

## Fuad Köprülü's *Evolution*: From Cosmopolitan Thought to National Historiography (1909-1913)\*

Fuad Köprülü'nün Evrimi: Kozmopolit Düşünceden Millî Edebiyat Tarihine (1909-1913)

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### Abstract

This article examines the conceptual transformation of evolution in Fuad Köprülü's writings between 1909 and 1913, tracing his intellectual trajectory from cosmopolitan literary sociology to nationalist philology. Initially engaging with Darwinian, Spencerian, and Tainean models of cultural development, Köprülü deployed evolutionary discourse to articulate a comparative and transnational theory of literature. His early essays treat evolution as a gradual and pluralist unfolding of aesthetic and intellectual refinement. However, following the Balkan Wars and under the influence of nationalist thought, Köprülü reimagines evolution as a voluntarist and vitalist force for national rebirth. Drawing on mutationism, Bergson's creative evolution, and Gökalp's cultural sociology, he reframes evolution as rupture, will, and methodological foundation. The article demonstrates how this conceptual reorientation culminates in Köprülü's "Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl," which institutionalizes literary history as a national science. By analyzing this shift, the article reveals how Köprülü transformed a European-derived concept into the epistemological core of Turkish literary historiography.

### Öz

Bu makale, Fuad Köprülü'nün 1909 ile 1913 yılları arasında kaleme aldığı metinlerde *evrim* (*tekâmül*) kavramının geçirdiği düşünsel dönüşümü incelemekte; onun kozmopolit bir edebiyat sosyolojisinden milliyetçi bir filoloji anlayışına yönelişini izlemektedir. Başlangıçta Darwinci, Spencerci ve Taineci modellerden yararlanan Köprülü, edebî gelişimi hem toplumsal dönüşümün bir ürünü hem de onun itici gücü olarak tanımlar ve evrimi estetik ve entelektüel olgunlaşmanın çoğulcu bir ilkesi olarak kurgular. Ancak Balkan Savaşları sonrası yaşanan siyasal kırılma ve Ziya Gökalp merkezli milliyetçi çevrelerin etkisiyle, evrim düşüncesini irade ve canlılık temelinde, ulusal bir dirilişin aracı olarak yeniden yapılandırır. Mutasyunculuk, Bergson'un yaratıcı evrimi ve Gökalp'ın kültür sosyolojisinden beslenen bu yeni çerçeve, "Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl" makalesinde disiplinler bir yönetime dönüşerek, edebiyat tarihini ulusal bir bilim olarak kurar. Makale, bu düşünsel dönüşümün izini sürerek Köprülü'nün Avrupa kaynaklı bir kavramı, Türk edebiyat tarihçiliğinin temel bir epistemolojisine dönüştürmesini ortaya koyar.

### Keywords

Fuad Köprülü, evolution, nationalism, Ottoman literature, literary historiography

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Fuad Köprülü, evrim, milliyetçilik, Osmanlı edebiyatı, edebiyat tarihçiliği

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## Introduction

Between 1909 and 1913, Fuad Köprülü authored a remarkable series of texts that chart a complex intellectual itinerary from cosmopolitan evolutionism to nationalist philology. Writing in the aftermath of the 1908 Revolution and amid the shifting epistemological and political contours of the Second Constitutional Era, Köprülü articulated an ambitious theory of literary development grounded in evolutionary discourse. Initially drawing upon European models—particularly those of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Hippolyte Taine, Georg Brandes, and Roberto Ardigo—he envisioned literature as both a product and a driver of societal transformation, governed by the same laws of adaptation, differentiation, and progress that structure biological and cultural life. Yet, following the traumatic experience of the Balkan Wars and under the growing influence of nationalist thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp, Köprülü’s thought underwent a decisive transformation. By the time he published “Ümid ve Azim” (1913, “Hope and Determination”) and “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl” (1913, “The Method in the History of Turkish Literature”), evolution had ceased to signify a cosmopolitan circulation of ideas and had become the philosophical foundation for a voluntarist, national historiography. This article traces the conceptual shifts across Köprülü’s major texts from *Hayat-ı Fikriye* (*Intellectual Life*) to “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” examining how the rhetoric and logic of evolution (*tekâmül*) is successively reconfigured—from a universal law of intellectual refinement to a strategy of national survival, and finally to a methodological blueprint for literary historiography.

This article traces the conceptual transformation of evolution in Fuad Köprülü’s writings between 1909 and 1913, situating his early thought at the intersection of European intellectual currents, Ottoman modernity, and emergent nationalist discourse. Structured in seven sections, the essay begins with an in-depth reading of *Hayat-ı Fikriye* (I), where evolution is first posited as a cosmopolitan imperative grounded in European philosophy, positivism, and literary sociology. The next two sections examine Köprülü’s engagements with aesthetic theory (II) and cultural pessimism (III), highlighting how his concept of evolution expands to encompass not only generational change and artistic form but also the psychological costs of modernity. Section IV turns to his evolving views on taste, cultural stratification, and the autonomy of the literary field, while Section V explores his decisive turn toward a comparative and transnational theory of literary development, culminating in a critique of nationalist essentialism. The final two sections chart a rupture: first, in “Ümid ve Azim” (VI), where Köprülü reconfigures evolution through Bergsonian and mutationist paradigms as a vitalist force of national resurrection; and second, in “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl” (VII), where evolution is reimagined as a methodological and historiographical foundation for a nationalist science of literature. Across these sections, the article demonstrates how Köprülü’s shifting use of evolution—from gradualist cosmopolitanism to

voluntarist historicism—mirrors a broader reorientation of Ottoman intellectual life in the wake of imperial crisis.

### ***Hayat-ı Fikriye: Evolutionary Thought at the Threshold of a Literary-Philosophical Project***

Published in 1910, *Hayat-ı Fikriye* marks Fuad Köprülü's debut as a public intellectual and theorist of cultural transformation. Composed at a moment of intense political and epistemological transition following the 1908 Revolution, the book inaugurates Köprülü's engagement with European philosophy, positivism, and sociological thought, articulating an early model of intellectual and literary evolution. Though often overlooked in favor of his later contributions to literary historiography, *Hayat-ı Fikriye* offers a foundational articulation of Köprülü's belief in the transformative power of ideas, positioning the concept of evolution not only as a historical phenomenon but also as a prescriptive imperative. The book's preface, titled "Kâri'lerime" [To My Readers] and dated December 5, 1909, lays the philosophical groundwork for this project. It presents a sweeping vision of Ottoman intellectual renewal—one that draws heavily on nineteenth-century European thought while mobilizing literature and philosophy as critical instruments of national survival. The preface thus functions as both a statement of purpose and an intellectual manifesto, revealing the foundational tensions that would animate Köprülü's thought in the years to come.

In the preface to *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, Köprülü casts the intellectual and social evolution of Ottoman society as both a historical inevitability and an existential necessity. Framing the aftermath of the 1908 Revolution as a critical juncture, he insists that political reform alone is insufficient without a corresponding transformation in thought, education, and cultural sensibility. He draws inspiration from Darwin and Spencer, as well as Comte, Mill, and Le Bon, to articulate a comprehensive philosophy of historical development. In this view, evolution is not a passive unfolding of events, but an active and cultivated process requiring ethical will and intellectual labor. Evolution, in this sense, is not merely descriptive but prescriptive: it demands conscious intervention to avert civilizational decline ("inhitat") and to ensure survival within a world governed by what he calls "the savage and self-interested laws of nature" ("tabiatın vahşi ve hodgâm kanunları").<sup>1</sup>

This sense of urgency is reinforced through Köprülü's invocation of a starkly Darwinian international order, where only the intellectually and culturally fittest survive. Against this brutal reality, he posits the necessity of an *inkılâb-ı fikrî*—an intellectual revolution capable of reorienting collective consciousness and guiding political life. For this revolution to succeed, literature must play a leading role. Citing Max Nordau's claim that literature mirrors the intellectual and emotional structure of an era, Köprülü treats literary progress as a barometer of societal health. Accordingly,

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<sup>1</sup> Fuad Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, ed. Cafer Şen and Nurcan Şen (Ankara: Akçağ, 2007), 15.

he insists that literature must transcend aestheticism and engage with contemporary philosophy and social science; only then can it embody the intellectual achievements necessary for civilizational advancement. Literary greatness, as exemplified by writers such as Zola, Flaubert, and Balzac, presupposes a deep entanglement with thinkers like Comte, Taine, and Renan—figures whose scientific rigor and historical sensitivity inform the literary imagination.<sup>2</sup>

Köprülü's understanding of philosophy, in this context, is resolutely pragmatic. Echoing Alfred Fouillée, he contends that philosophical ideas, when properly cultivated, generate concrete social and industrial consequences. Philosophy and the experimental sciences are not ornamental branches of knowledge but strategic instruments for cultural and political survival. Societies that fail to integrate these disciplines into their educational and institutional frameworks, he argues, are condemned to stagnation and eventual collapse. The Ottoman Empire's future, therefore, hinges on its capacity to absorb and internalize the intellectual heritage of modern Europe—especially in the domains of critical thought, scientific inquiry, and philosophical reflection.<sup>3</sup>

What emerges in the preface is a holistic conception of evolution in which literature, philosophy, commerce, agriculture, and the arts function as interdependent forces propelling society toward an imagined luminous future. This integrated vision foregrounds the mutual reinforcement of diverse domains of knowledge, united by a shared commitment to intellectual cultivation. Within this schema, the distinction between cultural refinement and geopolitical endurance collapses: to evolve intellectually is to survive politically. In this way, the preface fuses a deterministic account of historical development with an activist ethos, positioning the cultivation of thought as the central axis around which all forms of social renewal must turn.

While Köprülü situates his call for evolution firmly within the immediate concerns of Ottoman modernity, the intellectual horizon of *Hayat-ı Fikriye* reaches far beyond. The book's chapters offer extended engagements with European philosophers and literary critics—especially Roberto Ardigo and Georg Brandes—whose thought Köprülü treats not simply as foreign models, but as intellectual resources to be metabolized into an Ottoman context. Through these engagements, evolution is recast as a transnational paradigm for conceptualizing the dynamics of cultural and intellectual transformation. The preface thus anticipates a broader argument that unfolds across the book: that modernity, if it is to be meaningfully Ottoman, must first be intellectually cosmopolitan.

Following the programmatic urgency articulated in the preface, Köprülü opens *Hayat-ı Fikriye* with a sustained engagement with the Italian philosopher Roberto Ardigo,<sup>4</sup> whose

<sup>2</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Roberto Ardigo was the most prominent figure of Italian positivist philosophy in the nineteenth century, known for synthesizing empirical science, evolutionary theory, and materialist metaphysics. Initially a Catholic priest, he broke with the Church after facing persecution for his naturalistic views, which posited that all phenomena—natural, human, and social—could be explained through a principle of *naturality*,

intellectual trajectory exemplifies the very model of evolutionary transformation that Köprülü deems necessary for the Ottoman context. Far from a peripheral figure, Ardigo is presented as a paradigmatic thinker of nineteenth-century positivism, and as such, becomes both a source of theoretical authority and a mirror in which Köprülü projects his vision of intellectual renewal.

Ardigo's intellectual evolution—from Catholic cleric to scientific positivist—is reconstructed by Köprülü not simply as a biographical narrative but as a conceptual allegory for the kind of transformation he urges upon Ottoman thinkers. Born into a devout religious milieu in Cremona, Ardigo eventually abandoned his early theological commitments under the influence of figures such as Comte, Darwin, Spencer, and Kant.<sup>5</sup> Köprülü presents this progression as emblematic of a larger historical logic in which inherited metaphysical frameworks are superseded by empirical and evolutionary modes of thought. The personal thus becomes exemplary: Ardigo's intellectual self-overcoming is deployed as evidence for the universal applicability of evolutionary thought, and as a precedent for Ottoman cultural and philosophical regeneration.

A key element of Köprülü's portrayal lies in Ardigo's redefinition of evolution itself. Unlike Herbert Spencer, who grounds evolutionary development primarily in biological processes, Ardigo prioritizes the evolution of thought (*l'évolution de la pensée*), proposing that intellectual life is subject to the same laws of gradual differentiation and refinement.<sup>6</sup> This move allows Köprülü to expand the semantic range of evolution beyond biological analogy, establishing it as a master concept capable of organizing epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics alike. In this schema, knowledge is not static or cumulative but dynamic and open-ended. Ardigo's positivism, as Köprülü presents it, rejects fixed metaphysical truths in favor of a model in which empirical observation becomes merely the point of departure for a process of perpetual conceptual evolution—never its terminus.

Köprülü also emphasizes Ardigo's critique of theological dualism and his advocacy for a unified understanding of nature and cognition. The concept of indistinction ("müşevveş ve gayr-i müteferrik")—a primordial, undifferentiated unity from which complexity gradually emerges—becomes central to Köprülü's reading.<sup>7</sup> This notion of evolutionary emergence allows him to

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understood as an immanent, self-organizing logic within reality. Rejecting spiritualism and metaphysical dualism, Ardigo placed sensation at the core of knowledge, framing science as an evolving, self-correcting process. He viewed moral progress as rooted not in religious dogma but in socially determined ideals of justice and altruism. His thought was deeply influenced by thinkers such as Spinoza, Darwin, Mill, and Spencer, and served as the foundation for a distinctively Italian version of positivist democracy. Ardigo's evolutionary naturalism, with its emphasis on intellectual emancipation and the secular ethics of the modern state, left a lasting imprint on the Italian intellectual landscape. For a detailed account, see Nadia Urbinati, "Ardigo, Roberto (1828–1920)," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis, 2003), <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/biographical/ardigo-roberto-1828-1920/v-1>, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780415249126-DC101-1>.

<sup>5</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 20, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 35.

articulate a vision of intellectual life as a continuum in which the domains of philosophy, science, and literature are not discrete, but interdependent. For Köprülü, such integration is not merely desirable but essential: a revitalized Ottoman intellectual culture must dissolve disciplinary partitions and embrace the holistic dynamics of evolutionary development.

Ardigo's philosophical emancipation from both ecclesiastical orthodoxy and nationalist essentialism also serves as a strategic analogue for Köprülü's own position. Ardigo's role in liberating Italian thought from the constraints of clerical dogma becomes a precedent for Köprülü's call for Ottoman intellectuals to free themselves from similarly paralyzing traditions. Ardigo is not simply a philosopher to be studied, but a figure to be emulated: his philosophical evolution becomes a legitimating case study for the broader transformation Köprülü envisions. As such, Ardigo functions both as an object of analysis and as a methodological ally—someone whose trajectory exemplifies the difficult but necessary work of intellectual modernization.

Köprülü's treatment of Ardigo does more than situate him within the history of positivist thought; it integrates him into a broader ideological program in which the evolution of ideas is synonymous with civilizational survival. Ardigo's break with dogmatism, his valorization of empirical inquiry, and his reconceptualization of knowledge as process all converge to support Köprülü's central thesis: that intellectual evolution is not an abstract ideal but an urgent historical imperative. In aligning Ottoman intellectual renewal with the philosophical legacy of figures like Ardigo, Köprülü reaffirms his conviction that survival in the modern world depends upon the systematic adoption of evolutionary paradigms capable of reorganizing not only thought but the very conditions of cultural and political life.

Building on his analysis of Ardigo's epistemological evolutionism, Köprülü next turns his attention to the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes, devoting a substantial thirty-page chapter in *Hayat-ı Fikriye* titled "Georg Brandes ve İskandinav Edebiyatı." This choice is not incidental. In spotlighting Brandes—an intellectual whose career unfolded in Europe's cultural periphery yet whose influence reverberated throughout the continent—Köprülü carefully selects a figure whose trajectory resonates with his own aspirations. Brandes' ability to navigate local contexts while intervening meaningfully in international literary discourse renders him, for Köprülü, an exemplary model for Ottoman intellectuals seeking to craft a similarly dynamic and outward-facing critical practice.

In this spirit, Köprülü presents Brandes as both an interpreter and a mediator of ideas, whose legacy lies not in creative production but in the construction of a rigorous, comparative, and evolutionist literary historiography. Citing Lasse Horne Kjelldgaard's later formulation,<sup>8</sup> one

<sup>8</sup> Lasse Horne Kjelldgaard, "Georg Brandes' Literary Darwinism," in *Georg Brandes: Pioneer of Comparative Literature and Global Public Intellectual*, ed. Jens Bjerring-Hansen, Anders Engberg-Pedersen, and Lasse Horne Kjelldgaard (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 81–96. In his analysis of *Main Currents*, Lasse Horne Kjelldgaard shows how Georg Brandes adopted a scientific posture in writing literary history, modeling the critic on the zoologist or geologist who traces structures across evolution. Brandes viewed

might say that Brandes embodies a typological vision of literary history shaped by nineteenth-century scientific frameworks, particularly Darwinian evolution. Brandes frequently adopts the pose of the natural scientist, likening literary critics to botanists or zoologists who trace mutations across species. Literary forms, in this schema, behave like living organisms—emerging, adapting, or disappearing in response to shifting historical and cultural climates.

Brandes also incorporates geological metaphors, portraying literary history as composed of slow-moving currents that occasionally solidify into definable formations. Yet this method, for all its analytical power, risks determinism. By identifying recurring literary characters—such as Werther, René, and Adolphe—as symptomatic types, Brandes tends to subordinate artistic individuality to typological categories. This tendency, as Köprülü recognizes, marks a key tension in Brandes' thought: between the explanatory clarity of scientific analogy and the complexity of literary production.<sup>9</sup>

Despite his evolutionary language, Brandes diverges in significant ways from Darwin. Whereas Darwinian theory stresses random variation and environmental contingency without a predetermined endpoint, Brandes remains committed to a progressive, teleological vision. Literary evolution, in his work, is not merely descriptive but ethically charged: it aligns with liberal ideals of emancipation, reason, and individual freedom. According to Kjældgaard, this tension eventually compelled Brandes to retreat from rigid typology in favor of a more author-centered model—an evolution mirrored in Köprülü's own ambivalence toward strict determinism.

Köprülü situates Brandes within the broader intellectual ferment of the late nineteenth century, shaped by the rise of positivist thought and evolutionary theory. The influence of Comte, Mill, Darwin, and especially Taine forms the background of Brandes' critical method. Köprülü pays particular attention to Brandes' adaptation of Taine's triad—race, milieu, and moment—highlighting its transformative impact on Scandinavian literary culture. Denmark's status as a small, culturally marginal nation, Köprülü suggests, necessitated an outward-looking intellectual posture. Brandes embraced this position, importing French philosophical models and using them to energize a nascent national literature, thereby catalyzing the emergence of writers such as Ibsen, Bjørnson, and Jacobsen.<sup>10</sup>

To illustrate the significance of Brandes' intervention, Köprülü evokes the symbolic geography of Scandinavia: a rugged, fog-shrouded region of granite and fjords that, under

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literature as a field of typological transformation, where fictional “types” crystallize emotional and ideological movements over time. Drawing on Darwinian analogies, he combined evolutionary metaphors with idealist aesthetics, using the “type” to synthesize individual characters and collective forces. While his approach was initially systematic, Kjældgaard notes that Brandes eventually abandoned typology for more author-centered frameworks in later volumes.

<sup>9</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 48.

Brandes' influence, evolved into a vibrant node in Europe's literary map.<sup>11</sup> Brandes thus becomes the architect of a cultural transformation—an intellectual who fused local particularity with cosmopolitan vision. Köprülü's prose dwells on Brandes' capacity to mediate between the intellectual centers of Europe and its peripheries, positing him as a figure who proves that cultural marginality need not preclude international relevance.

Yet Köprülü is not uncritical. He acknowledges the potential limitations of Brandes' method—its tendency toward over-systematization and its occasional flattening of literary complexity under the weight of socio-historical explanation. Nonetheless, Köprülü views these as the costs of intellectual ambition rather than as disqualifying flaws. More importantly, he foregrounds Brandes' refinement of Taine's determinism. While Taine risks reducing the writer to a passive reflection of contextual forces, Brandes, according to Köprülü, recuperates a space for agency. His reading is informed by Sainte-Beuve's insistence on the individuality of the author, enabling Brandes to balance evolutionary logic with critical sensitivity to creative autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

Through this synthesis, Köprülü presents Brandes as a transitional figure—both rigorous and imaginative—whose work points toward a literary historiography grounded in scientific method while remaining open to the complexity of human creativity. In Köprülü's hands, Brandes emerges as a model for Ottoman literary scholars: a critic whose international scope, methodological clarity, and engagement with evolutionary thought illustrate how literature can be understood as both a product and a driver of historical transformation. The discussion of Brandes thus reinforces Köprülü's larger project: to construct a literary sociology in which evolution is not a borrowed metaphor, but a fundamental analytic principle capable of bridging philosophy, history, and aesthetics.

This engagement with Brandes sets the stage for one of the most significant conceptual turns in *Hayat-ı Fikriye*: Köprülü's incorporation of Taine's deterministic framework, not only as a tool for analyzing European literary development but also as a lens through which to interpret Ottoman literature. The discussion of Brandes thus becomes a conduit through which Köprülü introduces and legitimizes a methodology rooted in Taine's triadic model—race, milieu, and moment—positioning it as universally applicable across literary traditions. Köprülü does not treat this model as a foreign import to be passively adopted, but rather as a historiographical instrument capable of reconfiguring the study of Ottoman literary history within a global framework of intellectual evolution.

What distinguishes this portion of the text is its rare and deliberate turn toward local literary material. Köprülü briefly but purposefully invokes Ottoman examples to demonstrate the applicability of Tainean analysis beyond the European context. He argues, in line with Taine, that literature is never the isolated product of personal genius but emerges through the cumulative

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<sup>11</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, 64.



pressures of historical circumstance and cultural environment. Artistic creation, in this view, is conditioned rather than spontaneous, shaped by the prevailing emotional and intellectual climate of the time. To illustrate this, Köprülü reaches across historical and cultural contexts—ranging from ancient Greek sculpture to seventeenth-century French literature—before arriving at the Ottoman tradition.

Among his Ottoman examples, Köprülü singles out the poet Nedim as emblematic of a particular literary ethos deeply entwined with the historical moment of İbrahim Paşa's rule. He reads Nedim's hedonistic and sensuous verses not as merely individual aesthetic choices but as symptomatic expressions of the era's moral and social atmosphere.<sup>13</sup> Literature, in this light, functions as a mirror of historical mood—its tonalities shaped by the pressures and pleasures of its milieu.

Köprülü then extends this analysis to late Ottoman prose and poetry, offering a compelling diagnosis of the psychological and emotional undertone that pervades works by Tevfik Fikret, Cenap Şahabettin, Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, Süleyman Nazif, Faik Ali, and Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın. Despite their formal diversity, Köprülü detects in these authors a shared sense of melancholy and existential fatigue, a tonal register he traces to the repressive atmosphere of Abdülhamid II's reign. Under conditions of censorship, intellectual isolation, and political disillusionment, Ottoman writers, he contends, internalized a collective pessimism that left an indelible mark on their literary production. Even moments of joy, he suggests, are haunted by an undercurrent of despair, reflecting a literary field defined less by ideological clarity than by emotional weariness and cultural stagnation.<sup>14</sup>

This argument gains theoretical force through Köprülü's use of extended quotations from Taine, particularly those comparing literary evolution to anatomical variation. Just as biology shows how a single skeletal form can manifest as a paw, a hoof, or a fin depending on environmental demands, literary history, according to Taine—and by extension Köprülü—exhibits structural adaptability. Genres, styles, and emotional registers evolve not in isolation but in response to contextual pressures, and those most attuned to their historical milieu are the ones that endure.<sup>15</sup>

Köprülü reproduces Taine's analogy to reinforce the idea that literary prominence is not accidental but determined by environmental compatibility. Just as certain organisms thrive because they are suited to specific ecological conditions, literary figures rise to prominence because their temperament and worldview resonate with the dominant intellectual and moral climate. The

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<sup>13</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, 62.

implication is clear: both nature and culture operate according to the logic of selection, and in both domains, survival hinges on adaptive resonance with one's surroundings.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Köprülü's discussion of Brandes serves as more than a portrait of a Scandinavian critic. It becomes the occasion for articulating his own vision of literary history—one governed by the principles of evolution, selection, and contextual conditioning. By integrating Taine's methodology and applying it to Ottoman material, Köprülü stakes a bold historiographical claim: that Ottoman literature, too, can be understood through the same analytical lens that illuminates European traditions. In doing so, he rejects the notion of cultural exceptionalism or isolation and instead proposes a comparative model of literary history grounded in shared historical logics and intellectual processes.

This move is central to *Hayat-ı Fikriye*'s broader ambition. It positions Ottoman literary modernity not as a derivative phenomenon but as part of a larger, transnational dynamic of intellectual transformation. Köprülü's appropriation of Taine's framework, enriched by his nuanced reading of Brandes, thus enables him to localize a universal theory without provincializing it. In the process, he sets the foundations for a scientific, evolutionary, and comparative approach to literary historiography—one that links European and Ottoman traditions through a shared commitment to understanding how literature emerges from and responds to its historical moment.

### **Aesthetic Evolution and Generational Struggle: Reimagining Art and Literary Authority**

Having established in *Hayat-ı Fikriye* an intellectual foundation rooted in the transformative potential of evolutionary thinking, Köprülü continued to elaborate his vision of literary modernity through a series of essays published between 1909 and 1911. While the first phase of his intellectual career was shaped by philosophical inquiries into the nature of history, progress, and intellectual life, his next set of writings moved decisively toward a sustained engagement with aesthetic theory and the internal dynamics of the literary field. Evolution, no longer confined to a principle of intellectual history or literary form, emerges as a comprehensive framework for understanding artistic creation, generational conflict, and the negotiation of cultural authority. Evolution now becomes not only a principle of intellectual history or literary form but a framework for understanding artistic creation, generational conflict, and cultural authority.

In what follows, I examine how Köprülü's evolutionary aesthetic takes concrete form in the "Sanat ve Taklit" essays, where he challenges prevailing notions of mimesis and articulates a dynamic theory of artistic creation. This section explores the philosophical sources of his thinking,

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<sup>16</sup> Köprülü, *Hayat-ı Fikriye*, 63.

his critique of naturalism, and his redefinition of artistic agency—laying the groundwork for the more polemical interventions that would follow in the “Yeniler Eskiler” series.

Köprülü’s “Sanat ve Taklit” (“Art and Imitation”) essays, published in three parts between December 1909 and March 1910 in *Servet-i Fünun*,<sup>17</sup> represent a key moment in this development, as they confront the question of art’s nature and purpose through a historically grounded and evolutionarily informed framework. These texts confront the question of art’s nature and purpose, offering a historically grounded and evolutionarily informed theory of artistic representation. Rejecting both simplistic mimesis and rigid objectivism, Köprülü posits a model in which art evolves from imitation to imaginative transformation. His argument unfolds as a response to Raif Necdet, a prominent literary critic of the Second Constitutional Era known for his opposition to Fecr-i Âti and his advocacy of a moral and socially engaged literature, who asserted that literature functions as a mirror or “photograph” of society. For Köprülü, such assertions reduce artistic production to mechanical reproduction, ignoring its interpretive, synthetic, and affective dimensions.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing upon aesthetic theorists such as Taine and Eugène Véron, Köprülü concedes that imitation may serve as art’s origin, but he insists that it cannot constitute its essence. Instead, he emphasizes the evolving complexity of artistic form, shaped by the creative imagination (“muhayyile-i mübdia”) of the artist. True art, he argues, emerges from an act of selective perception and expressive synthesis—a process that involves discerning the essential nature (“tabiat-i esasiye”) of things and rendering it through temperament, intellect, and affect. The artist is thus not a passive observer but an agent of transformation, whose subjective vision infuses the work with vitality and meaning.<sup>19</sup>

This evolutionary aesthetic extends to Köprülü’s critique of naturalism. While writers such as Zola or Flaubert claimed to erase authorial presence through scientific neutrality, Köprülü maintains that perspective and sensibility inevitably shape representation. Even the most meticulously objective literary forms remain grounded in the artist’s “şahsiyet-i mümtaze,” or distinctive personality. Thus, aesthetic value lies not in literal accuracy but in the intensity and coherence of expressive transformation—a process analogous, in Köprülü’s account, to the gradual differentiation of species in the natural world.<sup>20</sup>

The “Sanat ve Taklit” essays culminate in a historical vision of literature as a dynamic system in which movements such as classicism, romanticism, realism, and naturalism do not simply

<sup>17</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Sanat ve Taklit I,” *Servet-i Fünun* 971, c. 38 (13 Kânun-i Evvel 1325 [26 December 1909]): 136–139; “Sanat ve Taklit II,” *Servet-i Fünun* 977, c. 38 (11 Şubat 1325 [24 February 1910]): 228–235; “Sanat ve Taklit Meselesine Dair,” *Servet-i Fünun* 981, c. 38 (11 Mart 1326 [24 March 1910]): 295–300.

<sup>18</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Sanat ve Taklit I,” 137.

<sup>19</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Sanat ve Taklit I,” 138.

<sup>20</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Sanat ve Taklit II,” 234.

replace one another but respond to evolving cultural, philosophical, and emotional climates. These alternations, Köprülü suggests, echo similar oscillations between empiricism and idealism in the history of philosophy. Within this schema, the artist becomes the most articulate embodiment of their time, a figure in whom individual temperament and historical conditions intersect. The essay series thus develops an evolutionary aesthetics in which literature is not a static canon but a field of ongoing adaptation—an ecosystem shaped by both inner creative energies and external cultural pressures.

Building upon the theoretical groundwork of “Sanat ve Taklit,” Köprülü shifts his focus in the “Yeniler Eskiler” (“The Young and the Old”) trilogy to the external dynamics of literary evolution: the contestation of authority, the structure of generational succession, and the reorganization of symbolic capital within the literary field. Published in April, October, and November of 1910, these essays mark a transition from aesthetic philosophy to cultural polemics, from the ontology of artistic production to the sociological mapping of literary power.<sup>21</sup> Yet the logic of evolution remains central—now deployed as an instrument of legitimation for the emerging generation of writers, whom Köprülü casts as both the product and agent of historical transformation.

In “Yeniler Eskiler I,” Köprülü introduces his polemic by citing Herbert Spencer’s dictum that “today’s progressives are tomorrow’s conservatives,” framing literary history as a cyclical yet directional process. Within this model, the Edebiyat-ı Cedîde, or Servet-i Fünun generation is not vilified but historicized: its contributions acknowledged yet positioned as provisional stages within a broader evolutionary continuum. The essay’s rhetorical momentum hinges on displacement rather than denunciation. Köprülü likens the older writers to static monuments in a museum—figures unable to perceive the forward motion of literature’s “procession” (“mevkib-i edeb”). The metaphor of movement becomes decisive: literary legitimacy resides not in fixed authority but in the capacity to march in step with historical development.<sup>22</sup>

This argument is sharpened in “Yeniler Eskiler II,” where Köprülü responds to Mehmed Nafiz, a prominent critic aligned with *Tanin*. Here, the generational struggle becomes explicit, and evolution is mobilized not merely as a descriptive model but as a polemical weapon. Köprülü accuses the older generation of maintaining symbolic dominance through inherited capital rather than intellectual relevance. He exposes the social mechanics of mutual flattery, insular canonization, and self-reinforcing networks—strategies that, he argues, hinder the emergence of a more critical, merit-based literary culture. In contrast, the younger generation is characterized by

<sup>21</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Yeniler Eskiler I,” *Servet-i Fünun* 983, c. 38 (25 Mart 1326 [7 April 1910]): 323–325; “Yeniler Eskiler II,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1012, c. 39 (14 Teşrin-i Evvel 1326 [27 October 1910]): 399–403; “Yeniler Eskiler III,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1016, c. 40 (1 Teşrin-i Sâni 1326 [14 November 1910]): 27–30.

<sup>22</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Yeniler Eskiler I,” 323.

its resistance to these conventions, its exposure to new philosophical and scientific paradigms, and its insistence on intellectual sincerity over performative reverence.<sup>23</sup>

By the final essay, “Yeniler Eskiler III,” Köprülü’s argument reaches its most forceful expression. The essay functions as a dual intervention: a rebuttal to personal attacks from Nafiz and a manifesto for a redefined literary field. Here, the terms of engagement shift decisively from literary evaluation to sociological critique. Köprülü systematically unmasks the rhetorical strategies employed by the older establishment—ad hominem dismissal, nostalgic idealization, false appeals to tradition—and positions them as reactionary defenses against inevitable change. Once again, evolutionary discourse provides the frame: all literary development unfolds through struggle, adaptation, and environmental responsiveness. The refusal of the younger generation to replicate the deferential practices of their predecessors is not a sign of disrespect but evidence of progress, a further stage in the moral and intellectual refinement of literature as a field.<sup>24</sup>

Taken together, “Sanat ve Taklit” and “Yeniler Eskiler” articulate a vision of evolution that is both theoretical and practical, aesthetic and sociological. In the former, evolution functions as a principle of artistic creation and philosophical development; in the latter, it becomes a force of cultural restructuring, enabling the emergence of new literary authority. Köprülü’s accomplishment lies in his ability to fuse these registers—to argue that aesthetic forms, critical authority, and generational movements are all governed by the same logic of historical transformation. His early essays thus do more than participate in intellectual debates of their moment: they actively shape the terms through which literature, criticism, and cultural legitimacy are understood within the Ottoman modernist imaginary.

### **Melancholy Modernity and the Aesthetics of Degeneration: Literary Pessimism as Evolutionary Expression**

As Köprülü’s early writings unfolded from philosophical exposition to literary polemic, and from aesthetic theory to field-level intervention, his commitment to evolution remained consistent—even as the implications of evolution grew more complex. The essays “Sanat ve Taklit” and “Yeniler Eskiler” had mapped literary history through the lens of development, selection, and generational transformation, portraying evolution as a largely progressive force. Yet with the essays “Bedbinlik”<sup>25</sup> (“Pessimism”) and “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler”<sup>26</sup> (“Morbid Types in Literature”), Köprülü turns to the darker underside of this same process. Rather than celebrating

<sup>23</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Yeniler Eskiler II,” 399-403.

<sup>24</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Yeniler Eskiler III,” 27, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Bedbinlik,” *Servet-i Fünun* 992, c. 39 (27 Mayıs 1326 [9 June 1910]): 58–60.

<sup>26</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1014, c. 38 (26 Eylül 1326 [9 October 1910]): 431–434.

the refinement of artistic form or the triumph of a new intellectual generation, these texts confront the psychological and cultural toll of modernity, exploring how literary pessimism and aesthetic morbidity become themselves the most potent signs of evolutionary movement. The result is a theory of modern literature that is no longer simply optimistic or heroic, but marked by ambivalence, rupture, and affective density—an evolution not toward perfection but toward increasing complexity and inner dissonance.

In “Bedbinlik,” Köprülü reconfigures pessimism not as a moral failing or an individual pathology but as a civilizational condition—an affective signature of modernity. Rejecting clerical and conservative claims that pessimism stems from religious decay, he traces its origins instead to the contradictions internal to Enlightenment rationalism. Through references to Nordau, Le Bon, and Schopenhauer, Köprülü identifies the affective and intellectual crisis of the late nineteenth century as a structural outcome of the very institutions and ideologies that once promised progress.<sup>27</sup> In this revised narrative, the forces of science, reason, and industrial modernity no longer appear as the engines of liberation, but as the generators of fragmentation and existential malaise. Crucially, this does not represent a break from evolutionary thinking but a deepening of its dialectical potential. The trajectory of evolution, he suggests, may lead not only to refinement and advancement but also to stagnation, disillusionment, and psychic collapse.

Köprülü’s pessimism is thus historicized rather than pathologized. Drawing on the diagnostic vocabulary of fin-de-siècle cultural criticism, he presents pessimism as a *maraz-ı umumî*, a general affliction of the modern world that manifests across domains—from philosophy and literature to politics and economics. Literature in this framework becomes both symptom and surface: a mirror that reflects the psychological and emotional dislocations of the modern condition. Figures such as Rousseau, Byron, Ibsen, and Zola appear not merely as authors but as registers of collective affect. Even naturalism, with its avowed commitment to depicting reality “as it is,” becomes complicit in this affective genealogy, replacing transcendence with disillusionment and foregrounding human suffering as its primary narrative thread.<sup>28</sup>

This logic is further extended in “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” which revisits the question of modern pessimism by examining its aesthetic manifestations in the form of literary types. The essay stages a historical contrast between the harmonious, idealized bodies of classical antiquity and the disintegrated, neurotic figures that populate modern literary works. In doing so, Köprülü constructs an evolutionary typology of character: just as biological species adapt to their environments, so too do literary figures transform in accordance with historical shifts in human consciousness and social life. From the heroic to the pathological, the aesthetic evolution of type reflects the psychic and ethical contours of its age.

<sup>27</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Bedbinlik,” 58-59.

<sup>28</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Bedbinlik,” 59-60.

Yet Köprülü does not adopt a moralizing stance. He does not, like Nordau, lament the decadence of modern literature or seek a return to classical order. Instead, he explores the aesthetic and epistemological value of these “sickly” figures. Drawing on the theories of Lombroso and Ferri, Köprülü categorizes literary characters using the language of criminal anthropology—*mücrim-i tevellüdî* (born criminal), *mücrim-i tecennünî* (criminal by madness), *mücrim-i ihtirasî* (criminal by passion)—suggesting that the literary imagination has long served as a diagnostic tool for mapping the limits of human subjectivity. Shakespeare, for example, is read not only as a dramatist but as a proto-sociologist whose characters anticipate modern psychology’s exploration of abnormality. This move affirms the diagnostic power of literature, not as moral instruction but as cultural reflexivity.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, evolution serves as the structuring principle—but now inflected with a tragic sensibility. If earlier texts had celebrated artistic evolution as a triumph of individual vision and intellectual maturity, “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler” suggests that evolution can also take the form of expressive pathology. The rise of the degenerate or morbid literary type is not a failure of literature but its adaptation to a disordered environment. These figures reflect a world where alienation, inner conflict, and moral ambiguity have replaced certainty and coherence. Far from condemning this development, Köprülü acknowledges the heightened emotional and aesthetic intensity it brings. The Symbolists, the Decadents—Verlaine, Verhaeren, Regnier—are praised for their capacity to register the unspoken tensions of their time, to transform cultural illness into poetic form.<sup>30</sup>

Together, “Bedbinlik” and “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler” enrich Köprülü’s evolving theory of literary modernity by introducing a complex affective and epistemological dimension to evolution. They demonstrate that evolution is not synonymous with optimism or improvement but is instead a process of historical adaptation that may include loss, fragmentation, and aesthetic crisis. Literature, in this schema, is not immune to these tensions—it is their most articulate expression. These essays thus complete a conceptual arc begun in “Sanat ve Taklit”: from the philosophy of art to the sociology of generations, and finally to the pathology of modern life. In each phase, Köprülü retains his central commitment to historical causality and intellectual responsibility, while expanding the vocabulary of evolution to encompass not only creative flourishing but also the psychic costs and cultural ambivalences of modernity.

### **Stratifications of Taste and the Autonomy of Art: From Cultural Conflict to Literary Distinction**

Having examined the pathological aftershocks of modernity in “Bedbinlik” and “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” Köprülü shifts his critical lens in 1910–1911 toward a different yet related set of

<sup>29</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” 431–432.

<sup>30</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” 433.

problems: the fragmentation of aesthetic authority, the tension between literary individuality and collective identity, and the contested role of “the people” in cultural production. If the earlier essays diagnosed the psychic costs of modernization and the moral complexities of literary evolution, the essays “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk”<sup>31</sup> (“The Conflict of Tastes”) and “Halk ve Edebiyat”<sup>32</sup> (“The People and Literature”) explore the uneven distribution of taste, intellectual capital, and literary agency across a rapidly differentiating social field. Here, evolution continues to serve as a master concept, but it no longer signals a linear progression of collective consciousness or a natural unfolding of cultural forms. Instead, it is recast as a principle of divergence, stratification, and contestation—guiding the emergence of competing aesthetic norms and reconfiguring the relationship between art, society, and historical movement.

In “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk,” Köprülü turns his attention to the sociological mechanics of literary disagreement, rejecting the assumption—prevalent among both conservatives and romantic nationalists—that a unified aesthetic sensibility undergirds cultural life. Drawing on European theories of social differentiation, particularly from Taine and Bouglé, he argues that modern societies are composed of overlapping yet distinct groups shaped by differences in class, education, profession, and intellectual formation. This diversity, he insists, renders any expectation of a “median taste” (“zevk-i vasatî”) not only untenable but ideologically regressive. Aesthetic pluralism, rather than a sign of decadence or disintegration, becomes the inevitable product of intellectual specialization and historical complexity.<sup>33</sup>

Within this framework, Köprülü reframes the enduring Ottoman binary of *eskiler* (the ancients) and *yeniler* (the moderns) not as a philosophical or aesthetic divide but as a symptom of generational anxiety and misrecognition. Through an incisive reading of figures like Namık Kemal, Recaizade Ekrem, Muallim Naci, and Tefvik Fikret, he identifies a recurring pattern of sanctifying predecessors while resisting contemporary innovation—a cycle of nostalgic idealization that functions less as literary critique than as defense against historical change. The most pointed critique is reserved for Muallim Naci, whom Köprülü portrays as intellectually immobilized, unable or unwilling to grasp the epistemological shifts demanded by modern literary consciousness.<sup>34</sup> Rather than representing timeless aesthetic values, Naci becomes for Köprülü a figure of reactionary insulation—one whose appeal lies precisely in the failure to evolve.

Here, evolution functions as both explanation and imperative. Just as social roles and political institutions must adapt to changing material conditions, so too must aesthetic judgments evolve in accordance with the emergence of new intellectual environments. Köprülü contends that it is the

<sup>31</sup> Köprülüade Mehmed Fuad, “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1023, c. 40 (30 Kânun-ı Evvel 1326 [12 January 1911]): 195–199.

<sup>32</sup> Köprülüade Mehmed Fuad, “Halk ve Edebiyat,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1055, c. 41 (12 Mayıs 1327 [25 May 1911]): 29–31.

<sup>33</sup> Köprülüade Mehmed Fuad, “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk,” 195–196.

<sup>34</sup> Köprülüade Mehmed Fuad, “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk,” 196–199.



“elite thinking class” (“zümre-i güzide-i mütefekkir”),<sup>35</sup> not the cultural average, that drives the production of enduring literature. Literature, in this conception, is a stratified cultural form: the product of historically situated minds, not the mirror of an undifferentiated social totality. The notion of taste itself is historicized and fractured, no longer rooted in national essence or popular instinct but in intellectual distinction and ideological struggle. “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk” thus marks a crucial evolution in Köprülü’s thinking: from a holistic, almost organicist conception of culture to a field-oriented model of literary production defined by contestation, hierarchy, and transformation.

This shift becomes even more pronounced in “Halk ve Edebiyat,” where Köprülü mounts a frontal assault on nationalist claims that literature must emerge from or reflect the soul of the people. The essay’s polemic is aimed at proponents of *edebiyat-ı millîye*, or national literature, who sought to ground literary renewal in the language, traditions, and sensibilities of the people (*halk*). Against this populist essentialism, Köprülü reasserts the autonomy of literature as a domain of singular intellectual labor, shaped by vision rather than resonance. Drawing on the authority of Sainte-Beuve and Faguet, he argues that great literary works—Montaigne’s *Essays*, Racine’s *Phèdre*, Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire philosophique*—were never expressions of collective sentiment but anticipatory disruptions of it. Their greatness lies not in their representativeness but in their formal and intellectual singularity, their refusal to echo the average.<sup>36</sup>

This theoretical turn has critical implications for Köprülü’s earlier readings. In *Hayat-ı Fikriyye*, Nedîm had served as a prime example of literature’s capacity to crystallize the spirit of a historical moment, offering a mirror to the Tulip Era’s hedonistic refinement. In “Halk ve Edebiyat,” however, that same example is reinterpreted through a new epistemological lens. Nedîm is no longer a cultural synecdoche, but an exception—irreducible to his time, courtly environment, or ethnic background. To define him through social context alone, Köprülü now argues, is to miss the irreducible element of creative singularity that defies sociological explanation.<sup>37</sup> This is not a renunciation of historicism, but a deepening of it—a move toward a model in which literary greatness emerges not from embeddedness but from critical distance.

In this reconceptualization, evolution is no longer the smooth arc of cultural expression but a jagged process marked by rupture, unevenness, and elite intervention. The literary field is stratified, not organic; conflictual, not harmonic. Popular literature and *folk* expression are granted documentary value but denied aesthetic authority. True literature, in contrast, is an act of intellectual projection—a break from the prevailing order rather than its echo. In rejecting the ideological romanticism of nationalist criticism, Köprülü reaffirms a modernist aesthetics grounded in intellectual autonomy, formal innovation, and historical discontinuity.

<sup>35</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk,” 196.

<sup>36</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Halk ve Edebiyat,” 30.

<sup>37</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Halk ve Edebiyat,” 31.

Together, “Tehâlûf-i Ezvâk” and “Halk ve Edebiyat” mark a decisive moment in Köprülü’s evolving thought. They retain the evolutionary paradigm central to his earlier work but recast it in a more fragmented and stratified register—one that accounts for intellectual hierarchy, social differentiation, and the irreducibility of literary genius. No longer tethered to the idea of literature as a collective expression, Köprülü now asserts its status as a historically situated, ideologically charged, and intellectually autonomous field. Evolution persists—but its trajectory, far from linear or consensual, becomes the site of conflict, tension, and the struggle for cultural legitimacy.

### Cosmopolitan Currents and the Disintegration of Literary Nationalism

As Köprülü’s literary thought matured over the course of 1911, his engagement with evolutionary theory increasingly intersected with questions of cultural permeability, transnational influence, and the ideological limits of literary nationalism. “Edebiyat-ı Milliye”<sup>38</sup> and “Edebiyatlar Arasında”<sup>39</sup> together mark Köprülü’s decisive reorientation of the concept of evolution toward a cosmopolitan horizon.<sup>40</sup> No longer concerned merely with intra-societal differentiation or the autonomy of the intellectual elite, he now turns to the inter-literary dynamics that drive artistic development. These essays do not abandon the evolutionary framework that had structured his prior arguments; rather, they elevate it to a global scale, presenting literary history as a series of adaptive exchanges and plural inheritances that resist the closures of nationalist thought. Evolution, in this context, is not the refinement of a singular cultural essence but the unfolding of human creativity through transhistorical and transnational encounters.

This section traces how Köprülü expands his evolutionary framework beyond questions of aesthetic form and generational struggle to address the ideological foundations of literary nationalism and the transnational conditions of modern literary production. Through a close reading of “Edebiyat-ı Milliye” and “Edebiyatlar Arasında,” I show how his thinking shifts from critique to proposition—from dismantling essentialist myths to articulating a cosmopolitan model of literary evolution grounded in hybridity, exchange, and global interconnection.

In “Edebiyat-ı Milliye” (“National Literature”), Köprülü launches a sustained critique of the ideological architecture underpinning nationalist literary discourse. He interrogates the premise—

<sup>38</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyât-ı Milliye,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1041, c. 41 (5 Mayıs 1327 [18 May 1911]): 3–7.

<sup>39</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatlar Arasında,” *Servet-i Fünun* 1043, c. 41 (9 Mayıs 1327 [22 May 1911]): 54–58.

<sup>40</sup> For an analysis of early Köprülü within the context of world literature and comparative literature, see Fatih Altuğ, “The Entangled History of Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in Modern Turkish Literature,” in *Turkish Literature as World Literature*, edited by Çimen Günay-Erkol and Burcu Alkan (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 26–29.

widespread among contemporary intellectuals—that a nation’s literature must express the inherent spirit, psychology, or racial character of its people. This position, he argues, rests on epistemologically unstable and scientifically discredited categories. Race, national psychology, and identity are not immutable foundations but historically contingent constructs—products of social environment, geographic circumstance, and cultural hybridity. Köprülü thus extends the evolutionary logic developed in “Bedbinlik” and “Tehâlûf-i Ezvak” to dismantle the very premise of literary nationalism, showing how concepts like “race” and “national soul” function more as ideological projections than as empirical realities.

Mobilizing a wide array of sources—Taine, Gobineau, Renan, Wundt, Ripley—he demonstrates the internal contradictions within European racial theories and their failure to produce a coherent account of cultural formation. The fact that Fustel de Coulanges and Renan arrive at contradictory interpretations of the same historical material is not, for Köprülü, an anomaly but a symptom of the theoretical incoherence of racial essentialism. In its place, he proposes an alternative genealogy of literary formation: one rooted in cross-cultural contact, historical contingency, and intellectual exchange. He draws on Ripley’s distinction between formative and transformative racial influences to argue that literature, too, is shaped not by static descent but by dynamic adaptation—a cultural evolution that defies ethnic borders and romantic nostalgia alike.<sup>41</sup>

Köprülü’s critique is not abstract. He explicitly applies this model to the Ottoman-Turkish context, rejecting the idea that modern Turkish literature should isolate itself from global literary developments in pursuit of a fabricated national purity. The Ottoman literary tradition, he argues, has always been hybrid—inflected by Arabic, Persian, Byzantine, Islamic, and Turkic elements. Rather than masking or erasing this hybridity, a truly modern literary culture must embrace it as its defining condition. Writers such as Ahmet Haşım, often accused of betraying national sentiment by engaging with Western forms, are not symptoms of decline but exemplars of creative evolution.<sup>42</sup> In the modern literary economy—shaped by industrialization, mass education, translation networks, and global circulation—national literatures no longer emerge from ethnic homogeneity but from the conscious navigation of plural aesthetic inheritances.

This vision of literature as a cosmopolitan endeavor reaches its most programmatic expression in “Edebiyatlar Arasında” (“Among Literatures”). Here, Köprülü turns from the question of “what is national literature?” to “how do literatures evolve in relation to one another?” The shift is crucial. No longer content to critique the internal incoherencies of nationalist discourse, he now articulates a positive theory of literary development as a relational and intertextual process. The essay is framed as a direct challenge to the Edebiyat-ı Milliye school’s suspicion of foreign

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<sup>41</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyât-ı Millîye,” 4.

<sup>42</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyât-ı Millîye,” 7.

influence. Köprülü's response is clear: to resist cross-cultural engagement is not to preserve aesthetic integrity but to guarantee cultural irrelevance.

Renan's metaphor of the European intellectual tree—whose isolated branches wither while those connected to the trunk flourish—serves as the conceptual anchor of the essay. Köprülü adapts this image to argue that literatures, like living organisms, require contact, tension, and exchange to grow. Insularity is equated with stagnation. Evolution, in this view, does not mean the purification of cultural form but its fertilization through contact. He supports this claim with a rich comparative analysis: the French Romantic movement, often regarded as a paradigm of national originality, was in fact deeply indebted to English and German sources. Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Madame de Staël absorbed Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller, just as later French writers integrated Darwinian science, German metaphysics, and Belgian symbolism into their own creative repertoires. Likewise, the international impact of French literature—on figures such as Byron, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky—proves that influence moves in multiple directions, destabilizing any claim to national self-sufficiency.<sup>43</sup>

But Köprülü's aim is not merely historical; it is prescriptive. He calls on Turkish writers to widen their artistic gaze, not only toward France but also toward England, Germany, Russia, and Scandinavia. Authors like Tolstoy, Ibsen, Carlyle, and Nietzsche are held up not as foreign invaders but as sources of intellectual revitalization.<sup>44</sup> The capacity to absorb and transform foreign influence into something singular—what he describes as the metabolization of aesthetic energy—is what defines literary genius. Influence is not a threat to originality; it is the very condition of its possibility.

In this light, literary evolution becomes a process of circulation, translation, and creative misrecognition—a history of appropriations and adaptations rather than linear descent. The great works of literature are those that emerge from this tension: grounded in their context, yet open to the world; shaped by their language, yet resonant across languages. “Edebiyatlar Arasında” thus recasts the literary field as a dynamic network in which vitality depends on participation, and evolution occurs not through isolation but through strategic permeability.

This cosmopolitan turn also anticipates later sociological theories of the literary field. Köprülü gestures toward a transnational intellectual disposition (“Avrupa hâlet-i fikriyesi”) that connects elite writers and thinkers across national lines.<sup>45</sup> His call for Turkish literature to assert itself within this evolving field is not a plea for mimicry but a demand for self-positioning: to enter the global literary conversation as an agent, not an imitator. In this sense, “Edebiyatlar Arasında” completes the arc initiated in “Edebiyat-ı Milliye,” affirming that modern literary evolution is not

<sup>43</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatlar Arasında,” 54.

<sup>44</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatlar Arasında,” 58.

<sup>45</sup> Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad, “Edebiyatlar Arasında,” 58.

a matter of inward reflection but outward movement—toward multiplicity, complexity, and dialogue.<sup>46</sup>

Together, these two essays constitute a culminating statement of Köprülü's early intellectual project. They integrate the conceptual tools of historical sociology, comparative literature, and evolutionary theory into a cosmopolitan theory of literary formation. In doing so, they repudiate the nationalist fixation on purity and echo in favor of a vision of literature as an open, relational, and adaptive system. If literature is the most refined product of human consciousness, then its evolution must mirror that of humanity itself: shaped by encounter, defined by divergence, and sustained by exchange.

### **From Cosmopolitan Circulation to National Resurrection: The Evolutionary Break of 1913**

The sweeping cosmopolitanism that defined Köprülü's early writings—from *Hayat-ı Fikriye* to "Edebiyatlar Arasında"—was animated by a vision of literature and thought as products of transnational circulation, shaped through contact, exchange, and hybrid inheritance. In these works, evolution referred to the gradual unfolding of aesthetic and intellectual potential through cross-cultural engagement and elite individual cultivation. Yet by 1912–1913, this model of evolution gave way to a profoundly different paradigm. The trauma of the Balkan Wars, the collapse of imperial confidence, and Köprülü's growing engagement with nationalist circles, particularly through his alignment with *Türk Yurdu* and his proximity to Ziya Gökalp, catalyzed a rupture in both his rhetoric and conceptual frameworks. With the publication of "Ümid ve Azim"<sup>47</sup> in 1913, Köprülü no longer describes evolution as a cosmopolitan unfolding of aesthetic pluralism but as a militant, spiritual force of national regeneration. What emerges is not simply a shift in political orientation but a redefinition of the very concept of historical movement—from gradual

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<sup>46</sup> Köprülü's model of literary evolution, as articulated in "Edebiyatlar Arasında," anticipates what David Damrosch describes as world literature's emergence through circulation, translation, and recontextualization rather than canonical fixity. His emphasis on hybridity and cross-cultural permeability resonates with Damrosch's notion of literature as a mode of circulation and reading. At the same time, Köprülü's critical stance toward essentialist national frameworks parallels Emily Apter's resistance to reductive globalism and her insistence on the political and epistemological complexities of translation. In both cases, Köprülü's early essays can be read as proto-theoretical interventions in what would later be theorized as literary cosmopolitanism. See David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Köprülüze Mehmed Fuad, "Ümid ve Azim," *Türk Yurdu* 8, year 2 (24 Kânunusâni 1328 [6 Şubat 1913]): 240–247.

differentiation to sudden transformation, from openness to consolidation, from universalism to a metaphysics of will.<sup>48</sup>

In “Ümid ve Azim,” Köprülü reconfigures the evolutionary model that had once been underwritten by Comtean positivism and Darwinian determinism into a nationalist doctrine of rupture and spiritual resurrection. Published in *Türk Yurdu* on February 6, 1913, in the immediate aftermath of the First Balkan War and the traumatic loss of Edirne, the essay opens with a bleak diagnosis of contemporary Turkish society: an atmosphere of fatigue, despair, and intellectual paralysis. Yet rather than dwell in this mood of collapse, Köprülü stages a rhetorical reversal, invoking a new metaphysics of action rooted in *irade* (will), *iman* (faith), and *tekâmül* reimagined not as passive adaptation but as creative eruption.

The essay’s most immediate target is the widespread fatalism Köprülü sees gripping Ottoman intellectual life. Whether in the guise of religious resignation or positivist determinism, fatalism is, for Köprülü, the ideological enemy of historical agency. He argues that both Islamic quietism and Darwinian evolutionism—when interpreted as inescapable laws—lead to the same outcome: moral exhaustion, collective passivity, and a retreat from history.<sup>49</sup> By collapsing theological and scientific determinisms into one paralyzing structure, Köprülü clears the ground for a radical revaluation of evolution as *possibility* rather than *necessity*. This move constitutes the conceptual pivot of the essay: the transformation of evolution from an inherited biological metaphor into a nationalist vitalism.

To articulate this new vision, Köprülü draws on the mutationist theory of Hugo de Vries<sup>50</sup> and the philosophical vitalism of Henri Bergson. De Vries’s notion that species evolve not through continuous adaptation but via unpredictable leaps (*mutations*) introduces a vision of historical time punctuated by rupture rather than continuity. For Köprülü, this model vindicates the possibility of sudden national awakening—an ontological break from decadence into vitality. Bergson’s *élan*

<sup>48</sup> For changes in Köprülü’s worldview and career during this period, see Ömer Faruk Akün, “Mehmed Fuad Köprülü,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed April 2, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mehmed-fuad-koprulu>.

<sup>49</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Ümid ve Azim,” *Türk Yurdu*, ed. Murat Şefkatli, v. 2 (Ankara: Tutibay Yayınları, 1999), 140.

<sup>50</sup> Hugo de Vries (1848–1935) proposed that new species arise not through the slow, continuous accumulation of small variations—as Darwin suggested—but rather through sudden, large-scale changes he called mutations. He argued that these mutations were heritable, discontinuous variations that could appear spontaneously and generate new species in a single generation. De Vries distinguished between progressive, retrogressive, and degressive mutations, asserting that only progressive ones created genuinely new traits, and therefore, new species. He saw mutations as internal, physiological events, largely independent of environmental influence, and offered them as a more experimentally verifiable and mechanistic alternative to Darwinian gradualism. His theory appealed to early 20th-century biologists seeking a more predictive and laboratory-based approach to evolution.

See Garland E. Allen, “Hugo de Vries and the Reception of the ‘Mutation Theory,’” *Journal of the History of Biology* 2 (1969): 55–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00137268>.

*vital*, meanwhile, offers a metaphysical supplement to this theory: the idea that life, and by extension national culture, is driven not by mechanical causality but by an inner, creative force. This creative force, when transposed into the political sphere, becomes the foundation for a voluntarist historicism in which will and imagination—not inheritance—drive national destiny.<sup>51</sup>

Köprülü's synthesis of de Vries and Bergson is further reinforced by his partial engagement with Georges Sorel. While he distances himself from Sorel's anarchist glorification of violence, Köprülü embraces his idea that collective myths—charged with emotional and symbolic power—can mobilize social forces more effectively than rationalist programs. This insight allows Köprülü to elevate the mythic past of the Turkish nation—particularly the legendary resolve of the Göktürks—into a performative horizon for present action. The Göktürk inscriptions, especially the vow of Bilge Kağan never to rest until the nation has been restored, are invoked not as antiquarian curiosities but as ethical injunctions. They become the archetypes of nationalist *élan vital*, carriers of a transhistorical spirit whose reawakening signals a new phase in Turkish evolution.<sup>52</sup>

What distinguishes this new evolutionary model from Köprülü's earlier writings is its reorientation away from pluralism and toward singularity—not in the sense of homogeneity, but of purposeful direction. Where "Edebiyatlar Arasında" had presented literary history as an open network of reciprocal influences, "Ümid ve Azim" closes that network, re-centering national destiny around an endogenous impulse of will. Evolution here is no longer driven by external contact or cultural hybridization but by internal concentration, sacrifice, and the reassertion of spiritual autonomy.

And yet, even in this new framework, the evolutionary logic remains. Köprülü does not abandon the idea of development; rather, he reinterprets it through a new temporal grammar—no longer cumulative but explosive, no longer comparative but redemptive. The goal is no longer the refinement of taste or the expansion of cosmopolitan consciousness but the resurrection of a wounded collective self. His earlier admiration for Ibsen or Verlaine, once framed within a matrix of intellectual permeability, is now subordinated to a politics of national awakening in which literature, philosophy, and myth all serve a singular imperative: the rebirth of Turkish will.

In "Ümid ve Azim," then, evolution is transformed from a descriptive science into a prescriptive ethos. It no longer names a slow adaptation to environmental conditions but a militant assertion of national vitality against historical entropy. In this redefinition lies the radical rupture that 1913 inaugurates in Köprülü's thought—a shift that would guide his subsequent work as literary historian, institutional architect, and cultural nationalist. This essay marks not merely a new chapter but a new telos: a vision of history in which survival depends not on understanding the past but on transforming it through faith, energy, and mythic identification.

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<sup>51</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, "Ümid ve Azim," 141.

<sup>52</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, "Ümid ve Azim," 141-142.

What remains of evolution in this new dispensation is not its gradualism or universality but its plasticity—its capacity to be reimagined as rupture, as will, as *azim*. Through “Ümid ve Azim,” Köprülü offers not only a political program but a philosophical realignment, one that fuses science and spirit, myth and modernity, into a new, fervent conception of national becoming.

The philosophical reorientation staged in “Ümid ve Azim” finds its methodological realization in Köprülü’s subsequent work. What begins as a rupture—a call for spiritual rebirth and national will—gradually crystallizes into a structured intellectual project. In “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” this ideational shift is translated into disciplinary terms: the fervor of national awakening becomes the foundation for a scientific approach to literary history.

### **Toward a National Science of Literature: Method, Evolution, and the Institutionalization of Turkish Literary History**

The visionary fervor of “Ümid ve Azim”—with its call for national rebirth through willpower, rupture, and creative vitality—finds its concrete methodological articulation in Fuad Köprülü’s “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” published in *Bilgi Mecmuası* in November 1913.<sup>53</sup> Where “Ümid ve Azim” reimagined evolution as a vitalist and voluntarist force<sup>54</sup> capable of propelling nations beyond historical paralysis, “Usûl” translates this conceptual reorientation into a systematic framework for the study of literature as both national expression and scientific inquiry. It is here that Köprülü fully emerges not only as a cultural nationalist but as the founder of modern Turkish literary historiography, proposing a discipline that is at once empirically grounded, methodologically rigorous, and ideologically committed to tracing the evolution of the Turkish national genius. In this essay, evolution is no longer theorized abstractly or rhetorically—it is historicized, operationalized, and rendered legible through method. The epistemological and

<sup>53</sup> Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” *Bilgi Mecmuası* 1 (Teşrinisâni 1329 [November 1913]): 3–52. For a collection of insightful essays that critically examine “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl” from multiple angles—including its methodological foundations, its role in shaping national literary historiography, and its engagement with Western literary theory—see: Servet Gündoğdu and Kaan Kurt, eds., *Usûlden Yönteme: M. Fuad Köprülü’nün Edebiyat Tarihçiliği* (İstanbul: VakıfBank Kültür Yayınları, 2022).

<sup>54</sup> Köprülü’s reconceptualization of evolution as a “vitalist and voluntarist force” draws directly on Henri Bergson’s notion of *élan vital*—a dynamic, creative impulse that drives life forward not through mechanistic causality but through intuition, duration, and will. In this context, Köprülü’s post-1913 intellectual orientation reflects an effort to understand historical transformation not solely through structural determinism but through the agency of individual will and the activating force of a national spirit. This vitalist reading balances continuity and rupture, grounding literary and cultural evolution in a Bergsonian framework of creative evolution. Rupture, in this sense, signifies a decisive break from inherited intellectual frameworks—an opening toward new forms of thought, expression, and national self-understanding.



emotional rupture inaugurated in 1913 thus solidifies into an institutional project: the construction of Turkish literary history as a national science.

Köprülü opens “Usûl” with a forceful defense of method as the foundation of all scientific progress. Citing Bacon and Descartes, he asserts that each discipline must develop its own methodological apparatus suited to its subject matter. Literary history, he argues, cannot be studied through the tools of the natural sciences or mathematical logic. While he acknowledges Comte’s ambition to develop a “social physics,” he critiques the tendency to reduce complex social and cultural phenomena to mechanical models.<sup>55</sup> Instead, he insists on the specificity of the literary object—its historicity, affective power, and embeddedness in lived human experience—which calls for a distinct methodology blending historical reconstruction with interpretive sensitivity.

At the heart of this disciplinary program is a reconceptualization of literary history as a branch of the history of civilization. Literature, for Köprülü, is not merely a repository of aesthetic forms but a living archive of a nation’s intellectual and emotional life. Unlike political documents or economic records, literary texts—Ahmed Paşa’s *divan*, a *mesnevi*, a *Bâkî* elegy—remain vital, capable of speaking across time. Yet this vitality also demands methodological vigilance.<sup>56</sup> Köprülü critiques the dominant Ottoman historiography of his time for its obsession with dynasties, battles, and rulers, arguing that such narratives overlook the *longue durée* of social, cultural, and intellectual evolution. A truly scientific literary history must account for the material and spiritual conditions of its production: geography, class, economy, everyday life, education, religion, neighboring cultures, language, and the history of ideas. The literary historian must thus become a general historian, reconstructing the civilizational milieu from which literary works emerge.

This comprehensive approach is grounded in a revised theory of literary evolution. While Köprülü continues to draw from the evolutionary models of the nineteenth century, he no longer accepts their deterministic, gradualist assumptions. Echoing “Ümid ve Azim,” he critiques Darwinian evolution as insufficient for explaining the dynamic, at times abrupt transformations of literary and historical life. He invokes Hugo de Vries’s mutation theory and Bergson’s creative evolution to argue that change can occur through leaps, ruptures, and acts of imaginative will. Against Mornet’s assertion that “nature and history do not leap,” Köprülü cites Bergson’s *élan vital* to reclaim spontaneity, discontinuity, and invention as legitimate aspects of historical development.<sup>57</sup> Evolution, now, is understood not as passive adaptation but as active, creative reconfiguration. This reframing opens space for the recognition of national genius and the transformative role of individual agency—concepts largely foreclosed by the rigid sociological models of Taine, Comte, or Marx.

<sup>55</sup> Fuad Köprülü, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” *Edebiyat Araştırmaları I*, ed. Fevziye Abdullah Tansel (Ankara: Akçağ, 2004), 27-28, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Fuad Köprülü, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” 44.

<sup>57</sup> Fuad Köprülü, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl,” 33.

Indeed, Köprülü subjects both Taine and Brunetière to sustained critique. While earlier essays had adopted Taine's race-milieu-moment triad to explain literary production, Köprülü now finds this framework inadequate for accounting for individual artistic excellence. Using Nedim as a case in point, he argues that the shared environment of the Tulip Era produced many poets, but only Nedim rose to lasting aesthetic significance—something that environmental determinism cannot explain. Similarly, Brunetière's model of literary genres as evolving biological species is dismissed as a reductive misapplication of natural science to literature. Such models, Köprülü argues, undermine the complexity and unpredictability of literary development. Scientific rigor, in his view, must never become dogmatism. What is needed is not schematic application but historically attentive, evidence-based interpretation.

This attention to complexity also informs Köprülü's handling of aesthetic subjectivity. He engages with Gustave Lanson's claim that a literary work produces the same effect across generations, rejecting it in favor of a more historicist view that recognizes the evolution of taste. Drawing on Faguet, he maintains that literature is always stratified: every period contains multiple coexisting literatures—elite, popular, devotional—and each appeals to different groups. The historian must study them all, but with awareness of their differing functions and aesthetic horizons. Great works, he argues, rarely reflect their time; rather, they anticipate it. They are the products of the intellectual elite, and their value lies not in mirroring collective sentiment but in transcending it.<sup>58</sup>

This nuanced balance between contextualization and aesthetic individuation is reflected in Köprülü's methodological schema. He outlines a multi-step program for the scientific study of literature: source identification and bibliography, textual criticism, philological analysis, aesthetic interpretation, historical contextualization, reception study, and, ultimately, synthesis. Each step is to be undertaken with historical precision and interpretive empathy. The goal is not only to analyze individual works but to reconstruct the evolution of Turkish literature as an expression of the national spirit—its ruptures, continuities, and emergent unities across centuries and geographies.<sup>59</sup>

The culmination of this project is the assertion that literary history can serve as a national monument. By tracing the evolution of the Turkish national genius through the study of texts, Köprülü aims to foster not only intellectual clarity but collective identity. His method is therefore not neutral; it is animated by a clear purpose: to guide future generations by articulating a shared, coherent, and dynamic literary past. Evolution, in this schema, becomes the logic of national continuity—not as mechanical unfolding, but as a process of creative synthesis that links past to future through acts of scholarly reconstruction.

What distinguishes "Usûl" from Köprülü's earlier work is not a rejection of European intellectual frameworks, but their selective appropriation. Figures like Bacon, Descartes, Comte,

<sup>58</sup> Fuad Köprülü, "Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl," 44-46.

<sup>59</sup> Fuad Köprülü, "Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl," 56-62.

Taine, Lanson, Bergson, and de Vries remain integral to his thinking. But whereas previously European figures functioned within a cosmopolitan and comparative context, they are now refracted through a nationalist lens. Their theories are mobilized not to map universal patterns but to forge a specifically Turkish disciplinary practice. The transformation begun in “Ümid ve Azim” thus culminates in “Usûl”: the cosmopolitan evolutionism of the 1909-1912 period gives way to a national philology rooted in historical rupture, intellectual agency, and cultural mission.

As such, “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl” is not merely a methodological treatise—it is the founding document of a new intellectual field, shaped by the traumas of empire and the aspirations of national rebirth. It encapsulates Köprülü’s profound synthesis of scientific discipline and nationalist vision, of historical rigor and imaginative projection. In doing so, it secures his legacy as the architect of Turkish literary historiography and as a thinker who redefined evolution not as biological fate but as the narrative structure of national becoming.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

Between 1909 and 1913, Fuad Köprülü’s engagement with the concept of evolution underwent a profound and consequential transformation. What began as a cosmopolitan and comparative framework—deeply rooted in nineteenth-century European thought and shaped by thinkers such as Taine, Spencer, Darwin, and Brandes—gradually gave way to a nationalist, voluntarist, and spiritually inflected reconceptualization. This shift, while reflecting the political and emotional upheavals of the Balkan Wars, also marks a significant epistemological realignment in Köprülü’s intellectual project: evolution ceases to function merely as a descriptive tool for analyzing aesthetic and cultural change and becomes, instead, a normative model for imagining national regeneration.

In his early essays—*Hayat-ı Fikriye*, “Sanat ve Taklit,” and “Yeniler Eskiler”—evolution is primarily understood in sociological and aesthetic terms. Literature is treated as the expressive surface of broader cultural rhythms, shaped by environmental pressures, intellectual climates, and generational dynamics. Evolution, in this phase, denotes a gradual process of differentiation, refinement, and adaptation. Drawing on positivist aesthetics, Köprülü reads artistic creation as an organic function of historical context, a product of shifting tastes and intellectual climates. Crucially, this framework is still open, pluralistic, and transnational; literary evolution occurs not within sealed national enclosures but through cross-cultural fertilization, as articulated most forcefully in “Edebiyatlar Arasında.” Here, evolution registers the permeability of national

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For a study that reads Köprülü’s turn from cosmopolitanism to nationalism as a form of conversion and compares his writings before and after 1913, see Fatih Altuğ, “İmparatorlukla Ulus-Devlet Arasında Kozmopolit Fuad Köprülü’nün Milli Edebiyata İhtidası,” in *Mehmet Fuat Köprülü*, edited by Yahya Kemal Taştan (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2012), 119–130.

literatures and the centrality of translation, influence, and cosmopolitan exchange in shaping literary modernity.

However, beginning with “Bedbinlik” and “Edebiyatta Marazî Tipler,” Köprülü’s tone begins to darken. The earlier celebration of intellectual openness is tempered by a growing awareness of modernity’s psychic costs—pessimism, degeneration, disintegration. While still working within an evolutionary idiom, Köprülü now emphasizes pathology and rupture, diagnosing the aesthetic symptoms of a civilization in crisis. In these texts, evolution no longer guarantees progress; it can also culminate in entropy. This sense of terminal decline prepares the ground for the radical rupture enacted in “Ümid ve Azim,” where the discourse of evolution is subjected to a decisive philosophical and ideological revaluation.

In “Ümid ve Azim,” Köprülü explicitly rejects deterministic and mechanistic models of evolution, identifying them as contributors to political passivity and intellectual fatalism. In their place, he constructs an alternative paradigm rooted in Hugo de Vries’s mutation theory, Bergson’s creative evolution, and the vitalist idealism of Sorel and Gökalp. Evolution is no longer a matter of slow, cumulative development but of rupture, will, and mythic reawakening. The shift is not merely theoretical but affective and rhetorical: evolution becomes a call to arms, a language of national resurrection. What emerges here is a historicist vitalism, wherein evolution is reimagined as the creative unfolding of a collective spirit, capable of transcending historical impasse through inner force and sacrifice.

This reconfiguration finds its methodological realization in “Türk Edebiyatı Tarihinde Usûl.” Here, Köprülü integrates his transformed understanding of evolution into a disciplined program for literary historiography. Drawing selectively on European intellectual traditions—while strategically sidelining their universalist or cosmopolitan implications—he articulates a vision of literary history as the evolution of the Turkish national genius. Importantly, this evolution is no longer conceived in Darwinian or Spencerian terms; it is not linear, continuous, or environmentally determined. Rather, it is marked by discontinuities, leaps, and the agency of exceptional figures. Evolution, in Köprülü’s mature formulation, is historicized and nationalized: it becomes the underlying logic through which the fragmented materials of Ottoman and Islamic literary heritage can be reassembled into a coherent national narrative.

Thus, across this critical period, evolution shifts from an explanatory tool within a comparative sociology of literature to a foundational epistemology within a nationalist historiography. It ceases to be a neutral process of change and becomes a strategic language for asserting cultural authority, historical agency, and national destiny. The evolution of Köprülü’s concept of evolution is itself a case study in intellectual adaptation: responsive to political crisis, informed by philosophical critique, and ultimately reoriented toward institutional and ideological consolidation. In forging a national philology out of a formerly cosmopolitan method, Köprülü redefines not only the meaning of literary evolution but the very conditions under which literature can be said to participate in the life of a nation.

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