

Haunting Ottoman Middle-class Sensibility: Ahmet Midhat Efendi's Gothic

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Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844–1912) was one of the most important literary, journalistic and intellectual figures of the Ottoman nineteenth century. He played many significant roles: editor of the long-running daily newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (The interpreter of truth, 1878–1924)¹; author of innumerable novels and short stories, including the iconic 1875 novel *Felâtn Bey ile Râkim Efendi* (Felâtn Bey and Râkim Efendi); polemicist; religious apologist; language reformer; commentator on economic questions. Inseparable from these activities was his work as a prolific translator and adapter.² He is known to have produced Ottoman Turkish versions of the works of Émile Richbourg, Émile Augier, Alexandre Dumas, Ann Radcliffe, Georges Pradel, Émile Gobariau, Octave Feuillet, Charles Merouvel (Charles Chartier), Léon de Tinseau, Hector Malot, Voltaire, Paul de Cock and Corneille.³ For these works, *version* is the operative word. In his thorough and stimulating 2005 dissertation ‘From discourse to practice: Rethinking “translation” (*terceme*) and related practices of text production in the Late Ottoman literary tradition’, Cemal Demircioğlu points out that in the nineteenth century a range of practices was encompassed within our modern term ‘translation’.⁴ These included texts we would readily characterise as ‘translation’, meaning reasonably recognisable transfers of a text from one language to another, with setting, characters, narrative structure, and – to the extent possible – style, recreated in the target language. Other practices might fall less easily within what we term translation, and might include condensed or summarised translations; adaptations in which the action and setting were translated to a different cultural environment; and borrowing, where the author was moved to compose a story on the basis of something encountered in another language. Ahmet Midhat Efendi engaged in all of these practices. Not only that: he openly discussed them, often in short prefatory notes to

specific fictions. His introduction to *İki Huda'kar* (Two frauds), one of the stories published in the series *Letaif-i Rivayat* (Amusing tales), thoughtfully describes his various approaches:

The basis of the present little novel entitled *İki Huda'kar* consists of a little anecdote that I read seven or eight months ago in a French newspaper. But, as I have acquired the honor of veteran status after so many years in the service of writing, my readers know that even when in 'translation' (*tercüme*) mode, I am always carrying out a fair bit of modification on the novels that I take from Europe, and afterwards I recommend them to our shared Ottoman morals. For well have I learned that of the things that come from Europe, the rotten ones are far more numerous than the sound, and the bad number many more than the good. But anyway, when it comes to borrowing (*iktibas*) I take the idea of modification even further . . . From them [the stories] I merely take an idea and then I take up my pen and write an entirely new work based on it . . .⁵

The novella I analyse here clearly falls within the category of borrowing (*iktibas*); more than that, it constitutes cultural adaptation in the widest sense. It is not, as far as I have been able to ascertain, an adaptation of an existing novel rendered suitable for an Ottoman audience, nor even a story inspired by another tale (Ahmet Midhat Efendi claims that *Cinli Han* is based on an anecdote, but the true value of such a claim is perhaps questionable). Rather it is an adaptation in a much broader sense; it takes up the European-origin Gothic Romance genre to suit Ahmet Midhat Efendi's notion of what he needed to communicate to an Ottoman audience. *Cinli Han* or 'The haunted inn' appeared in *Letaif-i Rivayat* volume 12, 1302 AH (1886). It was 160 pages long in the original edition and its preface gave this account of its inspiration:

One Friday as I was going from the bridge [Galata Bridge] to Beykoz, I heard the essentials of this strange story on the ferryboat from a friend, and since I found the kernel of the story truly strange and amusing in a degree that would be worthy of presentation to my readers, I supplied its deficiencies from the point of view of the novelist's art and I took courage to present and offer it in the following form to my dear readers.⁶

Letaif-i Rivayat itself was a series of fictions – short stories, novellas and one play – that Ahmet Midhat Efendi wrote and published between 1870 and 1894. The series comprised thirty pieces published in twenty-five instalments, amounting, in its complete 2001 edition, compiled and transliterated into modern Turkish by Fazıl Gökçek and Sabahattin Çağın, to 851 pages of text. The series constituted an important event in the history of Ottoman literature and print culture. Ahmet Midhat Efendi began publishing these stories shortly after his return to Istanbul, having

resigned his government post in the Ottoman province of Baghdad where he had been serving under his patron Midhat Paşa, governor of the province. These stories were part of a distinctly commercial effort on his part, for he needed to generate income from his various printing and publishing ventures in order to support himself. Thus, however didactic they might be, their popularity and marketability were always a fundamental consideration for Ahmet Midhat Efendi. The works were printed as what we might think of as fascicules (*cüz*), that is, the whole series was published under a common title or heading, but no individual work was published serially. Each fascicule was printed by Ahmet Midhat Efendi's own press, and distributed through a network that included reading rooms and booksellers, as well as water-sellers, tobacconists, and so forth. It is claimed that initially he intended to produce only three fascicules, but when they proved very successful, he just kept on writing, expanding the number of works that appeared under the common rubric.⁷ These tended to be short stories or novellas, whereas the longer novels often appeared in serialised form in periodicals like *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* and were subsequently re-issued in book form. Publication of *Letaif-i Rivayat* continued even while Ahmet Midhat Efendi was being held in internal exile on Rhodes (1873–6), and indeed continued after his release and reconciliation with the regime and the founding of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. *Cinli Han* is one of the pieces produced after his return from Rhodes. Based on Demircioğlu's research, we may say that of the thirty pieces in the series, nine (that is, just under one third) fell in some broad way into the variety of translation, adaptation and inspiration practices described above.

The Haunted Inn

Cinli Han is not one of Ahmet Midhat Efendi's more remarked works. In fact, in the 2001 edition of *Letaif-i Rivayat*, editor Fazıl Gökçek sums up the novella thus: 'This story has no characteristics worthy of attention, aside from [a certain] fluency attained in terms of the adventure (*macera*) and element of suspense.'⁸ I would argue, however, that *Cinli Han* has significant features to attract our attention above and beyond the fluency of the storytelling. *Cinli Han* is a Gothic Romance set in rural France, with protagonists who are ordinary village folk. At the time it was written, Gothic Romance does not seem to have been a widely disseminated form in the Ottoman Empire despite the genre's great popularity in Europe and North America. Nor were stories about ordinary villagers common.⁹ The unusual confluence of these two forms (Gothic Romance and village story) gives Ahmet Midhat Efendi the opportunity to achieve a variety

of effects and cover some interesting ground in terms of didactic themes that were of perennial importance to him. Before discussing these points further, however, a detailed plot synopsis may prove useful.

The story revolves around two young villagers, Josephine and her beau, Grégoire Salpet. They are both serious and virtuous, with not a hint of frivolity. They fall in love and promise one another to wait and marry on Salpet's return from his military service. He vows to become rich for her sake while he is away. He betters himself, saving his money and spending his free time not with his fellow conscripts, but with those who can offer him improvement, and thus slowly rises through the ranks to sergeant of the line. Early on he becomes literate so that he can communicate with his father and his beloved. Josephine is inspired to act accordingly for Salpet: she takes in sewing and laundry, makes socks, grows vegetables in her garden, buys chickens, then goats, then cows. In this way she begins to build up a tidy nest egg. She also learns to read and write.

Meanwhile, a man named de La Rouche comes to the village. De La Rouche is a friend of the local priest, Father Prasil, a somewhat reclusive cleric with a reputation for charity and compassion. De La Rouche hears of Josephine's accomplishments and is determined to marry her. He makes a peremptory proposal based on his superior social standing, at the same time assuring Josephine that Salpet has already forgotten her and will never come back. She vehemently refuses him and throws him out of her cottage. De La Rouche returns to Father Prasil and complains that he is now obsessed with Josephine, who has rejected him. It is revealed that de La Rouche and the priest are old associates; that they are really thieves and gangsters; and that de La Rouche is secretly active in a gang of bandits (*haydut*). Father Prasil suggests to de La Rouche that he can have Josephine if he gives up the idea of marriage. He advises de La Rouche simply to kidnap her and have his way with her; everyone will assume she has eloped. With the priest's help, de La Rouche drugs and kidnaps Josephine. She defends her honour, threatening suicide if he violates her. More than a year goes by with Josephine confined in the bandits' hideout – the eponymous haunted inn, an old waystation located in a remote rural area. The inn has a bad reputation for being visited by ghosts and spirits.

In all of this, Salpet returns from military service. Though offered promotion, he cannot stay away from his beloved any longer. He discovers that Josephine is missing and all the local folk assume she has run off with someone. He searches and searches for her, facilitating his search by using his military background to get himself appointed to the area gendarmerie, even seeking a lower rank than he could normally have expected, because the lower rank allows him to range over the countryside. But he finds no

trace of Josephine. One night, riding through a remote area searching for bandits who have been troubling the neighbourhood, he is caught in a terrible storm and takes refuge in the only nearby structure, the ruins of the haunted inn. In the course of the night, several apparitions try to frighten him off, but he bravely faces them down with his musket and sword, and in the end he discovers that they are illusions created with shadows and puppets by a very human man, whom he captures. Under pressure this individual reveals that he is one of the bandits and this is their hideout. Accidentally he reveals that a woman is being held in the basement of the ruins. Realising that this must be Josephine, Salpet rushes to her. They are reunited and return to the village of Prieri, leaving the captured bandit behind to guard all the loot stored there. But upon their return, a villager approaches them with a letter from Father Prasil telling them not to look for him or his associates. Salpet realises that the bandit they left behind has sent ahead to warn Father Prasil. The guilty parties and all their ill-gotten riches are gone. Salpet and Josephine, no longer wanting to live in Prieri, settle in the renamed inn, now converted to a gendarmerie post.

Critiquing the Ottoman Countryside

What can we make of such a story? First of all, I would argue that it shows that Ahmet Midhat Efendi was concerned with the state of the countryside and ordinary country folk as a part of his vision for the revivification of Ottoman society. Yet he knew that the audience for stories about village folk was limited in the Ottoman Empire. The French setting thus provides some additional interest to draw an Ottoman readership. In this story, peasants take the lead under cover of adventure and romance. However, having set the stage for such a tale of adventure and romance, Ahmet Midhat Efendi deviates to describe at some length the conditions of village life and Josephine's efforts at self-improvement. As he describes Salpet setting off for his military service, Ahmet Midhat Efendi comments, in the ironic tone so typical of him, that this novella is not one of those fictions that dwell on the adventures of a young soldier.

As a matter of fact, a novel does fit well in the ambit of these things [barracks, soldiers, weapons, etc.], and, even more, a very nice novel can be constructed in that milieu, as we have noted previously, on the basis of the relations among a group of women and soldiers. But in this story of ours, we are not now going to send our attention and concern chasing after Salpet all the way to the world of military service, because the share of events pertaining to that world is not significant [to this story]. Rather, we are going to return to the village together with its old folks.¹⁰

He does this even though, as he remarks, ‘Possibly our readers would not take any pleasure from such details [how the peasant heroine built up her fortunes] of a villager’s reality’.¹¹

At the same time, *Cinli Han* is supremely melodramatic, after the manner of the Gothic Romance, and this holds the readers’ interest despite the village setting. Ahmet Midhat Efendi was well aware of the overheated quality of his story and, just as he commented in his prefaces about his translation and adaptation practices, so too in the body of his texts he overtly and humorously gestured towards the genres that influenced him. It is often said of Ahmet Midhat Efendi that the *meddah* or oral storytelling tradition is evident in his narrative style, and he seems to point to this when he comments of M. de La Roche, ‘just like the son of the Yemeni Padishah about whom it is related in some fairy tales that he fell in love with the daughter of the Indian King after only hearing a few accolades about her, so he too fell in love with Josephine after hearing only few words about her’.¹² Likewise, the opening lines of *Cinli Han* point in a somewhat deprecating way to the Gothic and its preoccupations with the sublime and the picturesque.

Our story transpires in France, in the province of Lyon in the village of Prieri. We can’t get into descriptions here in the way that is customary for most novelists, such as ‘The village of Preri is beautiful in this way, charming in that way, if you find yourself there in such and such a season, thus and such a view is recommended . . ., or if you were in such and such a location, here is how it would look . . .’ As a matter of fact, while descriptions of this kind can be among the things that give the most zest to novels, the author should see the place with his own eyes or, by means of his having studied and analysed maps, plans, and photographs, he ought to know the place as if he had actually seen it, and so be able to describe it. When these conditions are not in place, poetical descriptions which have been learned by heart lack value.¹³

This remark seems pointed indeed. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) one of the most successful Gothic novels ever written, and one which was widely translated and adapted for the stage, was especially famous for its descriptions of locations and scenery.¹⁴ In fact, its author, Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), had never seen any of the things she described. Ahmet Midhat Efendi surely owed much to Radcliffe in his construction of *Cinli Han*: the mountain fastness, the ruined castle, the nobleman who is also a bandit. All have their place in *Udolpho*. And we know that Ahmet Midhat Efendi was familiar with Radcliffe’s novel, which had been translated into French not long after its original English-language publication, because he himself translated it into Ottoman in 1891. But perhaps these gestures to his stylistic and genre inspirations also make a sharper point:

critics argue that Radcliffe's novels, with all their overheated emotion and sensibility, may have been aimed at revealing the dangers of an excess of sentiment that would overrule reason. In this respect, de La Rouché's obsession can be compared with another Ottoman character, the poet's sudden passion in İbrahim Şinasi's (1826–71) play of 1860, *Şair Evlenmesi* (The poet's wedding): the misfortune that nearly overtakes the poet is partly due to the mercenary trickery of the matchmaker, but is at least as much a function of his own foolishness in falling for a wholly inappropriate young girl whom he has never met, but merely seen by chance in passing.¹⁵

Further, that staple of *Udolpho*, and of the Gothic more generally, 'the mysterious or supernatural explained', is present in a charming scene in *Cinli Han* when Salpet discovers that the apparitions haunting the ruins are actually puppets and shadows employed by the bandits to frighten local shepherds. In this climactic episode, the description of the forest, the storm, the ruins, and the haunting song that Salpet sings to himself, are strongly atmospheric, but as the apparitions make their first appearance the tone gradually becomes more humorous and satirical. In the end, through a combination of courage and reason, Salpet overcomes his fear, discovers the truth, and gets the girl.

The Gothic and the Victorian

Within its Gothic wrapping, however, *Cinli Han* is a paean to self-help not entirely different from the governing theme in Ahmet Midhat Efendi's *Felâtnun Bey ile Râkım Efendi*, except that it takes place in a French and rural setting.¹⁶ Salpet teaches himself to read, rises to the rank of sergeant of the line, becomes an officer of the local gendarmerie, saves his money, and generally shows lots of initiative. Ahmet Midhat Efendi describes young Salpet's progress once he learns to read and write:

Our man Salpet had even achieved the rank of sergeant of the line. His friends loved him. His officers loved him. Wherever he was and whomever he interacted with there, loved him . . . Military service can be a profligate time . . . [the soldier] holds nothing back in order to benefit not only himself but his friends. He will eat and drink not merely to the limits of his means, but indeed beyond those limits, and he will provide food and drink to others . . . But our Salpet basically cannot be compared to his friends who were doing their military service. So far from going with the other men from his unit to taverns and the like, he did not squander his friendship on such base characters. He always tried to find a way to converse with those who were greater and smarter than himself, that is, with officers. And thanks to this, so far from suffering poverty in the

military, because he managed to get by on his rations, he was even successful in saving eighty per cent of his pay.¹⁷

That would all have sounded very familiar to Ahmet Midhat Efendi's readers. One immediately thinks of Râkim Efendi learning French, taking on translation assignments and teaching private language classes, carefully saving up his money, and moving towards happy conjugal life. What is less familiar and stands out much more is Josephine's self-help story.

Motivated by Salpet's love and his declaration that he would come back 'rich for her sake', Josephine decides to improve her fortunes too. When he learns to read and write, straight away she does the same. Though the range of opportunities in the village is small, Josephine is determined and makes the most of them:

With what can a villager become rich? Not by putting capital at interest or by garnering profits or rent revenues eh! To become rich through the pen or the paint brush or through intelligence and cleverness also will not come easily to him. There is no doubt that a villager's getting rich is garnered through fields or [poultry] coops or stables. Though she did not have enough money to obtain a stable, Josephine made it her priority to become a tireless gardener, cultivating whatever vegetables possible in the garden around her house, and likewise she was able to raise chickens, geese, and ducks in a coop she prepared from twigs and branches. In the evenings she passed her time making socks or sewing. She resolved that, just as by this means she was on her way to increasing her earnings, by also curtailing her spending on every side, she would arrive at obtaining a couple of cows and seven or eight goats by the time her beloved returned from his military service.¹⁸

A striking feature of *Cinli Han* is that the young woman has a very active role in the story, much more so than she does in Ahmet Midhat Efendi's domestic novels and stories. In *Felâatun Bey ile Râkim Efendi*, Canan becomes a true partner to Râkim by becoming more educated and more aware of the world and the possibilities it could offer her, but at no point is she portrayed as a partner in the family's earnings (save only as knowing how to run a household on a tight budget) or as Râkim's equal in ambition. But Josephine is offered here as fully Salpet's equal in enterprising spirit, and indeed as his equal in fidelity, courage and cunning. Even Father Prasil says, in his letter to Salpet at the conclusion of the novella, 'Well done, both of you! However brave a man you have been, Josephine has been an equally incorruptible and heroic young woman.'¹⁹

Here I think we must take note of the way the genre of Gothic Romance offers opportunities for such a portrayal. First and foremost, a heroine plays a central role. The plot and many of the more colourful elements

of *Cinli Han* can be understood as in some ways a 'mash-up' of famous eighteenth-century works in the Gothic and Romance veins. The country setting and the theme of the relentlessly pursuing nobleman *cum* bandit are strongly reminiscent of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as is the trope of the ruined castle as bandit hideout, with the loot stored in the cellars. Most obviously, the drugging and kidnapping of a girl of modest origins by a man of superior social station, followed by her extended resistance to his 'seduction' are straight out of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).²⁰ Like Pamela, Josephine defends her honour from the marauding 'gentleman' by threatening to commit suicide if he rapes her. But in *Cinli Han* the story of *Pamela* is turned on its head; it is de La Rouche, not Josephine, who is seeking marriage. The progression of Josephine's rejection of him is interesting to notice. In the first instance he assumes that his superior social and economic standing mean that she will scramble to accept his condescension in proposing, but she says her heart is already engaged. Then he tries to convince her that Salpet is never coming back: this she responds to with fury (and tears, for she cannot avoid some doubt in her heart, if not in her actions). De La Rouche then drugs and kidnaps her, luring her into danger through her spirit of enterprise – she is asked to the priest's house to fit some clothes he has asked her to tailor, and accepts a glass of doctored wine that is pressed upon her there. Next, she is urged by the coachman who is helping to spirit her away to accept her circumstances and even see them as fortunate. Instead she threatens to kill herself if de La Rouche violates her. Finally, Josephine realises that she needs to find some way of stringing de La Rouche along, or ultimately he will lose patience and have his way with her, suicide or not. She comes up with the stratagem of asking for a year of 'mourning' for Salpet, who is not dead, but who is lost to her. She promises to marry de La Rouche once that period is finished. It is this cunning manoeuvre that allows her the time needed for Salpet to find her hidden away at the haunted inn. By comparison to characters like Canan in *Felâtn bey ile Râkim Efendi*, Josephine is active and worldly, and as enterprising as the hero, taking a hand in shaping her own destiny. By comparison with Pamela, she is on a different level of emotional independence. She has *chosen* a man who is really suitable to her by age and by temperament, and no amount of force, no offer of social standing and wealth, can move her or subjugate her.

Josephine is as strong as Salpet, and just as much the protagonist of *Cinli Han*. She is energetic and capable as an earner. She is also clever and courageous in defending her honour and achieving *her own ends* in the face of danger and opposition. Salpet and she have mutually chosen each other, and she is able to hold out for him despite adversity. Her stratagem

for delaying and blocking de La Rouche once she is in his hands is really worthy of Shahrazad, yet she does not hope to snare him, but rather to be free of him. This story is not about the taming of the rake, as it were. It is about companionate marriage, but a companionate marriage where the woman is far more equal in formal terms, far more part of the world, than is the case in Ahmet Midhat Efendi's domestic novels. Though deep characterisation is not one of the features of this novella, Josephine in *Cinli Han* is much more of a person than is Canan. The abduction is precisely the location where Ahmet Midhat Efendi can display the difference in position, and therefore character, between the domestic heroine who is utterly dependent, physically and economically, on a male protector, and the French peasant girl, who not only supports herself, but also supports her mother, and is making her own way along the road to amassing a comfortable subsistence.

The dramatic tension of *Cinli Han* revolves around de La Rouche's decision to kidnap Josephine and take her to his forest hideout. The priest suggests it, the coachman encourages her to accept it, and the villagers assume she has run off. But Salpet knows better, knows Josephine has not eloped, and is horrified by the suggestion that such a thing could happen and could be deemed acceptable and unremarkable. On his return to the village he asks an elderly peasant woman of his village where Josephine is:

The sour-faced wife answered. 'Josephine? You mean your Josephine?

Ohhooo! Cold winds blow through Josephine's place!'

'For the love of God! Did she also die?'

'No! But she got lost, she disappeared.'

'She fell into the river or into the hands of murderers or something like that?'

'No, no my boy, don't worry. She was simply snatched up and carried off.'

'My dear, what are you talking about? Are we living in the olden days that someone can just snatch a girl and carry her off?'

'My child! In the olden days they used to snatch a girl and carry her off whether she wanted it or not; nowadays, before a girl is snatched and carried off she herself gives consent to the men saying: If you want to snatch me and carry me off, I will pick myself up and run [into your arms] on my own. And *then* they snatch her and carry her off. You act as if you know nothing of girls, and I am reminded that I always thought that you were a naïve fellow.'

The old woman's harsh laughter yanked Salpet's head out of even greater suffering. With utter passion he asked,

'Good mother, take pity! Who carried Josephine off? What happened? Have you not heard any explanation?'

'My boy, as you ought to know, Josephine is a girl who keeps her own counsel.

Who know what she did or who she loved?'²¹

The passage is used to poke a little fun at the Gothic Romance genre – the improbability of such a kidnapping in the modern world is pointed out – but also to display the cold-heartedness and ignorance of the villagers, who really do not care what has happened to Josephine, and who are happy to think the worst *of* her without seeing the evil of such a fate *for* her. They also do not understand Salpet's distress. Let him find another girl as most of the returning soldiers do, they think. But this passage is also part of a larger reflection on consent. The village crone in this passage tells Salpet that today's abductions are with consent, unlike those in the past. This is patently untrue in Josephine's case, but either way the old crone seems unconcerned. Likewise, when Father Prasil is urging de La Rouche to solve his problem by making Josephine his 'mistress' through kidnapping, he says, 'But when it comes to what is necessary to make the girl your mistress [as opposed to your wife], there is no longer any need for her consent, for her 'yes' or any such thing'.²² After her abduction, while she is resisting de La Rouche's advances, the coachman urgently advises her not to persist in her resistance. If instead of fearing subjugation by him she will accept de La Rouche's offer and put herself under his protection, she might even find happiness. But if she persists in her opposition, she should know that de La Rouche is capable of killing a girl with no more concern than he would feel about slaughtering a bird. However, if she were to succeed in making him happy, she could live like a princess; all the treasure, all the jewels, all the ornaments in the world could be hers. Whereas if she ended up the wife of another man, even the soldier she was in love with, well he was nothing but a villager, was he? If she were to marry that fellow, how happy could he really make her?²³ The notion that material security is all that a woman requires, and that either real feeling or consent on her part are superfluous, is held up here for sharp criticism. Interestingly, the attitude the author displays in *Cinli Han* is different from the one he displays towards the institution of 'carrying off the bride' in his domestic works. In *Henüz 17 Yaşında* (Just seventeen) for example, Yümni Bey, a Muslim, falls for Kalyopi, a young Christian girl.²⁴ He declares his passion for her and promises honorable marriage, then carries her off. She is shown as potentially ready to be quite happy with him, until the Greek community interferes, demanding her return for religious reasons. From the break-up of that marriage she falls into prostitution, and here the contrast between a young woman, Josephine, who can earn her own living in honorable fashion, and Kalyopi, who cannot, is striking. In the French setting, a heroine, though lacking a male 'protector', earns her living, finds a suitable match, and defends her right to it in the face of ridicule, rumour and slander, and ultimately force. In Ahmet Midhat

Efendi's domestic novels, it is the young men who find, or at times create – Pygmalion like – suitable companions.

However, as in the domestic novels, so too in *Cinli Han*: the fundamental building block for happiness and success remains the family unit, understood as loving, not in the sense of a passionate crush or obsession, but in the sense of a suitable, serious, and stable relationship based on shared values and trust. So, the way forward is love, not sex; love, not self-interest; love, not the commodification of human beings. In fact, despite all the emphasis on thrift and boot-strapping and self-improvement, here, as in many of Ahmet Midhat Efendi's other works, a great point is made of the fact that the successful efforts of the young protagonists are a function of *love*. Salpet promises Josephine, as he leaves to do his military service, that he will come back rich *for her*. He learns to write so that he can write *to her*. All her subsequent efforts to make money and build up a small nest egg, to learn to read and write, stem from her desire to demonstrate a love that is no less than his, to reciprocate in kind. It is love that motivates them and provides the solid emotional basis for their partnership, a partnership that leads to prosperity and establishes their happiness. De La Rouche could never be a suitable mate for Josephine and would never stimulate such devoted efforts on her part, not only because she did not love him, not only because he was unworthy of her love (his self-regarding character and the fact that his wealth derived not from hard work, but from criminality mean that his 'passion' for Josephine stirred him to violence and not to constructive hard work), but because *he* did not *love* her. Rather, de La Rouche is obsessed with her. He hears the old women of the village speculating about Josephine, criticising her private manner, which they take to be secretive, implying that she must be up to something: otherwise, how did she put together the money to buy goats and cows? Hearing all of this, he is taken by her remarkable enterprise. He decides she is worthy of a man like him, suitable to be the mother of his future children, and he must have her. But in seeing her qualities in purely self-referential terms, de La Rouche misses the point. Josephine and Salpet love each other because of their character traits; their love reinforces those positive aspects of character and nourishes the qualities that produce their happiness and prosperity, and make them upright members of society. In fact, de La Rouche does not really 'see' Josephine at all, a point Ahmet Midhat Efendi makes crystal clear when he has de La Rouche exclaim, in response to Frather Prasil's observation that the girl does not want him, 'Well and good, but I want the girl! This business is going to be [worked out] not as she wants but as I want, of course. If she wanted me and I didn't want her, that wouldn't be an issue. But once I want her, it's a huge issue.'²⁵

The failings of the urban (de La Rouche) or educated (Father Prasil) elite in the village are glaring. While de La Rouche is consumed by selfish and mercenary desires, and is afflicted by a passionate obsession, the priest – theoretically abstinent – is in fact a womaniser and, while supposedly a pillar of the charitable community, is actually retaining most of what is supposed to be distributed to the poor, for his own use. If de La Rouche suffers from an irrational passion, it is Father Prasil who argues for total immorality, asking de La Rouche why he cannot give up the idea of the girl as a wife and the mother of his children and just have his way with her. Father Prasil affirms that he, a priest and celibate in theory, has had hundreds, indeed thousands, of women, and he thus reduces all relations between the sexes to sex. His sexual-emotional bankruptcy is embodied in his removal from and rejection of the family life that is the cornerstone of society, and is played out in criminal activities from defrauding the poor to involvement with bandits. The salacious and corrupt, not to say cruel, cleric was a fixture of the Gothic, most famously in Matthew Lewis's novel *The Monk*. Likewise, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish writing has a strong anti-clerical whiff, with the figure of the corrupt *ahund* or *molla* an important element in calls for religious modernisation. In *Cinli Han*, a particular sign that this cleric is a blight on the community is his desire not to really be a part of it. His nominally celibate status, his rejection of the very idea of a helpmate, his lack of desire to found a family, are both the causes and the indicators of his anti-social behaviour. His ostensibly hermit-like living arrangements on the outskirts of town, supposedly a mark of his piety, are really a cover for illicit activities, and his removal from social interaction is symbolic of what is wrong with him.

But a lack of constancy and a mercenary attitude towards others are not only the problems of the supposed upper classes in this story. If the priest is corrupt and de La Rouche, the sophisticated city dweller come a-visiting, is obsessive and ruthless, the villagers are portrayed as cruel, ignorant, mesquin and also fundamentally 'light', that is, lacking in any seriousness of purpose or deep sense of commitment. They ridicule Josephine, and to a lesser degree Salpet, for their enterprise and ambition; they treat their literacy as evidence of being 'jumped up', not as something laudable. When Josephine learns to read, the village youth loudly guffaw:

Josephine has learned to read and write. Who knows how great she is going to become? Word is, M. Salpet has also learned to read and write while a soldier. Tomorrow you may see him as Colonel Salpet and she may be Madam La Colonel.²⁶

And it is no accident that this attitude is intermingled with scorn for the young couple's seriousness of purpose and physical restraint. The villagers treat Josephine and Salpet's sexual virtue, restraint and reserve as evidence of bloodlessness and maybe even a sign of a certain moronic quality. With superior little smiles they joke that those two could not have made each other any promises before Salpet mustered in, because he was clearly either too arrogant or lacked the get-up-and-go to make any promises. Yet the villagers in the end take their own affections lightly, and quickly move on to other lovers and husbands once the young men have left for the army. That Josephine is a reserved young woman who does not flirt and does not talk about her relationship with Salpet, makes her an object of suspicion. When Josephine begins to get ahead economically, the villagers are filled with envy and cannot accept that this is due to her hard work and determination. Rather, they eagerly insinuate that in some way or other she has been 'up to no good'. Though previously they taxed her with being cold and passionless, once she disappears they quickly accept the idea that Josephine has been carrying on with someone. In short, the villagers are narrow and ignorant, and once Salpet and Josephine's adventure is over and they have been reunited, they choose not to live in Prieri. Though they stay in the countryside, with Salpet stationed at the inn-turned-gendarmerie-post, village life has no space for up-and-coming young people like them. Salpet, we are told, had no desire to further subject Josephine to the wagging tongues of the village.

Conclusion

Ahmet Midhat Efendi was a key figure in shaping a new middle-class morality in the Ottoman Empire, through journalism, non-fiction writing and translation, and fiction writing. He viewed the development of an energetic, educated, civically minded, and moral populace as essential to the survival and revival of the Empire, and he saw a certain type of family life as the cornerstone of that new society. His domestic novels and stories constantly dealt with these themes, but almost always in urban settings in ways that showed the protagonist struggling with questions of a mistaken modernity, sometimes embodied by the figure of the highly Europeanised and feckless dandy, sometimes portrayed as the monetisation of human relationships. But stories like *Cinli Han*, while displaying many of the same themes, allowed Ahmet Midhat Efendi, through their foreign setting and genre, to show his concern for the evils that beset the countryside. These included ignorance, callousness, envy and a lack of seriousness on the part of the peasants themselves, but also their vulnerability to deceit

and corruption practiced by those who were supposed to be their social betters, namely the urban educated classes and the clerical class. And finally, the French setting and Gothic Romance genre permitted Ahmet Midhat Efendi to extoll the merits of a virtuous woman who was nevertheless a self-supporting woman and a woman of action. It was possible in this French setting to propose men and women as real helpmeets to one another, and to engage much more fully with the idea of mutuality and consent.

Notes

1. There is some debate in the scholarship about when the last issue of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* appeared. I am here following Mehmet Tekin, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, in *İslam Asiklopedisi* vol. 40 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2011), 497–8.
2. Accounts of Ahmet Midhat Efendi's life can be found in numerous publications. Among the most detailed are the following: Mustafa Nihat Özön, *Türkçede Roman Hakkında bir Deneme* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, n.d.), and İhsan Sungu, 'Ahmet Mithat Efendi'nin Hayatı Üzerine', in Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu (ed.), *İdeal Gazeteci Efendi Babamız Ahmet Mithat* (Istanbul: Gazeteci Cemiyeti Yayınları, 1964).
3. Nesime Ceyhan, 'Ahmet Midhat Efendi'nin Tercümeciliği', in Mustafa Armağan (ed.), *Ahmet Midhat Efendi Kitabı* (Istanbul: Beykoz Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları 5, 2007), 198–9.
4. Cemal Demircioğlu, 'From discourse to practice: Rethinking "translation" (*Terceme*) and related practices of text production in the late Ottoman literary tradition', PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2005.
5. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'İki Huda'kar', in *Letaif-i Rivayat*, eds Fazıl Gökçek and Sabahattin Çağın (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2001), 703.
6. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', in *Letaif-i Rivayat*, eds Fazıl Gökçek and Sabahattin Çağın (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2001), 338.
7. Fazıl Gökçek, 'Letaif-i Rivayat Hakkında', in *Letaif-i Rivayat*, eds Fazıl Gökçek and Sabahattin Çağın (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2001), ix.
8. Gökçek, 'Letaif-i Rivayat Hakkında', xxii.
9. Indeed, Ahmet Midhat Efendi's 1885 *Bahtiyarlık*, published in number 11 of *Letaif-i Rivayat*, is generally said to be the first village novel in Turkish literature. A discussion of this can be found in Orhan Okay, 'Türk Romanında Köy Mevzuunun Girişinde Unutulan bir İsim: Ahmet Midhat Efendi', in *Birinci Milli Türkoloji Kongresi: İstanbul 6–9 Şubat 1978* (Istanbul: Kervan Yayınları, 1980), 169–76.
10. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 342–3.
11. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 344.
12. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 346.

13. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 338.
14. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* appeared in French translation in 1797 (issued multiple times, as well as followed by other French translations); in German in 1795; in Italian in 1816. Stage adaptations appeared in English (1803) and French (two in 1798 and two more in 1799), with Alexandre Duval's 1798 play produced a second time and printed in 1813. There was also an operatic version in English in 1808. Ahmet Midhat Efendi's own translation, *Uldolfhusari*, appeared in 1307 AH (1891/2 CE) from Kırk Ambar Matbaası. The most complete bibliography of works of Ann Radcliffe, as well as the editions and adaptations thereof, is Deborah D. Rogers, *Ann Radcliffe: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).
15. *Şair Evlenmesi* was written as a single act play and first appeared in 1860 in the famous Tanzimat journal, *Tercüman-ı Ahval* (The interpreter of events). Subsequently it was printed in freestanding edition in Ottoman Turkish. It is a humorous work reminiscent of Molière's comedies, but in its own day it was also compared to popular folk tales or fables. Long viewed as the earliest instance of a Western-style stage play in Ottoman Turkish, it has been printed numerous times in modern Turkish editions. For a discussion of the play, its importance and Ottoman-era publication history, see Âlim Kahraman, 'Şinasi', in *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 39 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2010), 166–9. There is also an English translation: İbrahim Şinâsi, *The Wedding of a Poet*, trans. Edward Allworth (Whitestone: Griffon House Publications, 1981).
16. For a discussion of *Felâatun Bey ile Râkim Efendi* and its self-help content see my [Shissler] 'The harem as the seat of middle-class industry and morality: The fiction of Ahmet Midhat Efendi', in Marilyn Booth (ed.), *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 319–41. For a wider discussion of economic thinking and self-help in nineteenth-century Ottoman society, including the work of Ahmet Midhat Efendi, see Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).
17. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 355.
18. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 343–4.
19. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 382.
20. Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho: a Romance*, ed. Jacqueline Howard (London: Penguin Books, 2001 [1799]). *Pamela* was the first novel of Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) – *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1740]). It was an enormous sensation when it appeared, and was rapidly translated into French, as well as adapted for the stage, both theatre and opera. A detailed discussion of the novel's French life can be found in Franco Piva, *Pamela in Francia*, vol. 1 (Fasano, Italy: Schena Editore, 2011). For a discussion of the adaptation of *Pamela* for the Italian opera by Carlo Goldoni, see Stefano Castelveccchi, *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama*

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially chapter 1, 'Pamela goes to the Opera.'

21. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 356-7.
22. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 353.
23. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 379.
24. Ahmet Midhat Efendi's novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında* (Just seventeen) was first published serially in *Tercüman-i Hakkikat*, and subsequently released in book form in 1882. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında* (Istanbul: s.n., 1882).
25. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 350.
26. Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 'Cinli Han', 345.

