

The Heroine's Role in Depicting Social Change in the Late Ottoman Era: A Study of *Eylül* by Mehmet Rauf

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Abstract—The novel *Eylül* by Mehmet Rauf, an Ottoman writer, is a distinguished literary work that highlights the social and cultural transformations experienced by Ottoman society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This study analysed the role of the heroine in this novel, how she interacted with her surrounding environment, and how she reflected the changes that Ottoman society underwent during that period shedding light on how she embodied these social changes that influenced the life of the Ottoman individuals. The findings highlighted the novel's role in documenting social transformations in the late Ottoman era. By examining the heroine's function, the study demonstrates how changing societal standards, notably those concerning gender roles, individual liberties, and modernity, are reflected in Ottoman literature. The study also placed *Eylül* in a larger historical and political framework, illustrating how writing can both reflect and critique modern developments. Consequently, the study adds to a better knowledge of Ottoman intellectual and cultural history, with Mehmet Rauf's work serving as a crucial work in depicting the shift from traditional to contemporary society systems.

Index Terms—late Ottoman era, classical novel, Mehmet Rauf, *Eylül*, social life

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel *Eylül* by Mehmet Rauf is one of the most prominent literary works of the late Ottoman period, providing an accurate depiction of the social and cultural life of that era (Geylani, 2023; Stone, 2010). The events in the novel reflect the challenges faced by Ottomans, making it a mirror of the social and cultural transformations that shaped Ottoman society at the time. Amid these transformations, this study highlights the central role of the heroine, exploring how her actions and thoughts reflect the reality of social life in Ottoman society. Examining the heroine's role in reflecting social life and its changes in the late Ottoman era is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to a more profound understanding of the social and cultural changes experienced by Ottoman society during that period (Essa et al., 2023). Second, it allows for comparative studies with classical novels from other languages written in the same period, enriching critical understanding of world literature and the impact of social transformations on literature across cultures. Third, through *Eylül*, the study reflects the societal changes of the Ottoman period, making it a valuable resource for researchers interested in social studies, as it provides insights into how individuals responded to social transformations in the late Ottoman era (Al-Abdulrazaq et al., 2024; Shehabat et al., 2025; Al-Gayam et al., 2025; Bani-Khair et al., 2025).

The novel revolves around three central characters: Süreyya Bey, his wife Suad Hanım, and his cousin Necib Bey. Süreyya and Suad live in the house of Süreyya's father (Ottone, 2017). Despite being married for five years, Suad gradually senses a decline in their love. Süreyya becomes increasingly focused on his personal pleasures, particularly his desire to buy a yacht where he can enjoy leisure time away from daily pressures. As a result, Suad finds herself feeling isolated and lonely, making continuous efforts to rekindle their fading love. The psychological tension between the characters escalates with the frequent visits of Necib, Süreyya's cousin. Necib, a thirty-year-old man, is hesitant about marriage and indulges in a life of pleasure and luxury. Over time, he becomes deeply attracted to Suad, seeing in her the qualities he has always longed for in a life partner. His feelings for her grow stronger, leading to an increasingly tense and complicated relationship. Necib struggles to suppress his emotions, while Suad begins to distance herself emotionally from her husband, who remains entirely preoccupied with his personal interests.

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As time passes, Suad starts withdrawing from Necib, fearing that their secret emotions might be exposed. This leads Necib to believe that she has lost all feelings for him and is deliberately avoiding him. The situation worsens as days go by, and their relationship becomes even more complicated. Necib, unable to comprehend Suad's coldness, is left in frustration. In a moment of despair, he turns to drinking and indulges in a life of recklessness, further deepening Suad's feelings of guilt. She realises that she has been the cause of his suffering and isolation. Overwhelmed by longing and remorse, she feels a pressing need to seek Necib's forgiveness and confess her love for him.

The novel reaches its climax when Suad and Necib find themselves alone in the house in a defining moment. Their long-suppressed emotions come to the surface as they finally confess their love for one another, vowing that their love will remain eternal despite the obstacles they face. As a symbol of their unspoken bond, Necib gives Suad one of his gloves as a keepsake, and in return, she gives him the other glove that she had kept since the beginning of their relationship.

As love between them grows stronger and both try to endure the unbearable pain and suffering, an unforeseen disaster strikes—the palace suddenly catches fire, engulfing the place in unexpected horror. In the darkness of the night, everyone rushes outside in a desperate attempt to survive, each fleeing for their lives. Amidst the terrifying chaos, the crowd realises that Suad is not among the survivors. Süreyya cries out desperately, "Suad! Suad!" Panic spreads as they realise she is still trapped inside the burning palace.

Süreyya meets Necib in the midst of the turmoil and informs him that Suad has not been seen among those who have escaped. Upon hearing this, Necib, overwhelmed with terror and despair, rushes toward the flames in search of his beloved, heedless of the imminent danger. As he struggles to reach her, the ceiling suddenly collapses, engulfing them both in the raging fire in a tragic and grim scene. Thus, the novel concludes with its heartbreaking climax, where the two lovers meet for the last time amidst the flames, their lives ending together in the blazing inferno (Rauf, 2022).

One of the defining features of *Eylül* is its deep psychological exploration, where the author meticulously analyses the inner worlds of its characters. While secondary figures such as servants, farmers, and Necib's family appear in the novel, they remain on the periphery of its psychological development, emphasising the intense internal conflicts of the main characters (Özbalcı, 1994).

The novel's title, *Eylül* (September), carries profound symbolic meaning. It refers to the first month of autumn, the season that follows summer, marking a period of transformation in both nature and human life. September represents a delicate balance between the remnants of summer and the onset of autumn—where the transition from joy and stability to turbulence begins. Yet, its beauty lies in the lingering traces of summer that give it a unique character. In the novel, the protagonist, Suad, likens her life to September, realising that she can never return to her former self. It is during this month that she comes to terms with her true feelings for Necib, an epiphany that turns her world upside down (Özdemir, 2010, p. 41).

In summary, *Eylül* masterfully intertwines themes of love, psychological turmoil, and social conflict, presenting a complex portrayal of human relationships under challenging societal conditions. This novel stands as the cornerstone of Mehmed Rauf's literary career, contributing to the evolution of Turkish literature through its pioneering use of psychological analysis as a compelling narrative device (Özcan, 2013).

A. Problem Statement

Although previous studies have explored the works of Mehmet Rauf in general and *Eylül* in particular, these studies have mainly focused on various aspects of the novel (Zariç, 2017). However, no independent study has specifically analysed the roles of the heroine in *Eylül* and how this character reflects social and cultural transformations in the late Ottoman era (Çaya, 2013). For instance, Özcan's (2013) study, "*Eylül* Romanında Can Sıkıntısı", analysed the concept of boredom in the novel, examining how the characters reflect a sense of ennui and psychological emptiness. Likewise, Kerman's (2009) study, "*Eylül* Romanında Musiki", explored the musical dimension of the novel and discussed the role of music in shaping the characters and enriching the narrative structure, emphasising the relationship between music and emotional expression in the novel. Also, Köseoğlu and Durna's (2023) study, "Mehmet Rauf'un *Eylül* Romanında Mekâna Dair Duygusal Betimlemeler Yoluyla Tematik Bir Analiz" (Thematic Analysis via the Emotional Descriptions of Architectural Space in the Novel *Eylül* by Mehmet Rauf), examined the spatial structure in the novel, analysing the role of architectural descriptions and their emotional impact on the characters and events, as well as how the author employed space as a narrative element to reflect emotions and psychological transformations.

Hence, the current study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the heroine's role, highlighting the social dimensions she embodies. It aims to answer these questions:

- How does the heroine in *Eylül* reflect the social transformations and evolving gender roles in the late Ottoman era?
- How does Suad's development illustrate the conflict between deeply rooted Ottoman traditions and the influences of modernisation and Westernisation during that time?
- To what extent can *Eylül* be considered a literary document that reflects the reality of the marital institution in the late Ottoman period?

B. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. By analysing the heroine in *Eylül*, this study provides deeper insights into the social and cultural changes that shaped Ottoman society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It highlights how literature serves as a reflection of historical transformations, particularly in gender roles and societal expectations. *Eylül* is considered the first psychological novel in Turkish literature, yet its social dimensions remain underexplored. This study contributes to Ottoman literary scholarship by offering a focused analysis of how the heroine embodies shifting social dynamics, enriching the understanding of Mehmet Rauf's literary contributions. The study allows for cross-cultural comparisons with contemporary novels from other literary traditions, enhancing discussions on how literature captures and critiques social transformation in different societies. The findings are valuable not only for literary studies but also for social history, gender studies, and cultural studies. By examining the heroine's role, the study provides insights into the changing status of women and the broader societal shifts in the late Ottoman period. By situating *Eylül* within its historical context, this study bridges the gap between literature and history, demonstrating how fiction serves as a medium for documenting and interpreting historical change.

II. METHODS

The study employed an analytical and descriptive methodology based on a comprehensive textual reading of *Eylül*, tracing the heroine's role at different stages of the novel and identifying the multiple roles she assumes. The study employed a social approach to analyse the relationship between social transformations and the development of the main character, exploring how the heroine's roles represent these transformations. Moreover, the study relied significantly on Turkish sources, as they are essential for understanding social and cultural changes in the late Ottoman era.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Upon examining *Eylül*, we find that the character of Suad assumes multiple and evolving roles throughout the novel, making her a dynamic figure that reflects the psychological and social transformations she undergoes (Özbalcı, 1994, pp. 183-191). These roles are not arbitrary nor merely dramatic embellishments to enrich the plot; rather, they serve as a mirror of late 19th-century Ottoman society. Suad is not just a devoted wife or a hesitant lover; she embodies the shifting societal norms, particularly regarding marriage and the role of women. In this context, this study analyses these roles in detail, exploring both the psychological aspects that highlight Suad's personal and emotional evolution and the social aspects that illustrate how these roles reflect the cultural and societal changes of the Ottoman era.

A. *The Role of the Wife's Psychological Perspective*

When we begin reading *Eylül*, we immediately encounter Suad's first role—that of a wife. However, she is not just any wife; she is an ideal, devoted, and faithful spouse. Having been married to Süreyya for five years, Suad lives in complete dedication to him, devoting her life to his happiness. She rejoices in his joy and grieves in his sorrow, living entirely for him. Suad resides in her husband's family home, which includes other members such as his father, known as Seyyid Fazıl; his mother, Sayyida Fazıla; his sister Hacer; her husband Seyyid Fatin; and his cousin Necib. She finds comfort and security in this large household, sharing happiness with its members in an atmosphere of warmth and harmony. Contrary to expectations, where one might assume that the wife would struggle with the crowded and confined living conditions, it is actually Süreyya who expresses dissatisfaction. He constantly complains about the harshness of life in this house, frequently telling Suad of his deep desire to acquire wealth and live in a home overlooking the sea—whether along the Bosphorus or in the Princes' Islands—believing that true tranquility and peace can only be found there, away from the chaos that disturbs him: "Imagine now, Suad, that we are in the Bosphorus or perhaps in the Princes' Islands... Can you see the sea? That sea that gives us life even in the hottest times. Cool... blue... pure... While here, we must wait until eight or nine o'clock for the northern breeze to arrive... Smoke... smoke... as if we are inside a blazing furnace..." (Rauf, 2022, p. 28).

Suad, in response, remained silent regarding her familial circumstances while enduring her husband's endless complaints with remarkable composure and deep patience. She sought only to ease his frustration, doing everything within her power to bring him peace of mind. She never complained about their modest life or their financial struggles, valuing their marital bond above all else. Instead, she reassured him by saying, "Perhaps everyone is wealthy, but none of them has a heart like yours" (Rauf, 2022, p. 33). When her husband continued to complain and she was unable to lift him from his deteriorating mental state, her deep devotion led her to take a bold step. She wrote to her father, asking him for money to rent a house by the sea, fulfilling her husband's desire for a calmer and more beautiful life. Indeed, she succeeded in her request, and they moved to that picturesque seaside home, where her husband's mood shifted, and his life transformed from discomfort to ease, thanks to the beauty of the location and the charm of the view.

Suad possesses noble character and holds her husband's family in high regard. When she managed to obtain the money from her father to rent the seaside house, she insisted that her husband, Süreyya, who had planned to move there without informing anyone, first seek permission from his father before making that decision. She also pleaded with him to inform his sister Hacer about this matter and allow her to visit them whenever she wished. In truth, Suad was a fundamental pillar in her husband's daily life, playing a central role that cannot be overlooked. She paid special attention to all the details of home life, bearing the responsibility for preparing meals and overseeing all household tasks.

In this role, she portrayed the ideal wife, dedicating her life to ensuring her husband's comfort and managing the household with skill and dedication.

Suad's character clearly embodies the image of the Ottoman woman who lived in a pivotal period, as the Ottoman Empire was undergoing drastic social and economic changes by the end of the 19th century (Zürcher, 2013; Açıkgöz, 2021). In the face of economic challenges and the rise of modernity and rapid cultural changes, figures like Suad emerged, clinging to traditional values, placing family and marriage at the centre of their lives. Despite the stormy winds that battered society at the time, Suad remained an example of a woman striving to preserve the family spirit, which was the foundation of stability in Ottoman society. The traits that Suad displays as the ideal wife are a reflection of the qualities of Ottoman women in the 19th century, as pointed out by author İnci Enginün.

Suad, with her virtues, is not a fictional or distant character but rather represents a true model of the Ottoman woman who lived in Istanbul between 1870 and 1890 (Enginün, 2006, p. 416). Through Suad's portrayal as a wife, we see her as the traditional Ottoman woman, the cornerstone of the family and its stability. Society expected her to be the main support for her husband, bearing the responsibilities of the home and family with loyalty and resilience. Her attention to cooking by hand and her meticulous supervision of every detail of home life serve as a clear example of the Ottoman woman who dedicates herself to providing comfort and stability for her husband. This dedication to household duties and attention to detail reflects the deep-rooted social values in late 19th-century Ottoman society. At the time, women played a central role in creating a stable and warm home, contributing to the happiness and cohesion of the family, thereby forming a crucial part of family life. Despite the heavy pressures that burdened Suad—whether due to the cramped living conditions or from her husband himself—she remained an epitome of endurance. She did not show complaints or distress; on the contrary, she dealt with her husband with calm and stability, using all her strength and patience. Her patience was not merely a traditional virtue but an integral part of her character, reflecting a fundamental virtue in Ottoman women of the time, especially amid the economic and social crises that many families faced.

Nevertheless, Suad's role went beyond patience; she also made actual sacrifices, such as seeking financial help from her father to provide what would make her husband happy and ease his distress. This act exemplifies the social norms that were imposed on Ottoman women, where they were expected to make sacrifices and find solutions to ensure the stability of the family and the happiness of the husband, even if it meant going beyond their traditional responsibilities. What stands out clearly is that Suad represents the traditional Ottoman woman who adheres to social conventions and shows great respect for family authority. When she obtained the money from her father to rent the seaside house, she did not act in isolation from social norms but asked her husband, Süreyya, to seek permission from his father before moving to this new place. This act demonstrates her understanding of the father's role in the Ottoman family structure, where the father held a central authority over family matters. The father in the Ottoman family was not just the head of the household but a symbol of prestige and power, and Suad shows an awareness of this authority by directing her husband to seek his father's approval (Özcan, 2018, p. 5).

What also demonstrates Suad's respect for family values and the social traditions that prevailed in the late Ottoman period is her plea to her husband to inform Hacer about the new address and allow her to visit them whenever she wished. This act clearly reflects Suad's commitment to strengthening family bonds and ensuring that ties of kinship remain strong and enduring. Suad does not only represent the image of the Ottoman woman concerned with the nuclear family, but also one who views enhancing extended family relations as an essential part of her role in maintaining the unity of the entire family. This plea reflects her respect for her husband's desires while simultaneously revealing her efforts to maintain a delicate balance between his wishes and the social traditions that require the preservation of family relationships (Yılmaz et al., 2022, pp. 115-123).

B. *The Role of the Mother*

Suad's role as a mother is not clearly depicted throughout the course of the novel, and there are not many events that emphasise aspects of her maternal personality. However, Suad does appear as a grieving mother who is overwhelmed with sorrow and pain over the loss of her child, as if its death had taken a piece of her being. Her grief was profound and unbearable, as she wished her child had lived to be the bond that would restore the unity of her family, especially after the feelings of love in her marriage had begun to fade. Losing the child was a harsh blow to her, as she deeply felt that if the child had been alive, it would have been the secret that revived the life and warmth of the faltering family and restored the lost stability and happiness. Alongside this deep sadness, she was haunted by great fears from every direction. She feared that history might repeat itself if she were to have another child, who could die just like the first one, while at the same time, she feared that her marriage would collapse, and she would be separated from her husband because of the absence of a child she saw as the guarantor of the relationship's continuity and preservation:

Oh, if only their child were alive! When this thought crossed her mind, she felt that usual pain, as if it was seeping from deep within her lungs, filling her eyes with tears. She understood how a child could be an irreplaceable bond in the family, how it could be a source of unparalleled joy, how its arrival could renew hearts and give them the flavor of life, filling them with happiness. And every time she thought of this, she fell into another wave of sorrow. Oh, if only it were alive, how their lives would always stay warm, always alive... That death had carved a deep wound within her, to the point that she now felt an immense horror and unbearable fear of the thought of bearing a child again... (Rauf, 2022, p. 38)

This deep sorrow in Suad's heart was not a fleeting feeling or a memory that would fade with time, but rather a permanent wound that penetrated the details of her life. She embodies the image of a mother who lives on the ruins of an incomplete dream, knowing that the emptiness left by her child will never be filled.

Suad's profound grief over the loss of her child clearly reflects the importance of motherhood in Ottoman society at the time, where motherhood was the cornerstone of a woman's identity and her role within the family (Ferhatoğlu, 2018, pp. 86-88). Her pain over the loss of her child signifies a strong emotional bond to motherhood and highlights the harshness of losing a child in the lives of Ottoman women. The matter does not stop at grief but extends to a fear that controls her, a fear that the painful experience of losing another child may be repeated if she were to conceive again. This fear casts a shadow over her psychological life, highlighting the obstacles faced by women during that period, as medical resources were limited and insufficient to cope with such tragedies (Hamlacı, 2017, pp. 24-26). Suad's fear that the absence of children could destabilise her relationship with her husband, Süreyya, is a clear indication of the importance of motherhood in Ottoman society. In this society, motherhood was a fundamental pillar in preserving the family's stability and strengthening marital bonds. The fear of losing this pillar reflects the importance of children as a vital factor in family cohesion, as they were seen as a source of renewing relationships and injecting vitality into them.

Even in contemporary times, this thinking persists in some communities, where the absence of children is considered a threat to the continuation of the marriage. Although the concepts of marriage and family roles have evolved significantly in many cultures, the idea that children are a "guarantee" for the continuation of marriage remains prevalent among some people (Breger & Hill, 2021; Popenoe, 2014). This shows how the social values surrounding motherhood and marriage in the Ottoman period continue to influence the thinking of many individuals today.

C. *The Role of the Educated Woman*

Suad is not merely a wife and mother but also an educated and cultured woman who draws from the refined arts, particularly Western music. She possessed profound knowledge of the most prominent Western composers and artists. Her interest in this art stems from her father's passion, which developed during her trips to the West, where he purchased a piano and gifted it to her. From that point on, Suad honed her skills and mastered playing pieces by the most famous composers of the era. Through continuous practice, she became capable of playing renowned compositions such as *La Traviata*, *Granviya*, *Faust*, *Trovatore*, *Aida*, and others that were among the most famous works of the time. What deepens her cultural personality is that she does not only play music but also engages in discussions with Nacip about Western art and music, reflecting her sincere desire to broaden her knowledge. In moments where her self-confidence and high skill are evident, she asks Nacip, "Which piece would you like to hear?"—confident that she can delight him with those enchanting melodies, revealing her passion for music and viewing it as a powerful means of expressing what lies deep within her.

Suad's openness to European music and her passion for learning it represent one of the significant transformations that occurred in Ottoman society in the late 19th century. While Ottoman classical music relied on traditional instruments like the oud and drum and was harmonised with inherited Turkish melodies (Filiz, 2023, pp. 4-5), Suad turned towards Western music, reflecting the new waves of cultural change that began to penetrate the fabric of society. Ottoman society, which had long sung the praises of its traditional music and celebrated its artistic heritage, was not isolated from the increasing Western influences over time (Feldman, 2023). By the end of the 19th century, signs of intellectual and artistic transformation appeared, where intellectual elites, like Suad, were eager to embrace European arts, adopting new playing styles and embracing famous compositions such as *La Traviata*, *Faust*, and *Trovatore*. This shift does not merely reflect a new musical taste but also represents a cultural inclination toward renewal and interaction with Western thought and art. We can say that this trend reflects the social and cultural changes emerging in Ottoman society during this period, where individuals, especially intellectuals, began seeking new ways to express themselves and their art, moving away from the traditions that had dominated society for centuries.

D. *The Role of the Woman Open to Others*

Suad is distinguished by a remarkable social openness that transcends the traditions of her time. At a time when Ottoman society was still engaged in debates about the role of women and the limits of their relationships with others, Suad welcomed the family friend, Mr. Nacip, into her home, assigning him a room and sitting with him comfortably. They would exchange conversations about famous Western artists and discuss the aesthetics of European musical pieces. Moreover, she accompanied Nacip on various outings and trips, without the heavy social restrictions that would normally prevent her from doing so. She even sat alone with him, even when her husband, Mr. Süreyya, was out of the house, discussing various topics related to his thoughts on marriage, women, and so on. When it was time for him to leave, she insisted on him staying longer. And if he insisted on leaving, she would ask him to return soon, as if she refused to lose this connection, which had become a part of her day.

Suad's openness to others, whether through her outings with Nacip or sitting with him at home while playing music, is a clear sign of the social and cultural transformations that Ottoman society experienced in the late 19th century. These behaviors, which might have been considered unconventional in a conservative society, reflect the significant changes in the role and status of women, highlighting how the educated elite began adopting new values that surpassed traditional social constraints.

Suad's excursions with Nacip and her sitting with him at home were a clear violation of the customs and traditions governing interactions between men and women in Ottoman society. At that time, society imposed strict limitations on interactions between the sexes. However, Suad's openness to communicate freely with Nacip reflects the changing social values in the late Ottoman era. This openness demonstrates how some educated women began to transcend those boundaries and adopt a new model of social relationships that allowed for free and open interaction between the sexes. In other words, this openness indicates that educated women, like Suad, were no longer confined to traditional roles within the family but had begun to participate more actively in cultural and social life. Consequently, these transformations reflect the beginning of a shift in perceptions of the role of women, as women began exploring new spaces of personal freedom and social interaction.

E. The Role of the Beloved Woman

The ideal qualities that Suad exhibited, distinguishing her from the women of her time, deeply affected Mr. Nacip. Suad was not merely a beautiful woman; she combined beauty with culture, skillfully played music, and was distinguished by refinement and behavior unlike what he was accustomed to in other women. For him, Suad became an angelic being, noble in character, above petty matters, and superior to the harm and vulgarity he saw in other women.

Initially, their relationship was one of friendship, where Nacip focused on her personality, contemplating her traits and decisions, admiring her intelligence, and being influenced by her brilliance. However, over time, Nacip began to see her through different eyes. He no longer contented himself with admiring her ideas and behavior but began to examine her physical features, contemplating her hair, lips, and attire, lost in the beauty of her face. He no longer saw her as just an angelic woman, but as someone imbued with divine connotations, a model of perfect beauty and grace.

This perfection he saw in Suad made him love her in a way that transcended the ordinary, reaching a passion that bordered on slavery. It was a classic kind of love, where the lover climbs the ranks of passion until he reaches its zenith, seeing only absolute perfection in his beloved, loving every particle of her, every movement, and every stillness. This was evident when Nacip decided to distance himself from Suad's house to control his love, but the strength of his passion overcame him, and he secretly kept one of her gloves, as if holding on to a piece of her soul. During his illness, when he suffered from a fever, he placed the glove under his pillow, taking it out occasionally to press it to his chest and smell it, as if clinging to a real part of Suad.

When Mr. Süreyya learned of Nacip's illness, he went with Suad to visit him at his father's house. When Süreyya asked Nacip to return to their seaside home, Nacip could not refuse the request, for there was Suad, the woman he loved to the point of slavery. He returned with them to the house, and his admiration and love for Suad reignited, growing even stronger than before.

In classical Ottoman literature, women were often depicted as sources of inspiration for men in poetry and literature, but were not granted the status of a lover if they were married. However, Suad in this novel represents a bold break from this traditional pattern. She is not just a wife but also a lover, a portrayal that is unusual in Ottoman literature. Suad's role as both a married woman and a lover to Nacip is strange and unconventional, reflecting the significant social and cultural changes that the Ottoman Empire was undergoing in the late 19th century.

Married women were traditionally expected to fulfill specific roles centered around domestic duties and family care. The idea that a married woman could be the lover of another man was a blatant departure from the strict norms governing marital relationships. This situation clearly shows that some emotional relationships in the late Ottoman period were beginning to break free from social constraints, becoming more complex and less bound by tradition. The relationship between Suad and Nacip embodies the tension between inherited traditions and the modern currents that were beginning to seep into Ottoman society. Despite her marriage to Mr. Süreyya, Suad found herself the object of deep emotional attention from Nacip, who loved her passionately. This unconventional relationship highlighted a crack in the norms and traditions governing marriage and relationships between the sexes, serving as evidence of the early emergence of new relationship models influenced by Western cultures and modernity.

F. The Role of the Comparing Woman

Suad's role as a conscious woman who compares her life skillfully is evident through her reflections and evaluations of her relationships with her husband, Süreyya, and her family friend, Mr. Nacip. Throughout the novel, we see how Suad's perspective on her marriage evolves, and how she begins to compare her present life with her past, revealing significant psychological transformations as she searches for true happiness and the love that refreshes her soul.

Suad had previously feared the collapse of her marriage due to the absence of a child to strengthen it, but now, she looks at her relationship with a critical eye, recalling a time when happiness was the foundation of their bond. She mourns the decline of this love, regretting the days that seem to have died and will never return. She compares her dull present with a future she expects to be even worse. If her husband has changed and become less loving in the place he once longed to stay, what will it be like when he returns to his family home?

At the start of the novel, Suad is depicted as a woman who is extremely concerned with her husband's happiness and considered him superior to all wealthy men. However, she now compares him to her friend Mr. Nacip, who surpasses Süreyya in emotional depth and affection. How could she not compare them when her husband constantly complains about the place they live in? When he moved to a new place, he became obsessed with his boat, leaving his wife to gaze at the walls in her solitude, while spending much of his time with Nacip. She asks him to listen to her music, but it is

clear that he has no interest in it, as the sound of his boat is far more beautiful than her music. In contrast, Mr. Nacip praises her performance, compliments her character, and engages with her in ways that brighten her spirits. She thinks to herself, "If only Süreyya could see things this way, if only he could think like this..."

Here, Suad comes to the bitter realisation that Süreyya's love for her has faded, and that the common interests they once shared have vanished. This is the most dangerous dilemma threatening the essence of marriage: the loss of shared interests makes the relationship monotonous and lifeless. The tragedy is that Suad, being an emotional woman, is fully aware of this emotional collapse, while Süreyya, with his selfish character, remains completely unaware of it.

Thus, we see that comparison plays a crucial role in the development of Suad's character in the novel. Through these comparisons, Suad realises the vast gap between the love she experienced in the past and the love she lacks in the present. Comparing her husband Süreyya with Mr. Nacip highlights the emotional void in her marriage and opens the door for her to search for the true happiness she is missing. These reflections mirror Suad's complex emotional state, embodying her deep need for love, appreciation, and attention, all of which she lacks in her marital relationship.

In this part of the novel, one of the most prominent signs of social change is Suad's transformation into a comparing woman. This change reflects an important development in the awareness of Ottoman women in the late 19th century, as women began to view their marriages critically, comparing their present lives with their past, and comparing their husbands with others like Nacip, who embodied the emotions and affection they lacked in their marital lives.

At the beginning of the novel, Suad represents the ideal wife, striving to please her husband Süreyya, whom she considers better than all wealthy men. Over time, Suad begins to view her marriage with a more critical eye, making comparisons between the past and present. This shift from complete contentment to criticism and comparison reflects a significant change in the awareness of Ottoman women, who began to realise that love is not just a duty or sacrifice, but an ongoing interaction that requires sustained nourishment from both parties. Suad's comparison of her marriage between the past and present is a clear indication of the changes in the consciousness of Ottoman women, who began to recognise that negative changes in marital relationships could not be ignored or silently endured but should be confronted and analysed. This self-criticism represents a step toward the liberation of women from the traditional constraints that required patience and endurance without discussion.

G. The Role of the Hesitant Woman

Suad's role as a hesitant woman is clearly portrayed in the novel, where she experiences an internal conflict between emotion and duty, between her secret love for Mr. Nacip and her responsibilities as Süreyya's wife. This deep hesitation reflects emotional and moral contradictions, causing her to oscillate between her desire to surrender to the new love and her feelings of guilt regarding her marital relationship. Suad felt a profound emotional void after Nacip's departure, as his absence revealed how much she had become emotionally and psychologically dependent on him. Gradually, she realised that she could no longer imagine her life without him, making her acutely aware of the emotional gap between her and her husband Süreyya. Despite years of marriage, Suad recognised that she had never truly understood Süreyya deeply or built a real relationship with him; instead, she lived with him as if he were a stranger. "I don't know him... He's another man... How did I spend my life with him, oh God, how?" These feelings drove her to reevaluate her marriage, finding herself torn between a love she could not do without and a marriage she consciously chose but now faced at a crossroads with no way back.

Her hesitation deepens when she learns that Nacip did not leave because of boredom but due to illness, and when she finds out he had kept her glove under his pillow during his illness, she realises how deeply he loved her. This makes her experience a mixture of joy and fear. She was happy because this love revived her spirit and gave her a sense of vitality, but she also feared the consequences that might follow. Nacip began to visit Suad's house again. When Süreyya was absent, music became the tool to express how each felt about the other. Suad was overjoyed by the emotions she felt, but when she remembered her husband Süreyya, she felt guilty and troubled, attempting to forget his presence in her life so that she could enjoy moments of this love that she had not revealed to anyone yet. This hesitation continued for a long time in the novel, as Suad struggled to make a clear decision about how to act. As her inner conflict intensified, she eventually decided to treat Nacip coldly in order to push him away, attempting to control her emotions and rid herself of the burden of guilt weighing on her.

In this part of the novel, we see how Suad transforms into a hesitant woman, reflecting the psychological and social changes she faced. Her indecision and emotional turmoil mirror the social changes experienced by Ottoman women in the late 19th century, as women began to feel contradictions between their marital duties and personal desires, between social traditions and emotional needs. Suad's portrayal as a hesitant woman toward Nacip and her husband Süreyya reflects the transformation in the understanding of emotional relationships and marriage among Ottoman women. The traditional woman was expected to remain completely loyal to her husband, but Suad experiences a struggle between her desire for true love and her marital obligations. The ebb and flow of her emotions reflect the psychological changes faced by educated, intellectual Ottoman women, who were no longer satisfied with being confined solely to traditional marriages.

Suad's hesitation can be seen as a symbol of the social changes occurring in Ottoman society. Women during this period began to step out of the traditional constraints that governed their lives, yet they remained trapped by concepts of honor and familial duty. Suad represents this struggle between the desire for personal freedom and liberation from tradition and the sense of responsibility toward family and society. Thus, her hesitation reflects the transitional phase

that Ottoman women were experiencing during this time. However, her final decision to treat Nacip coldly in order to avoid the tortures of her conscience or the revelation of her secret to society shows her submission to the traditional societal constraints of the Ottoman Empire, despite her desire to break free from them.

H. *The Role of the Unfaithful Woman*

Suad continually tried to rid herself of her love for Nacip, but her efforts failed, especially given her husband Süreyya's neglect and his increasing indifference toward her feelings. The situation worsened when he treated her coldly and insulted her after she objected to his sudden decision to leave the seaside house and return to the family home, which ignited her anger and made her regret knowing him and marrying him. Despite Suad's attempt to distance herself from her lover, Nacip, she ultimately surrendered to her emotions and confessed her love for him. She did not physically betray her husband, but she betrayed him with her soul and feelings, which is why she was considered unfaithful.

While the term "betrayal" may seem harsh toward Suad, her indulgence in emotions and exchanging glances with Nacip placed her in this dark circle. When she realised that she could not escape from society and its values, Suad decided never to leave her husband, but she agreed with Nacip to maintain their secret love. Suad's decision to stay with her husband while simultaneously maintaining a secret emotional relationship with Nacip reflects a form of internal complicity, where she preferred to walk this contradictory path, trying to reconcile her social duty as a wife with her forbidden emotional desires. This fragile balance led her to sit on the "seat of betrayal," with all the connotations the term holds. She not only betrayed her husband but also the social principles and values that rejected such relationships. However, fate did not give her much time; in an unexpected moment, a fire suddenly broke out in the house. Nacip tried to save Suad, who was trapped inside, but they did not escape the tragedy, as the roof collapsed on them, ending both their lives. Thus, this emotional relationship ended in the tragic way narrated by the author.

Suad's role as the unfaithful woman in the novel *Eylül* reflects one of the most prominent social and cultural changes in Ottoman society in the late 19th century. Marital infidelity, whether physical or emotional, was a severe taboo in Ottoman society, and a woman's status was tied to values of honour and loyalty to her husband. However, portraying Suad in this role reflects a shift in the understanding of marital relationships and points to the tensions between deeply rooted social traditions and the emerging new values that began infiltrating the educated classes at that time. Suad's choice to maintain her love for Nacip secretly and agree with him not to reveal the relationship reflects deeper cultural and social transformations. In traditional societies, women were seen as the bearers of family honour, and marital infidelity was considered one of the greatest moral violations a woman could commit.

Yet, in Suad's case, we see how she began to adopt a new kind of behaviour that challenges these values. She decided to live this emotional love in silence, believing it was the best solution so she would not lose her husband or her society, yet still preserve her love. These transformations show the influence of more liberal European ideas that began to enter Ottoman society at the time (Değeralp, 2012, p. 58). Suad's betrayal was not born out of a desire to betray in and of itself, but rather as a natural consequence of multiple emotional and social pressures. Süreyya's neglect drove Suad to seek attention elsewhere. This dynamic reflects the transformations taking place in Ottoman society, where women, especially educated ones, began to realise the importance of emotion and attention in marriage, rejecting the continuation of cold, loveless relationships. Suad was not just a victim of her husband's neglect, but also a victim of the social expectations placed on her as the ideal wife, who was supposed to endure everything silently.

Such forbidden and illicit relationships in the late Ottoman Empire were highly unusual, and there is no doubt that Ottoman society, being a Muslim society, completely rejected such relationships. Therefore, when the author chose to end the novel with the lovers' tragic death by fire, it was a way to signal what Ottoman society thought of such relationships. For them, these relationships were forbidden and illicit, and since the punishment is of the same nature as the act, the fire symbolised the inevitable punishment they deserved.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored *Eylül* by Mehmet Rauf as a literary work that reflects the social and cultural transformations that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Ottoman society. By analysing the character of Suad and her role in embodying these transformations, the study revealed how her evolving roles and interactions with her environment reflect broader societal changes, particularly concerning marriage and the role of women. The study revealed that Suad initially appeared as a devoted wife, embodying the traditional image of an obedient woman. However, as the narrative unfolds, she becomes a symbol of the internal conflict between adherence to deeply rooted societal values and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. Her transformation is not merely a dramatic element but a representation of the shifting perceptions of marriage and family, where women were beginning to assert their individuality beyond traditional roles.

Suad's complex relationship with her husband, Süreyya, and her emotional connection with Nacip illustrate the changing dynamics of gender relations and evolving attitudes toward love and marriage during that period. The findings confirm that the novel, through its portrayal of Suad's emotional and social crises, reflects the realities of the marital institution in the late Ottoman era. Marriage, once seen as a rigid social contract, was beginning to be influenced by psychological and emotional considerations.

Furthermore, the novel's tragic ending underscores society's rejection of deviations from traditional values and serves as a symbolic punishment for those who challenge prevailing norms. Also, *Eylül* offers a clear insight into Mehmet Rauf's perceptions of social values in his time. Through his characters, he articulates the tension between conservatism and modernity and expresses concerns about the changing status of women in Ottoman society. As such, the novel is not merely a romantic tragedy but a literary document that captures a pivotal transitional moment in Ottoman social and cultural history. In contributing to a deeper critical understanding of Ottoman literature and its reflection of social transformations, this study opens avenues for future research. Comparative analyses between *Eylül* and classical novels from different cultures that addressed similar themes in the same historical period could provide valuable insights. Additionally, this study serves as a resource for scholars in social and literary studies, offering a broader understanding of the changes that reshaped Ottoman society, how individuals responded to them, and the role of literature in documenting and interpreting these shifts.

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