

Shadows of Zaven Biberyan: Revisiting the Turkish Literary Canon

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Abstract

Zaven Biberyan wrote and published his major novels during the golden years of Turkish modernist fiction. While he was fighting with the specters and phantoms of the past, Tanpınar, Atay, Atılğan, Erbil and others published the greatest exemplars of Turkish modernist literature. Although Biberyan's prose was mostly in Armenian, he was eager to find ways to connect with Turkish literary circles and audience. He himself translated (actually rewrote) his first novel in Turkish: *The Lonely Ones* (Yalnızlar) came out in 1962. He also wrote a film script out of this novel again in Turkish, but this script unfortunately never became a movie. His output was almost totally ignored for half a century before Aras Publishing House in Istanbul printed his oeuvre in the last years. In this paper, I revisit and reflect on the formation of Turkish modernist literary canon while taking Biberyan's literary adventure in Turkey into consideration. Why did his literary activity encounter full-fledged silence in the 1960's and in the 1970's? Why did his rediscovery come much later than the writers like Atay and Tanpınar who changed and expanded the borders of the Turkish literary canon? And today, how may his works challenge and modify the very same borders?

Bio

Mehmet Fatih Uslu is assistant professor of Comparative Literature at Koç University, İstanbul. He is the author of *Çatışma ve Müzakere: Osmanlı'da Ermenice ve Türkçe Dramatik Edebiyat* (Conflict and Negotiation: Armenian and Turkish Dramatic Literature in the Ottoman Empire" (2014). He is also the co-editor of the volume *Tanzimat ve Edebiyat: Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Modern Edebi Kültür* (Tanzimat and Literature: Modern Literary Culture in Ottoman İstanbul), with Fatih Altuğ (2014). He has translated numerous works of literature and humanities from English, Italian, and Armenian into Turkish. He continues to translate from Armenian, with a special focus on the works of Ottoman Armenian writer Zabel Yessayan.