesis, this paragraph again suggests that the word “classics” is a concept that Zaydān’s readers are not familiar with. At the same time, Zaydān also emphasizes that even if Europeans and Arabs may have come up with different expressions to describe a particular style, they share similar historical trajectories. Zaydān notes that a European expression that may sound foreign to his readers actually captures the characteristics of a particular style in Arabic prose. Zaydān, like numerous literary historians of the late Ottoman Empire, did not only use the term “classics” simply to mark their relationship vis-à-vis the past but also

⁷² Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 2:294.

⁷³ Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 2:294.

to signify an affinity with the Western civilization which also had its own classical heritage.

Furthermore, Zaydān does not use parentheses or quotation marks when using the terms *naḥw* (science of grammar) and *al-Jāhiliyyah* to describe certain aspects of Greek or French writings throughout the *Tārīkh*.⁷⁴ Indeed, Zaydān constantly emphasizes similarities between Greeks and Arabs to show that Arabs, like Greeks, belong to an important civilization. He notes that both debated extensively about the talent of their poets; both share a period of *jāhiliyyah*; both developed *naḥw*.⁷⁵ Like Zaydān, many influential authors such as Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973), and Sulaymān al-Bustānī (1856-1925) would frequently compare their communities with Greeks and Romans.⁷⁶ Thus, many modern Arabic writings uphold Zaydān's vision of Arabic culture and heritage that found shape through manifold comparisons.

Just as “the *naḥḍah*,” according to Tageldin, “unfolded in translation” by transporting “French and English into Arabic [and thus] appearing to ‘preserve’ Arabic—all the while translating it,” “Ottoman poetry,” as Veli N. Yashin puts it, “becomes (new Turkish) literature, inasmuch as it can be recognized in European terms—fitted into its form and *translated* into its history.”⁷⁷ I consider the use of the term “classics” in late Ottoman writings a similar act of translation that we have already observed in Zaydān's writings.⁷⁸ I propose that the term “classics” also served to shape these authors' attitudes toward Arabic literary heritage since it helps these authors to envision Arabic texts as predecessors of Ottoman Turkish writings rather than an integral part of an Ottoman literary biome. The term “classics” foregrounds relations of anteriority and posteriority that this biome did not emphasize in such stark terms. Indeed, Fatih Altuğ has argued that Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literatures intertwined in the Ottoman cosmopolitan tradition in a manner that is heterogeneous and

74 *Jāhiliyyah*, which can also be translated as “the Age of Ignorance,” is a term that is used to refer to pre-Islamic times.

75 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 1:244; 1:171; 2:11.

76 See Peter E. Pormann, “The Arab ‘Cultural Awakening (*Nahḍa*)’, 1870-1950 and the Classical Tradition,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13:1 (2006), 3-20.

77 Tageldin, *Disarming Words*, 5. Veli N. Yashin, “‘The True Face of the Work’: Sovereignty and Literary Form in Literary Historiography,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20:2 (2017), 166; italics mine.

78 “Classics” (*klasik*) was a term that was prevalently used in many late Ottoman Turkish writings and had various meanings such as old poetry and literary works of high quality. For an extensive description of debates on classics in the late Ottoman Empire, see Ramazan Kaplan, “Klasikler tartışması (Başlangıç dönemi),” *Türkoloji Dergisi* 11:1 (1993), 161-208.

centerless (*heterojen ve merkezsiz*), making it hard to separate these traditions.⁷⁹ Altuğ's observation on the intertwinement of these traditions would resonate well with the description of the Ottoman language in the famous anthology *Harabat* (Tavern, 1291-1292 AH [1874/1875-1875/1876]) by Ziya Pasha (1825-1880). The anthology depicted the mixture of Persian and Turkish as akin to the "mixture of sugar and milk" and Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages as akin to streams that intertwine in the "Ottoman ocean."⁸⁰ *Harabat* is often interpreted as one of the last works in the late Ottoman Empire that defended tradition; indeed, unlike *Harabat*, many late Ottoman texts "stabilize" Arabic and Ottoman Turkish literatures such that Arabic literature always predates Ottoman Turkish literature as a source of influence.

İsmail Hakkı, one of the first Ottoman literary historians to use the term "classics," uses the term to characterize Ottoman literature's relationship vis-à-vis Arabic literature:

غرب ادبياتي ايچون قلاسيكلر، يونان وروماليلردن بدأ ايتديكي كى بزم ادباتمز ايچون
دخى عرب وعجم شعراسندن باشلار⁸¹

Just as, for Western literature, the classics begin with the Greeks and Romans, for our literature, they start with Arab and Persian poets.

The word "just as" (*gibi*) suggests that Ottoman literature is comparable with and hence similar or even equivalent to Western literature. This sentence claims that just as the Western culture has its classics, so too do the Ottomans. Literature becomes a possession that contributes to one's sense of identity, as is evident in the use of the phrase "our literature" (*bizim edebiyatımız*). İsmail Hakkı's observation also generates a teleological trajectory, since for him Ottoman literature "starts with" Arab poets such as al-Mutanabbī and Abū Tammām. Implicit in this word choice is the fact that these poets are *still* considered part of Ottoman literature, even if they are now seen as distant ancestors. İsmail Hakkı claims that Ottoman literature starts with Arab and Persian *poets* rather than with Arabic and Persian *literatures*. This subtle and yet pivotal distinction suggests that İsmail Hakkı, unlike most authors after him, still does not categorize literatures based on ethnolinguistic grounds and considers Arab and Persian poets a part of what he calls "our literature."

79 Altuğ, 185.

80 Ziya Pasha, *Mukaddime-i Harabat* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ebüzziya, 1311 AH [1893/1894]), 37-38.

81 İsmail Hakkı, *Muallim Naci Efendi* (Istanbul: Nişan Berberyan Matbaası, 1311 AH [1893/1894]), 88.

As with Zaydān, “classics” is a non-emic term for İsmail Hakkı and he feels the need to define the term whenever he uses it.⁸² Just like many European writers in the nineteenth century who studied the Mediterranean as the basin of a Greco-Roman heritage that gave birth to modern Western civilization, writers such as İsmail Hakkı also sought the roots of their “civilization” in Arabic and Persian works as their classics.⁸³ Thus Ottoman literature could be resignified as Turkish literature and classical Arabic poetry as a source of influence that once shaped this literature and eventually can be set aside for the constitution of a new, modern culture.

Regarding the role of classical Roman and Greek traditions in the current imagination of Western culture and its use by the British imperial discourse, Mark Bradley writes: “For the self-conscious discourses of modernity, the classical world was both the ‘other,’ pushed back into the distant past, *and* the evidence of unbroken tradition evoked to bestow legitimacy on the present.”⁸⁴ Although Bradley focuses on representations of classical Greek and Roman traditions in the nineteenth-century British Empire, his observations capture the dynamic between classical and modern works in literary histories that I have been examining. These histories relegate texts that they deem classical to a distant past while still maintaining a sense of continuity between the past and present. Even if numerous late Ottoman writings did not use the term “classics” per se, they share the same attitude with İsmail Hakkı toward Arabic literature. Faik Reşad also notes that Ottomans imitated Arabs in the same way that French imitated Greeks.⁸⁵ Likewise, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, one of the most influential authors of modern Turkish literature, compares the influence of Arabic prose on Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895) with the influence of Latin on French writers.⁸⁶

82 İsmail Hakkı builds upon critics such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) while providing a definition of the term “classics.” He defines it once as “old poetry” (90) and another time as works from the past that have a high literary value (83). İsmail Hakkı wrote his thoughts on classics at the end of his biography of Muallim Naci (1849-1893), who is praised as one of the last poets who uses classical style. İsmail Hakkı thinks that Muallim Naci would not receive the praise that he deserves because more authors look down upon the classical style.

83 For this understanding of the Mediterranean in European writings, see Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

84 Mark Bradley, “Introduction,” in *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, ed. Mark Bradley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

85 Faik Reşad, *Tarih-i edebiyat-ı Osmaniye* (Istanbul: Dersaadet Kütüphanesi, n.d.), 17.

86 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *19uncu asır Türk edebiyatı tarihi*, 6th ed. (Istanbul: Çağlayan Kitabevi, 1985), 177.

Like İsmail Hakkı's work, *Tārīkh 'ilm al-adab 'inda al-Ifranj wa-l-'Arab wa-Fiṭṭūr Hūkū* (History of the Science of Literature among the Europeans and the Arabs and Victor Hugo, first serialized in *al-Hilāl* in 1902 and its first edition published in 1904) by Rūḥī al-Khālīdī also depicted Arabic literature as a past source of influence for Ottoman literature rather than an integral part of its biome. The publication of this work marked, according to H. Al-Khateeb, "the beginning of the study of comparative literature in the Arab world."⁸⁷ Al-Khālīdī writes about the controversy around the anthology *Harabat* by Ziya Pasha:⁸⁸

واقفنى أثر بوالو في انتقاد كلام المتقدمين الوزير ضيا باشا وألف مجموعة سماها "الخرابات" خرب فيها كثيراً من أشعار الفرس والترك والعرب المتقدمين عليه. وكانت وفاته في بروسة سنة 1295هـ فجاء بك إمام الأدب في اللسان العثماني وكتب عليه انتقاداً سماه "تخريب الخرابات"، ونشره في مطبعة أبو ضياء. فالغاية التي يتطلّبها أئمة الأدب العثماني كاللذين ذكراً، وعبد الحق حامد بك مستشار سفارة لوندرة، وأكرم بك، وسعيد بك من أعضاء الشورى، المعلم ناجي أفندي المتوفي منذ بضع سنين، وبقية النشأة الجديدة—هي تخليص لسانهم من مبالغات الفرس الأعاجم والسلوك فيه منهج بوالو وراسين وقورنيل ومولير وبقية أدباء عصر لويس الرابع عشر. لأن هؤلاء الأدباء يذهبون إلى أن التخيل الشعري ينبغي أن يكون مقروناً بالتعقل.

The vizier Ziya Pasha followed Boileau's footsteps in criticizing the old school and composed an anthology that he called "*al-Kharābāt*" [sic] in which he strongly castigated poetry by the Turks, Persians, and Arabs who preceded him. Ziya Pasha passed away in Bursa in 1295 AH. And then came Namık Kemal, the leader of *adab* in Ottoman language. To criticize *Harabat*, Namık Kemal wrote *Takhrīb al-Kharābāt* [sic] and published it from the Ebüzziya Press. Leaders of Ottoman *adab*, like the two hitherto mentioned [Ziya Pasha and Namık Kemal], Abdülhak Hamid Bey who is an embassy counselor in London, Ekrem Bey, Said Bey, who is among

87 H. Al-Khateeb, "Rūḥī al-Khālīdī: A Pioneer of Comparative Literature in Arabic," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 18 (1987), 82. See also al-Khateeb, *Rūḥī al-Khālīdī: Rā'id al-adab al-'Arabī al-muqāran* (Amman: Dār al-Karmal, 1985). Like Zaydān, al-Khālīdī also was a part of the transcultural context of Ottoman literary biome. He read Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and French and received education in numerous cities, such as Beirut, Istanbul, and Paris. He was elected numerous times as a deputy to the Ottoman parliament. According to al-Khateeb, few works of Arabic literature paid attention to al-Khālīdī's work because the earlier scholarship has studied him often within the context of the history of Palestine.

88 Al-Khālīdī, 122.

the members of *şura-yı devlet* [state council], Muallim Naci Efendi, who passed away a few years ago, and the rest of the new generation all sought the aim of getting rid of foreign Persian exaggerations from their language. In doing so, they follow the stylistic approach of Boileau, Racine, Corneille, Moliere, and other litterateurs (*udabā*) from the time of Louis XIV who asserted that the poetic imagination must be accompanied by reason.

Like Zaydān, this paragraph “translates” the Ottoman literary landscape in several ways and renders it familiar to its Arabic readers. First, it calls Ziya Pasha’s anthology *al-Kharābāt* using the Arabic definite article and then uses the Arabic *iḍāfah* construction in reproducing the title of Namık Kemal’s work as *Takhrib al-Kharābāt* rather than the Turkish *Tahrib-i Harabat*, further endowing a sense of familiarity to these works for Arabic readers. Second, al-Khālidi “misreads” *Harabat* by claiming that the anthology criticizes old poets. Many critics have noted that *Harabat* defends classical poetry at a time when many late Ottoman intellectuals such as Namık Kemal were harshly critical of it and calling for a new literature. Finally, al-Khālidi classifies diverse figures such as Reşad Ekrem, Muallim Naci, and Abdülhak Hamid Bey as “new writers” and overlooks discrepancies among them. Also like Jurjī Zaydān, al-Khālidi describes Namık Kemal as “the leader of literature in Ottoman language” and has nothing to say about his engagement with Arabic literature.

Al-Khālidi’s comparison between French and Ottoman writers again depicts Arabic as a source of influence that predated the emergence of Ottoman literature but never existed as a part of its literary biome. Al-Khālidi notes that Ziya Pasha and Namık Kemal “followed the footsteps” of Boileau (1636-1711) who also called for a stark separation between ancient and modern literatures and established what al-Khālidi referred to as a style that is “scholastic (classics)” (*madraşī [kilāsīk]*). Al-Khālidi compares the period of Louis XIV with the period of Augustus and time of Pericles of Greeks.⁸⁹ By comparing Ottoman writers with poets from the reign of Louis XIV, al-Khālidi generates a sense of equivalence between authors like Ziya Pasha and Namık Kemal and their French counterparts like Boileau, Racine, Moliere. He also notes throughout his book that French authors “followed the footsteps” (*iqtifā athar*) of earlier Arab writers from al-Andalus and the Abbasid empire and then writes that Ziya Pasha followed the footsteps (*iqtifā athar*) of Boileau.⁹⁰ Arabs first contributed to the emergence of classics as they influenced French authors like Boileau,

89 Al-Khālidi, 120.

90 Al-Khālidi, 151.

who ultimately shaped the intellectual formation of authors such as Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha. Al-Khālidi thus generates a particular genealogy which starts with Arabs and ends with Ziya Pasha through his use of the term “classics” and the French act as a temporal bridge between the two.

This particular use of classics establishes comparisons between Arabic and European literatures, as it also stabilizes the classical Arabic heritage within a linear historical trajectory in works by both Jurjī Zaydān and Rūḥī al-Khālidi. “The similarities between Zaydān’s position and Khālidi’s are striking but not surprising,” Haifa Saud al-Faisal notes, “considering that the two men moved in the same circles. In addition, Khālidi’s writings were frequently published in Zaydān’s *Al-Hilāl*.”⁹¹ In the *Tārīkh*, Zaydān notes that all the communities that belonged to the Islamic civilization (*al-tamaddun al-islāmī*), including Turks and Iranians, became “Arabized” (*ta’arraba*) and produced Arabic works in diverse fields such as language arts, grammar, history, medicine, science, and philosophy.⁹² Both Rūḥī al-Khālidi and Jurjī Zaydān then meet on common ground with İsmail Hakkı as they all describe Arabic literature as a source of influence that always existed before Ottoman literature rather than simultaneously as a crucial part of the Ottoman literary biome. Unlike Zaydān’s writings on Namık Kemal that de-emphasize the cultural intersections between Arabic and Turkish literatures, the *Tārīkh* seems to acknowledge here the influence of Arabic texts on Ottoman writers. However, the *Tārīkh* depicts Arabic works mainly as a source of influence that Arabized Ottoman writers and not as works of a cosmopolitan biome that were read to forge a cosmopolitan Ottoman identity. Therefore, like Zaydān’s writings on Namık Kemal, the *Tārīkh* encourages readers to imagine Arabic texts as belonging to biomes that cultivate only Arab or Arabized cultural communities. Furthermore, İsmail Hakkı, like Zaydān and al-Khālidi, also mobilized the term classics to foreground relations of anteriority and posteriority between Arabic and Turkish literatures.

Classics then is a shared term in late Ottoman Arabic and Turkish writings that contributes to the eventual stabilization of “classical Arabic heritage” exclusively within the history of Arabic literature and Namık Kemal exclusively within the history of Turkish literature. Such stabilizations in both Arabic and Turkish writings stands for cultural negotiations that would eventually reinforce the current disciplinary divisions between classical and modern as

91 Haifa Saud Alfaisal, “Liberty and the Literary: Coloniality and Nahdawist Comparative Criticism of Rūḥī al-Khālidi’s *History of the Science of Literature with the Franks, the Arabs, and Victor Hugo* (1904),” *Modern Language Quarterly* 77:4 (2016), 543.

92 Zaydān, *Tārīkh*, 1:22.

well as among Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literatures in the study of Middle Eastern literatures. At the same time, my article has revealed various entanglements between the histories of modern Arabic and Turkish literatures, especially since both Arab and Turkish intellectuals wrote on the same poets who were starting to be seen as members of a classical tradition. Therefore, the history of modern Arabic literature—and classical Arabic literature that this modern literature defined itself against—cannot be written without reference to debates on language, literature, and heritage in Ottoman Turkish writings.

Yet my work does not simply call for analyzing “primary sources,” i.e. Arabic and Turkish literary texts and their histories, in conjunction with each other for reassessing the history of modern Arabic literature. A more nuanced understanding of what literary critics have called *nahḍah* and *tanzimat* texts can emerge through a synthesis of “secondary sources.” In the past few years, numerous critics such as Shaden Tageldin, Tarek El-Ariss, and Elizabeth Holt have provided nuanced frameworks of interpretation for the study of the *nahḍah* while numerous critics such as Jale Parla, Veli N. Yashin, and Fatih Altuğ have done the same for the *tanzimat*. Nevertheless, theoretical works on *al-nahḍah* rarely engage in dialogue with theoretical works on the *tanzimat*. My article calls for more works that synthesize the perspectives of these scholars for a more nuanced view on Arabic and Turkish literary modernities.

Finally, this article's focus on “the reinvention of Arabic literature as comparative literature” resonates with recent works which have recontextualized Arabic literature within global literary networks to move away from nationalistic frameworks that have shaped its study. To reflect more on the reinvention of Arabic literature as comparative literature will provide a new direction for this attempt to “globalize” Arabic literary studies. Emily Apter notes that “in globalizing literary studies, there is a selective forgetting of ways in which early comparative literature was always and already globalized”⁹³ In a similar vein, recent attempts to globalize Arabic literature should not overlook diverse cross-cultural entanglements that “reinvented Arabic literature as comparative literature.” To globalize Arabic literature also necessitates mapping diverse literary biomes in which Arabic texts have manifested and can again manifest in the future. This mapping requires practices of comparison that do not generate a sense of equivalence that levels out the diversity of literary biomes.

93 Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 46.

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