

6 Dogs of Modernity

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The Stable

Providing stage directions but reading more like a parable, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's (1901–1962) 1953 short story "The Last Council" invites a number of animals to the stage of history. The animals visit the court and claim to know the old emperor from bygone days.¹ The emperor does not recognize the animals, but the elephant politely introduces itself as an acquaintance, or perhaps something more: It turns out that the elephant is none other than the emperor's very own appetite. The lion moreover is his power and glory, the tiger his anger and wrath, the bear his compassion, the wolf his care and the monkey his imagination, the snake his remorse, and the donkey his sobriety ... The animals want to leave these lands, and ask the emperor to let them go, because, they say, they have not been fed properly for many a season, and they were starving to death – hence the last council. The bear and the wolf in particular are in bad shape, while "others can still find scraps here and there, due to the nature of their business ..." (Tanpınar 318).

The emperor, in his old age, has turned away from everything that made him of this world and life, and of his very own earthly realm as well. Before the animals come, he only has his chamberlain, his magician, his heir and guards around him, and he is surrounded by precious metals, all sorts of luxury items, and a work of art of a throne (311). When the chamberlain announces the arrival of his visitors, the emperor says he had no idea he had subjects other than those already present at court. He clearly spends too much time in the palace and has forgotten these animals altogether, blinded by all sorts of luxuries. He has become a little too civilized, a little too polite, perhaps. What we know for sure is that in the emperor's civilized world there is no more passion but only constraint, only law and order; no pleasure or pain, and not even compassion or anger but only work, crowns, and thrones.

He is on the path to becoming even more human. He does not follow the animal; he has been on a different, humane path. He is only a few steps away from achieving an ideal humanity. In fact, when he appears rather fearful of accepting his visitors, his magician calms him down by telling him that his death could not be by the hand of an animal, since

it had already been revealed to the magician that the emperor's death would be "the beginning of a new era ... the era of the human" (313).

Now the animals would finally let him be; they are starving and want to leave for good. He asks them about the meaning of all this, and upon hearing the response, first loses his temper, then quickly calms down. He agrees. In the middle of suffering animal noises coming from the world outside and from inside the palace, the emperor gives up on them:

Why not? If death is to open the door of the stable, to kick out a bunch of stinking animals! Why not? Chamberlain ... Leave me alone ... You stay, away with these animals though, let them take their leave at once, with all the rest, all those waiting in front of the door. I shall empty the stable. (322)

He does empty the stable, but the price is death. He even appears prettier in his deathbed, a perfectly human figure, like a statue, with a mysterious glow on his face. The birth of the mysterious human figure amounts to death.

The starving animal only announces the coming of the human figure, which is in fact one of death. This humane figure is dead, while the stable was closer to life, which in the end is something stinky and bestial, perhaps. Or perhaps starving the animal for the sake of that mysterious glow is a crime against animals and humanity alike, and its punishment is death. What is clear is that once there was balance.

This lighthearted narrative reads like a modern-day example of a satyr play, where animals would mock current societal issues; perhaps that is why it takes place in time immemorial (311; Castellani 621–631). One can only imagine what sort of costumes Tanpınar had in mind for his actors. Yet Tanpınar's speaking animals address this pagan emperor from time immemorial as if they were addressing an Ottoman sultan, using various forms of Ottoman–Turkish royal honorifics. The animals are but "maaiyet-i şahaneleri," and they love and admire their "velinimet," "şevketmeap," and so on and thus hint at a very specific and concrete, Ottoman and Turkish context in their mockery of current societal events (Tanpınar 312–315).

The animals of "The Last Council" do not look or sound like real animals: they even smoke cigarettes and complain about related dental issues. Yet there was a time, not even long ago, when Istanbul's human habitat was not as hostile as it is today to real animals. Almost every European traveler to Istanbul since the late eighteenth century had something to say about this issue, often expressing shock at Istanbul's stray dog population and at how dogs and other wild animals were part of the daily life of the city. Baroness Craven is one of them:

You must not suppose that carriages may proceed in the streets of Pera, or Constantinople, as fast as in those of London or Paris.

A race of dogs, belonging to no one in particular but to every Turk indifferently, swarm in the streets ... the ill-understood charity, publicly given them, is by no means sufficient to feed them, and many hundreds die with hunger. No man has a dog belonging to him, but all dogs are suffered to lie and breed about the streets. Turtle-doves are likewise an object of respect with the Turks, and they are seen disputing the crumbs with the hungry curs in the streets. (Craven 227–228)

Some travelers even came up with explanations to contain their Socratic perplexity at these circumstances. They looked at the issue from numerous different angles. Gérard de Nerval, for instance, thought that dogs had a function, a mission in Istanbul:

The favour enjoyed by dogs at Constantinople is largely due to the fact that they clean up the refuse which is generally thrown into the street. The pious foundations which make provision for them; the troughs of water which they find at the entrances to mosques and beside the fountains, are doubtless based upon this fact. (Nerval 176)

From Lamartine to Mark Twain and Sir Mark Sykes, many a great mind contributed to the problematization of the peculiarities of this Oriental oddity, this particular way of relating to animals right where the East met West in their accounts, to be joined by Turkish intellectuals and revolutionaries over the course of Turkish Europeanization. Some admired these circumstances, others found them detestable.² By the time the revolutionary Young Turks took power, the literature on the dogs of Istanbul had grown significantly.

Almost half a century before “The Last Council” was published, Istanbul witnessed a most tragic event involving these dogs. This tragedy brings together hygienic concerns and animals starving in exile, like those in Tanpinar’s parable. Tens of thousands of Istanbul’s stray dogs died in 1910 on a barren island, Hayırsızada, in the middle of the Marmara Sea, where they were exiled at a crucial moment of Turkish Europeanization when Young Turks took a giant step toward modern democracy.

Young Turks dethroned and exiled the “tyrant,” Abdülhamid II, in 1909 to rush in a Second Constitutional Era. They could be said to have fulfilled the dreams of the Young Ottomans, and the previous generation of Ottoman–Turkish revolutionaries responsible for the short-lived First Constitutional Era (1876–1878), which, in turn, was the promise of the sweeping cultural, political, and educational reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. Tanzimat reformers (1839), with their emphasis on education, had made sure that the generations to follow would have the means to understand Europe better to hasten the empire’s

Europeanization. There is a well-established consensus among historians, moreover, that the mid-nineteenth century reforms must be traced back to the longer nineteenth century and that the seeds of this radical transformation can be located somewhere in the eighteenth century.

It would take over a century, then, to get to the moment in this history of Europeanization when the “streets of Pera” finally began to look more like “those of London or Paris.” The annihilation of the dogs of Istanbul changed the ancient silhouette of the city and life on its streets for good. Although officials made attempts to explain away the measures taken against the canine population on grounds of the hygienic requirements of a fast-growing imperial capital, the dogs were eliminated in part for having become the embodiment of the Empire’s backwardness and inability to keep up with Europe.

It only follows then to read Tanpınar’s parable as responding to this trajectory, which culminated in his own era. The overall themes of the parable – starving animals, exile, death, and the human figure – readily lend themselves to an interpretation of the text as it relates to the exile and annihilation of the dogs of Istanbul and Europeanization.

Hardly anything makes sense in Tanpınar’s parable; nothing follows in linear fashion. The emperor himself cannot follow his own humanity; nor can his animals follow him on the path to the sort of humanity he pursues: they are already starving. Emptying the stable does not follow from this, either. Once the animals remind the emperor who they are, and that their departure would mean his death, it is completely senseless for him to arrive at that decision. Why would suffering animal noises follow this decision, moreover, which is what the animals themselves had petitioned for? Why do they not celebrate instead? Nor does humane life follow from the departure of the animal – it is death that comes next. Even death, thanks to that mysterious glow, does not follow from life as it should. Perhaps there is also something about Tanpınar’s own moment in that history of non-European Europeanization that just does not follow. This moment may still be our moment today. We may have frozen in that moment in the history of Europeanization, in Europe as in non-Europe. Almost half a century after “The Last Council,” Jacques Derrida, for instance, would proclaim in Paris that “for about two centuries,” something has been happening to us “who call ourselves men or humans, we who recognize ourselves in that name”: something that is clearly visible in our relation to other living beings. This thing is so strange, he would observe, that it does not even seem to happen “within what we continue to call the world, history, life, and so on.” That is why “it should oblige us to worry all those concepts, more than just problematize them,” like dogs (Derrida 25). It has no precedent to it in human history. It is as if we were at the edge of human world and human history, if not already beyond.

I would like to see if Hayırsızada, where tens of thousands of dogs died about a century ago, and the way this island has since figured in the East and the West of Istanbul, may bring to relief the vantage point from where Tanpınar, and perhaps Derrida also, may have wanted us to look back at the last two centuries of global modernity.

The Isle of Dogs

Soon after the revolutionary Young Turks overthrew Abdülhamid II, the pious tyrant of the late Ottoman empire, to reinstate the constitution and reopen the Ottoman parliament in 1909, the stray animals of Istanbul, and particularly the city's legendary dogs, became a target of the revolutionary movement. Abdülhamid II's long reign, which began with the dissolution of the Ottoman parliament and the suspension of the constitution, had long been considered an era of stagnation by the Turkish revolutionaries, a period when the century-old Westernization program of the Ottoman empire had come to a halt. Earlier rulers of the nineteenth century, Mahmud II and Abdülaziz, who were credited with being wise enough to religiously follow the civilized world and pursue the Europeanization of all the institutions of the empire, seem to have had issues with the stray animals of the capital much earlier (Timur 12–13; Twain 373–374; Colombari 141). One prominent Young Turk, though, namely the incredibly prolific Kurdish philosopher Abdullah Cevdet, expresses disappointment at Mahmud II's failure, for instance, to take his modernizing efforts of eliminating the dogs of the capital earlier in the nineteenth century (Cevdet 7).³ Perhaps it is safe to assume that the dogs were not a priority for the earlier modernizers of the empire – that while following in the footsteps of these earlier visionaries, Young Turks also considered themselves far ahead of Mahmud II and Abdülaziz in imagining a modern life in Turkey. Regardless, Young Turks considered themselves to have inherited a mission, not only from European humanism, but also from the earlier Westernizers and other revolutionaries of the Ottoman empire. Overthrowing the tyrant, reinstating the constitution, and reopening the Ottoman parliament were only a beginning for them. They were invested in cleaning up all aspects of life in the empire – religious and political, cultural, and material – while modernizing and refurbishing all the institutions of the Ottoman state for the new century. As the capital, Istanbul was a pilot urban setting for the revolutionaries.

With the beginning of their “second constitutional era,” which, Young Turks thought, would fulfill the promises of the earlier era of reforms, print culture boomed across the empire, accompanied by numerous other institutional improvements in education and public services at large.⁴ Hygienic concerns of a new, revolutionary municipal administration are in part the explanation for the unprecedented focus on the stray

dogs of the capital, as mentioned. The dog population slowly came to be viewed as an infestation. Dogs had been around in Istanbul since so long ago that, as some critics have argued, for the revolutionaries, the dog infestation was at once an infestation with tradition, with the old habits associated with an ancient, aging, outmoded way of living and being.⁵ Abdullah Cevdet, for one, made clear in 1909 that his attack on the dogs of Istanbul was at once an attack on the superstitions of the pious, whom the people mindlessly followed, like sheep – or like those hordes of filthy dogs. When earlier modernizers of the empire showed cruelty to the dogs, God had sent them all sorts of plagues and punishments, or so believed the humble, lured by clueless religious leaders. All this is nonsense, Cevdet explains (8–9). Eradicating the dogs was eliminating the aging, corrupting tradition, the backward, conservative Muslim way of being and living with animals, which itself appeared somewhat animalistic to Cevdet and his comrades.

We do know that several options were on the table to deal with the dog infestation. For instance, one idea, as the French director of l'Institut Pasteur d'Istanbul explains, was to sell the dogs to an investor who would then install gas chambers around the city, where the dogs would be humanely killed, then butchered, and processed to produce usable materials (Remlinger 1932, 65–66). He suggested that after Istanbul, similar measures could be taken across the Ottoman empire (1910, 153–157). Remlinger's language already sets the stage for some "dreaded comparisons" between the fate of Istanbul's canine population and the darkest moments of Turkish and European twentieth century (Spiegel; Armstrong). Cevdet regrets that this offer was turned down by the government (4). There were parts of the city – occupied mostly by Westerners – where dogs were already being poisoned, and that could have been another option (Colomban 140; or Pinguet 2010, 367–368). Cevdet goes so far to ask his readers not to expect everything from the government and to take action themselves and kill the filthy creatures already (13).

What I have narrated so far already makes it clear that in the late Ottoman era the persecution of the dogs of the capital was a matter of following the European example, of the empire's Westernization. The dog population of the capital came to be identified as an infestation by those who viewed human life at this corner of the world as one that had to be more strictly distinguished and demarcated from the animal world than it had been thus far, and one that had to be brought in more of a proximity to the European way of life. But for the Ottoman revolutionaries who took themselves to be following the European example, and the example of the earlier modernizers of the empire; it was also a matter of safeguarding and conserving the tradition, of saving tradition from stagnation, of making sure that the traditional Ottoman, Muslim values, and institutions would survive in the modern world.

A Muslim capital of modern times, *the* Muslim capital, that is, the capital of the Ottoman Caliphate, could not appear as if it were the capital of a canine populace. Cevdet's pamphlet develops its argument not only on the basis of the necessity to follow the European, civilized example, but also on the basis of a particular take on what it means to follow *sharia* and its prescriptions. Cevdet also followed "biological materialism" and translated many pieces into Ottoman-Turkish to teach Muslims biological materialism. The guiding premise of his thought, however, was that Islam had always already been somewhat biological materialistic – *avant la lettre*, as it were; that the superstitions of the modern era pitting Islam against biological materialism were the outcome of the degeneration of ancient Muslim thought (Hanioğlu 1966, 129–158).⁶ For Cevdet, the proper Muslim way of life would have never shown tolerance for that strange picture of a crowded city infested with filthy dogs. If Ottomans were to follow the prescriptions of Islam, which they thought they always followed, and be the Muslims that they took themselves to be, they would have to change those Muslim ways, and follow the European example in demarcating the human and animal habitats like never before. This new path to follow was in no way a matter of transformation or conversion, but of preservation, even though the eradication of the dogs would transform the ancient silhouette of the city for good.

All in all, there was a great deal of following then. Nevertheless, nor could Turks barely follow Europeans into shooting or gassing the poor dogs, for instance, for that would leave hardly any difference between Turkish lives and the bare lives of the dogs of Istanbul who mindlessly followed Turks on the streets of Istanbul. That would make them into "apish imitators," as Halide Edib would have it, if not into dogs (Edib 240). This certainly explains, for instance, Cevdet's turn to Islam, but not to barely follow tradition, like a mindless beast. For the way Cevdet thought the humble mindlessly followed religion was the reason why Europeans were far ahead of Turks in history to begin with.

Ultimately, then, the driving force at this moment of Turkish Europeanization was an intellectual tension emanating from this question: What is the relationship between following – as in imitating and enacting (the European, the Ottoman, or the Muslim way of life) – and being (European, oneself, or Ottoman and Muslim)? What does it mean to *follow* (the Turkish, Muslim, Ottoman, European, "human," or canine, *example*) and what does it mean to *be* (Turkish, Muslim, Ottoman, European, human, or dog)? An ontological question after all.

For Derrida, as we shall see, this same question, instead of turning into the driving force for some kind of humanism as it did in Turkey, should have been overcome and forgotten long ago. It should have long

been forgotten along with all those stories “that man tells himself ... of the animal for the man-philosopher,” of “bare lives” as opposed to human beings (Derrida 22–24). But let me not get ahead of myself.

The weight of the question may also explain the monstrously awkward response that the Young Turks improvised. They did not follow the recommendations by Europeans or even Cevdet, the latter’s influence at the time being at best questionable. They did not poison the dogs or build gas chambers across the city, nor did they call for the dogs’ eradication. After all, as someone explained to Georges Goursat when he visited Istanbul in 1910, “la loi musulmane interdisant de les détruire” (“Muslim law forbidding killing them”) (Goursat 49).

Nor did they leave the dogs alone. They collected and shipped them to a barren island, despite considerable resistance by humble Ottoman citizens – apparently with a mind, at least initially, to guaranteeing their survival there, even appointing caretakers. Eventually, according to the mayor of the time, in 1909 and 1910, around 30,000 dogs living in Istanbul were systematically hunted, caged, and exiled to Hayırsızada in the middle of the Marmara Sea, where they suffered from exposure to sun and dehydration, most of them slowly starving to death after eating each other for a while (Topuzlu 121). Regardless of the initial plan, Young Turks ultimately caused the deaths of tens of thousands of dogs under most horrid conditions – in the name of modernity *and* tradition.

Cultural Schizophrenia

Already Young Turks seem to have had difficulty identifying themselves as part of a history that could accommodate such violence. For right after the eradication of the dogs, prominent members of the same revolutionary movement ended up founding the “The Istanbul Society for the Protection of Animals” (Gündoğdu 385). Although the Young Turks were after all in pursuit of Europeanizing the Turkish way of life in demarcating the human habitat more clearly, moreover, Europeans could not by any means identify themselves in this episode in Turkish history either. Catherine Pinguet gave us numerous examples of this inability to identify oneself in history, from missionaries who copiously mourned over the tragedy after themselves having poisoned some dogs, to the director of l’Institut Pasteur d’Istanbul who, despite himself coming up with the option of gas chambers, found the Turkish solution to be utterly inhumane (Pinguet 2005, 2008, 2010).

One of the signatories of the infamous Sykes–Picot agreement between Great Britain and France, which shaped the modern Middle East by dividing it up to create a number of clearly demarcated habitats for different human populations, namely Sir Tatton Benvenuto Mark Sykes, also had something to say about this bestial history. In response to the

dog massacres, Sykes sided with conservative Abdülhamid's tyrannical law and order against the anarchy that the revolutionary Turks stirred up (Sykes 507; Brummett 440–441). Even the dogs had a place during the Hamidian era, whose order seems to be closer to a European ideal from Sykes' perspective, and look what happened to them under Young Turks!

Georges Goursat's (aka SEM) 1910 illustrated essay "L'île aux chiens," his "literary debut," tells the story of his visit to the island where the dogs were exiled. Goursat expected to see the streets of Istanbul swarmed with dogs, "d'après la légende" ("after the legend") (49). Upon failing to locate the dogs on the streets of Istanbul, Goursat learns that they were collected from the streets and exiled. He attends a dinner with Talat Pasha, one of the three pashas who were in charge of the revolutionary Young Turkish government: "Son Excellence nous affirma avec un sourire rassurant que cette mesure avait été prise par Mouheddin bey, gouverneur de Péra ; que trente mille francs avaient été votés par le Parlement pour l'entretien de ces chiens, qu'ils étaient très bien soignés et nourris aux frais de l'Etat" ("His Excellency assured us with a comforting smile that this measure had been taken by Mouheddin Bey, governor of Pera; that thirty thousand francs had been put aside by the Parliament for the maintenance of those dogs, that they were very well cared for and fed at the expense of the State") (50).

Then something strange happens. Goursat and his friends, right after leaving the civilized Turkish dining hole, run into three brutes chasing dogs on the streets, three "terrible Kurds," after which they finally decide to make it to the island. "It was a hideous sight," writes a disillusioned Goursat (49). A pitiful horde looking for rescue jumps into the water when Goursat's boat approaches the island. The dogs even follow the boat in the sea as Goursat and his company leave, an English woman on board screaming: "Those poor dogs ought to be killed! Kill them, I beg you!" (48, 56). Goursat and the dogs continue to haunt contemporary imagination: "Like the poor Armenians," Goursat would add (51).

Goursat's illustrations of 1910 can be traced all the way to Armenian-French film and theater actor, director, writer, and producer Serge Avedikian's Cannes and Palm d'or-winning animated short *Chiienne d'histoire* (2010). Avedikian carries Goursat's dreadful comparison further and "links the Armenian genocide in April 1915 to these thousands of dogs cleansed from the streets of Constantinople and left to starve" (Dayan 133). The film comprises not only Goursat's illustrations in a sequence, but also its own illustrations by Thomas Azuélós, of dogs in particular, were clearly inspired by Goursat's.

Avedikian tells the story of a bitch that has just whelped a beautiful litter of healthy pups, all ending up in the island to meet their destiny. He illustrates for us Istanbul's humble, Muslim Turks who seem to have

no quarrel with the dogs. We also have here the Young Turk triumvirate with their mustaches and European outfits deliberating on the issue of dogs upon being briefed by a European expert, likely Remlinger himself, who shows them exemplary images of Western urban centers. We see a boat – Goursat’s – of shamefully golden hues approaching the island in the midst of the nightmare before the sequence of Goursat’s illustrations.

So, nobody is spared in Avedikian’s response to the barbarism. After Avedikian, whose perspective fulfills the overall modern historical vision thus far narrated, one is left to think that, if there was hardly anything truly European in the way in which the dogs were treated, there was also hardly anything truly European in the way in which the tragedy came to be represented in Europe until Avedikian’s corrective in our present. This present – Avedikian’s and our present – fulfills or enacts the truth of the properly European ways, which stand at a radical distance from the dog massacres and the previous attempts at representing Istanbul’s animals. This is also a Europe where, today, as everywhere else in the Europeanizing world, the utterly barbaric “farming and regimentalization” of animals has reached demographic levels “unknown in the past” (Derrida 24).

For the Turkish side of things, as Avedikian too shows, back in the day people themselves had no quarrel with the dogs anyway. Palmira Brummett accounted for how dogs figured in the revolutionary press, or rather in the “cartoon revolution,” one of the new freedoms of the print culture boom after the Young Turkish revolution. According to Brummett, insofar as the cartoons “bridged the gap between literate and illiterate culture,” often tackling the life on the streets and also circulating extensively there, cartoons enable us to catch a glimpse of life at this point in history that is not available anywhere else (436). Mixing high and low genres and styles, bridging the gap between the humble and the learned, addressing the daily concerns of the simple and elevating those concerns to print material, the Ottoman revolutionary press and its blooming literary – if not exclusively “literate” – culture represents the kind of historical reality that other historical accounts do not and cannot. The cartoons of Brummett’s choice may not be representative, she explains, but they certainly represent some reality, and it seems to be the way they do the work of representing that makes them uniquely realistic (437). While the evolving revolutionary press, by definition, did obviously “address basically an elite audience,” cartoons also take us closer to the daily life of ordinary people, whose simplicity, moreover, suggests the simplicity and relative immediacy of the particular reality that cartoons represent (436).

These satirical images equate “the dogs with the Ottoman people: starving, oppressed, and at the mercy of foreign entrepreneurs and an

unsympathetic government,” questioning the difference between ordinary Ottoman citizens on the streets of Istanbul and their dogs (443). Brummett is convinced that nothing less than “cultural schizophrenia” was at stake (437).

Regardless, the humble Turkish folks are but on the canine side of the barricade according to the high realism – or the literary-historical realism, in the Auerbachian sense – of these cartoons where, according to Brummett, these Turks find their self-expression. They are more on-lookers than agents of change. The dogs’ suffering and end are at once their own suffering.

Recently, on the Turkish front, reputable historians and critics (in short essays such as Timur’s and Işın’s) have addressed the massacres with some nostalgia for these earlier times, often sympathizing with the dogs. Then again, insofar as modern Turkey is the product of a popular upheaval, the modern Turkish nation – a rather more hygienic version of the simple Turkish folk of the empire – seems to have hardly anything to do with this history of barbarism. After all, from Goursat’s perspective, for instance, even Young Turks do well enough before some brute Kurds enter the stage! It may be relevant to mention Kurdish Young Turk Cevdet’s fate at this point.

When this Young Turk, the scourge of Pinguet’s critical attention, entertained the thought of Kurdish independence, he only outraged the conservative and the revolutionary Turks alike. Clearly this was not what he intended. Cevdet must have thought that Kurdish independence only followed Turkish independence – that in pursuing Kurdish independence, he only followed Young Turkish thought. When Cevdet later recommended that Turkey should open its gates to immigration to populate and farm the desolate Turkish lands, he was declared an animal himself and cast aside by the conservative and the revolutionary alike: today, in Turkey, Cevdet is best known for his alleged call to import “brood males from Europe,” a most bestial thought unfit for any decent Muslim Turk (Hanioglu 1966, 386–395). The animal seems to have never ceased to haunt Abdullah Cevdet “the Kurd” – just as he never ceased his humane pursuits, even at his own expense.

Like Nerval and Sykes, among others, Pinguet responds to dog massacres by turning her attention to the earlier state of affairs in the Muslim lands. Pinguet also resists the argument about the place and function of dogs in premodern Muslim Istanbul, which at one point required taking into consideration, by Nerval and Turkish historians as well, the dogs’ role as scavengers and trash collectors (Işın 219–226; Twain 372). She argues that the dogs’ place in Istanbul’s Islamicate premodernity cannot be explained away from a utilitarian perspective. It was simply a different way of relating to animals, a different conception of the gap, the barricade dividing the human from the animal (Pinguet 2005, 239–240). A different way of being human.

The Muslim way of relating to animals is thus one of Pinguet's favorite topics. Her writings on the dogs of Istanbul, and her observations on how initially it was in the European and Christian neighborhoods of Istanbul that the dogs were unwelcome, are accompanied by intellectual and religious historical accounts of Muslims and their animals. No one paid more attention than Pinguet to the resistance on the streets to the eradication of the dogs, mainly by conservative Muslims, humble Turkish folk. And this, in part, explains the stir her book on the predicament of these dogs created in Turkish translation (2008, 2009).

In these literary and historical accounts, then, the killing of the dogs thus almost always figures as having taken place as an exception, or despite the arrival of culture, civilization, or modernity in this part of the world and despite the every-day Turks' considerable resistance. It is almost always a moment of discontinuity, some awkward exception to the rule. The multiple perspectives I have covered thus far illustrate the paradoxical premises underlying this thought of discontinuity. In short, it appears to be impossible to account for the massacre of the dogs of Istanbul historically – to identify what caused this event with clarity, or to find out who were responsible for it, let alone the relation of this episode to our present.

As for Pinguet's humble Muslims and their traditional, Muslim ways: That some humble Turks stood up against the killing of defenseless stray dogs does not mean that Islam is particularly animal-friendly. From the sacrificial slaughter of lambs and other animals, which Cevdet found more defenseless than stray dogs, to the breeding of roosters, camels, and other species for the purpose of animal fights, Muslim Istanbul had seen a fair amount of bloodshed and violence against animals before the Young Turks took power (Cevdet 8; Gündoğdu 381–382; Sevengil 67). Already Lady Craven's comments on "the ill-understood charity" of the Turks offered a corrective to the legend of their humane ways in our opening. Mark Twain, for his part, was just as disappointed as Goursat when he saw the dogs for himself in Istanbul almost half a century before the Frenchman. Twain expected them to be "determined and ferocious" (Twain 370). Yet the dogs turned out to be scattered all over the city, lazy and miserable. Although Turks "are loath to kill them," he explains, for they "have an innate antipathy to taking the life of any dumb animal, it is said ... they do worse. They hang and kick and stone and scald these wretched creatures to the very verge of death, and then leave them to live and suffer" (372).

Turks were not the legend that one would want them to have been before Europeanization, in other words. Nevertheless, once things were at least a little different, and we do know that too. That little difference was also the ultimate distance to mass murder of innocents committed in the name of modernity and/or tradition. It may as well have been what stood between entire peoples and their eradication.

The Animals of Modernity

The pursuit of the human in history seems to hail an end point vis-a-vis our contemporary relation to animals, according to Derrida, which has a history of about two centuries. Perhaps this also explains the reason why the massacre of Istanbul's dogs is almost always represented as a moment of discontinuity in the literary and historical accounts above. On one hand the "traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down," on the other hand "we no longer even have a clock or a chronological measure" to determine what has been happening to us and since when. This is one of the reasons why today, ("our") history itself, this confessional and autobiographical enterprise of sighting and situating ourselves on earth needs to be problematized. For there may be a continuity between the failure to recognize the human in episodes such as the dog massacres of Istanbul and the events themselves. There may be a continuity between this very failure, and the changes taking place all around the world "intensely and by means of an alarming rate of acceleration," which has already brought us today to "farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past ... the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat" (Derrida 24–25). Let us see how one can account for this continuity.

For Derrida, then, the question of the animal in our day and age is at once a question concerning history, literature, modernization and religion. More precisely, from his narrowly European perspective, the question of the animal is the question of history, literature and "especially" Christianity. On one hand, gnawing on history, Derrida diligently sucks out Christian confession and autobiography from its core in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, and insofar as these are themes and issues that he seems to have always followed, as he admits, there are no surprises here; he only follows himself after all, he is consistent. On the other hand, in this final, bestial autobiography, he also finds himself obliged to pursue a new, strange angle to view and account for himself – an angle that is neither merely historical, chronological, nor immediately literary, autobiographical, or philosophical.

Can one think of stepping out, beyond or before history? Not beyond or before this or that historical account of events, European or other histories. Can we imagine viewing ourselves without this overtly confessional, this "poisonously" autobiographic, literary lens that gives us our histories (47; 24–25)? For that lens can no longer provide us with the proper means to view ourselves for who or what we have become at this point in human history – it can no longer account for "the present as history – the present [as] something in the process of resulting from history" (as Auerbach would say, 491). Can we try an alternative? "Just to see," he would add, if there is,

in particular in the history of discourse, indeed of the becoming-literature of discourse, an ancient form of autobiography immune

from confession, an account of the self free from any sense of confession? And thus from all redemptive language, within the horizon of salvation as a requiting? Has there been, since so long ago, a place and a meaning for autobiography before original sin and before the religions of the book? Autobiography and memoir before Christianity, especially, before the Christian institutions of confession? (Derrida 21)

Is there an “especially” pre-Christian historical vision, a position outside or before Christianity, outside history and free of the lures of autobiography and literature?

What Derrida then shows us, in the form of his own autobiography and his own account of his animals and philosophers, is that perhaps the “abyssal rupture” between the beast and the human in the context of autobiography and literature, “doesn’t describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges” (31). He for one only follows himself and he had always been after himself, he shows us, without knowing where he would end up, and without knowing that he was following, to begin with. As he had done many times before, Derrida catches himself talking about himself here at the end of his career, regardless of the topic he addresses. This time he was asked to lecture on “the animal,” before he was asked to address Platonism, the ends of man, Marxism, hospitality, or spirits. Here he discovers that there is a continuity to his work that he never seems to have intended. Nor could he have had such an intention, he explains. Having followed the same Derrida for decades, intentionally or not, having *repeated* himself over and over again, very much like his own cat that followed him every morning to the bathroom, Derrida tells us that, despite talking about the animal, he got locked in his human self all over again, looking for a way out. Like his cat did every morning, he asks to be let out.

There is something quite bestial then about autobiography and literature; about history, Christianity and confession. On the autobiographical, literary, and historical side of the “abyss,” one barely follows oneself, more or less mindlessly, more or less willingly. Working on the autobiographical, literary, and historical, Christian side of the “abyss,” Derrida shows us that he himself was only a follower after all, in other words, like his cat and like the dogs that followed Goursat’s boat. These animals’ struggle for “bare life,” he teaches us, their bare struggle for life, which even Twain found comparable to the predicament of the humble Turkish lives of Istanbul, cannot be easily – through “a unilinear and indivisible line” – distinguished *intellectually* from the overtly humane trials and tribulations of a philosopher, autobiographer, and a historian of his caliber. For there is no such thing as “bare life” as opposed to human life, and we should put this thought behind us. In fact that thought should have long been history: a story, “the one that man tells himself,

the history of the philosophical animal, of the animal for the man-philosopher” (22–24). Not just to render the animal more than “bare life” in our minds, but to see that being human is also being barely, simply alive. In neither case do life and bare life “describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges.” Being *is* following. This is what it was before the fall, and this is what it still is.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to venture into the rich contexts and conclusions of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that takes us, along with many of Derrida’s animals, poets, and philosophers, to Greece and the times before the fall, and via the Bible to contemporary thought. What I have been after is this conclusion that there is something animalistic, perhaps particularly animalistic, about buying into the noblest lures of autobiography.

If it is the pursuit of the human self, or of demarcating human life, that underlies the dog massacres of Istanbul, it is the same search for the human self in history that renders this episode a moment of discontinuity historically. This provides us with a new perspective on who or what we have become in our humane or humanist pursuits, following the human self *like* dogs.

Derrida, like Tanpınar, never wrote on the dogs of Istanbul. Then again both Derrida and Tanpınar thought and spoke about a variety of borders dividing humans from non-humans, and also on the animals of philosophy and the humanities in Istanbul (Keskin). It would be preposterous, though, to think that Tanpınar may have never heard of Hayırsızada when he drafted “The Last Council.” It is impossible to read “The Last Council” without thinking of the dog massacres. Tanpınar’s discourse on the animal, like Derrida’s, is not just literary or philosophical in so far as it is overburdened by the historical reality of the dog massacres and the change this has produced in Istanbul. Reading Tanpınar’s parable as responding to Turkey’s Europeanization does not say much about Europe or the premodern, fabulous Turk, either. Yet it tells us something different about the animals, the bare lives of our *modern imagination*.

If “The Last Council” reads like a modern-day satyr play, its central theme, moreover, is a conflict between a perilous perfection of form and raw and lively passions; the very ancient tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian that has inspired great many men and women of letters and philosophers. The Dionysian here in Tanpınar’s parable, at the beginning of the story at least, is not “in the full sense, an essence, but the possibility of an essence to exist in the guise of its represented appearance” (De Man 100). Tanpınar’s speaking animals are but civilized, anthropomorphic representations. What they do in reality is to aesthetically represent certain human ideals to embrace and follow – ideals on equal footing with the Apollonian order we see in the palace. We do not have in this story anything about real animals, nor any association,

for that matter, between the animal and “bare life” until the end of the story. Yet something resembling the fiction of “bare life” emerges at the end of the story – one that, *again, has nothing to do with the “real” animal*. Once the emperor empties the stable, bare life rushes out into the world, and for the first time “suffering animal sounds” are heard as opposed to speech.

If “the philosophical animal” or the “man-philosopher” as opposed to the animal is but a humane fiction, an ideal to follow, so is this “bare life” that Tanpınar’s emperor empties out into the world. If following or enacting the truth of the former constitutes “the history of the philosophical animal,” following or enacting the truth of the other fiction, that of bare life of animals, would be equally *of* our very own humanity. Perhaps Tanpınar is telling us that more or less willingly following the fictional “philosophical animal,” the “man-philosopher,” we have mindlessly come to enact the truth of the latter fiction. In pursuit of *our* human, in other words, we may have become *our* animals – ferocious creatures that have nothing to do with real animals or the animals that we once were. Perhaps it is the animals that the emperor let go, the animals that we are, who, having run away from the stable, mindlessly killed the dogs of Istanbul, among numerous other innocents.

Notes

- 1 *Meclis* could also be the parliament or the council of poets, or, colloquially, a gathering at the tavern, or in the “salon.”
- 2 The usual suspects, including Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Nerval are among those who contributed to that authorship. Needless to say, some dreaded this curiosity, and some admired it. Critics I cite in this essay, from Brummett to Pinguet and Gündoğdu, scanned this literature extensively.
- 3 For more on Cevdet, see Süssheim and Hanioglu (1966). See also Berkes (337–46, 359–66), for instance, or Mardin (221–50).
- 4 Brummett gives a concise history of these developments in context. See also Hanioglu (2010); and for Young Turks, 1995 and 2000.
- 5 Witnesses and earlier critics, from Claude Farrere to Mark Sykes, made this point overtly clear in their observations, and Brummett and Pinguet follow up on these accounts and evaluations.
- 6 See also Hanioglu (1997, 133–58 and 2005, 41–60). Historians often have difficulty finding Cevdet’s paradoxical piety genuine (see, for instance, Hanioglu 1997, 136). I believe he deserves the benefit of the doubt. See also Alkan.

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