

## Mehmet Akif Ersoy's "To the Martyrs of Dardanelles": Turkish View of World War I in Comparison to the English War Poets

Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un *Çanakkale Şehitleri*: İngiliz Savaş Şairlerine Kıyasla Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na Türklerin Bakışı

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### Abstract

*This paper is concerned with the Turkish view of World War I as reflected through Mehmet Akif Ersoy's 'Çanakkale Şehitleri' (To the Martyrs of Dardanelles) in comparison to the English war poets and argues that Turkish attitude to World War I is very different from that of the English war poets in terms of patriotism and sacrifice for one's country. The most important feature of the English war poets who wrote during World War I is that all of them, except for Rupert Brooke, who died of malaria, participated in the war personally and reflected their personal war experiences and perspectives in their poems. The Ottoman Empire, which participated in World War I as an ally of Germany, fought with the British in Çanakkale. There are many poems written by professional poets about the Dardanelles wars, in which the Turks won a decisive victory, but there is not any soldier-poet known in Turkish poetry. Considering the poems written on the battles of Çanakkale, the first ones that come to mind are "To the Martyrs of Dardanelles", and Mehmet Akif Ersoy. The epic poem "To the Martyrs of Dardanelles", written by Mehmet Akif for the heroic martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the salvation of their country, is the poem that best reflects the Turks' perspective on this war. This article focuses on the difference between the Turkish side's view of the war, which is reflected in Mehmet Akif Ersoy's poem "To the Martyrs of Dardanelles", from the British war poets in terms of patriotism and self-sacrifice ideas for the homeland. The perspective reflected by the English war poets was initially treated as a romantic ideal adorned with the propaganda of democracy, freedom and protection of Western civilization. However, it was understood that the war had nothing to do with national security for England and it was just an environment of hell where millions of young men died in vain for the power struggle of the politicians. Thus, this realization gave way to protest and disappointment. For the Turks, since this war meant the occupation of their lands in case of defeat, they defended their country at the cost of their lives and did not allow the English pass by Gallipoli.*

**Keywords:** Gallipoli, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, war poetry, World War I, Martyrs of Dardanelles

### Öz

Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında yazmış olan İngiliz savaş şairlerinin en önemli özelliği sıtmaya yakalanarak ölen Rupert Brooke haricinde hepsinin savaşa bizzat katılmış olması ve şiirlerinde kişisel savaş deneyimlerini, bakış açılarını yansıtmış olmalarıdır. Birinci Dünya Savaşına Almanya'nın müttefiki olarak katılan Osmanlı imparatorluğu İngilizler ile Çanakkale'de savaşmıştır. Türklerin büyük bir zafer kazandığı Çanakkale savaşları üzerine profesyonel şairler tarafından yazılmış birçok şiir bulunmaktadır ancak Türk şiirinde bu savaşa katıldığı

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bilinen bir asker-şair yoktur. Çanakkale savaşları üzerine yazılmış olan şiirler düşünüldüğünde ilk akla gelen "Çanakkale Şehitleri" ve Mehmet Akif Ersoy'dur. Mehmet Akif'in ülkesinin kurtuluşu için kendini feda eden kahraman şehitler için yazdığı destansı şiiri "Çanakkale Şehitleri" Türklerin bu savaşa bakış açısını en iyi yansıtan şiirdir. Bu makale Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un "Çanakkale Şehitleri" şiirinde yansıttığı Türk tarafının savaşa bakış açısının vatanperverlik ve vatan için yapılacak fedakârlık fikirleri açısından İngiliz savaş şairlerinden farkına odaklanmaktadır. İngiliz savaş şairleri tarafından yansıtılan bakış açısı ilk başta bu savaşın demokrasi, özgürlük ve Batı medeniyetini koruma propagandasıyla bezenmiş romantik bir ideal olarak ele alınmıştır. Ancak, daha sonra savaşın aşlında İngiltere açısından milli güvenlik ile ilgisinin olmadığı anlaşılmıştır. Politikacıların güç savaşı için milyonlarca gencin boş yere öldükleri bir cehennem ortamına sürüklendiğinin görülmesiyle bu romantik ideal yerini protesto ve hayal kırıklığına bırakmıştır. Türkler açısından ise bu savaş yenilgi halinde topraklarının işgali anlamına geldiğinden, onlar topraklarını canları pahasına savunmuş ve Çanakkale'nin geçilmesine izin vermemişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çanakkale, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Savaş şiiri, Birinci Dünya savaşı, Çanakkale Şehitleri,

## Introduction

The most important thing about the English poetry of World War I is that a group of poets named as war poets all participated in the war. Except for Brooke who died due to malaria before getting involved in the action (Caesar, 1993, p. 50), war poets wrote their poems out of first-hand experience. Some of them were killed in the battlefield and some survived the war but the common thing was that these war poets wrote of their own war experiences.

The Ottoman Empire also participated in World War I as an ally of Germany and therefore fought against the English in Gallipoli, but unfortunately, there is not any example of a poet-soldier known in Turkish poetry. However, there are many poems written by mainly professional poets about World War I, especially about Gallipoli battles where Turkish side won a decisive victory. In Turkish literature, Mehmet Akif Ersoy is the poet who comes to mind when the Gallipoli war is mentioned. His lyrical and epic poem 'Çanakkale Şehitleri' (To the Martyrs of Canakkale) may be regarded as the legend of the heroic martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the emancipation of the country and the best representative of the Turkish perception of the war. In that respect, this paper argues that Turkish view of the war reflected through Mehmet Akif Ersoy's 'Çanakkale Şehitleri' (To the Martyrs of Canakkale) is very different from that of English war poets in terms of patriotism and sacrifice for one's country.

## *English View of World War I as Reflected by English War Poets*

When England declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, there was a strong national enthusiasm since it was regarded as a national challenge. Johnston points out that "no one could foresee, of course, either the nature or the duration of the conflict; no one could predict the long, hopeless stalemate of trench warfare that was to follow after the German invasion of France had lost its original impetus" (1965, p.21). Full of devotion on the belief of fighting for the right cause, the young men responded to the call of the army by enlisting. The heroic spirit that motivated many young, educated English men to volunteer for the army was the ideal that "France to be saved, Belgium righted, freedom and civilisation re-won, a sour, soiled crooked old world to be rid of bullies" (Johnston, 1965, p. 22). In that respect, these volunteers were motivated by the national excitement and did not regard themselves as a doomed youth who was deprived of its future due to political and economic claims of the nations. On the contrary, they were proud to have the chance to involve in a heroic action; the chance to achieve fulfilment of an ennobling warfare in a commercialised world (Johnston, 1965, p. 23). Rupert Brooke was one of these educated young Englishmen who regarded the call of the army as a spiritual quest, a heroic challenge and reflected the patriotism of the English pre-war period in his war sonnets *1914 and Other Poems* published in 1915. In February of 1915, Brooke sailed to Dardanelles and on his way to Gallipoli, he had the symptoms of his fatal illness,

acute blood poisoning due to malaria he caught from a mosquito bite (Caesar, 1993, p. 50). Brooke was moved to a French hospital ship at the island of Skyros where he died within three days. So Brooke, through his early death became a symbol of the youth who sacrificed himself for his country and a model through his patriotic war sonnets of a “poet-soldier” as Churchill called him and set him as a national war poet in his letter to *Times*:

*The thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this, the hardest, the cruellest, and the least-rewarded of all the wars that men have fought* (quoted in Ross, 1965, p. 162).

Among these patriotic war sonnets of Brooke, “The Soldier” achieved much success and is the well-known poem as it reflects the idealistic, patriotic mood of the nation while entering the war. The poem has an imperial tone, reflecting the imperial spirit and the colonising attitude by transforming the soldier into the imperial embodiment of England where he dies and is buried:

*If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.* (Brooke, 1915/2013, p. 106)

In the poem, Brooke speaks of his own death and equates his dead body with the beauty of England and sees every soldier as the embodiment of his homeland. In this sense, this sonnet best reflects the spirit of the young man “who thought of himself...to discharge an obligation of honour” (Johnston, 1965, p. 22). Brooke gives a rural picture of England and implies that this country and its nation are worth dying for. In the same manner, Brooke emphasises the immortality of the youth who sacrifice itself for the country in “The Dead,” the third of his five patriotic sonnets in his collection *1914 and Other Poems*:

*Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!  
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,  
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.  
These laid the world away; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be  
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene  
That men call age; and those who would have been,  
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.*

*Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,  
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.  
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;  
And we have come into our heritage.* (Brooke, 1915/2013, p. 105)

In the sonnet, the reflection of a chivalric spirit is noticed right from the first line and Brooke promotes self-sacrifice with the line “But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold”. The honour of dying for a noble cause is given also in the sestet, reflecting the chivalric tradition by referring to history. Holiness, honour and nobleness come back again which unite the youth with the heritage of their heroic ancestors, implying the chivalric tradition of the past and thus creates the sense of national history.

In her influential book about the classical influences on the poetry of World War I entitled *Stand in the Trench, Achilles*, Elizabeth Vandiver states that the most remarkable thing about the poetry anthologies published during the Great War is that they promoted the perception of war as a struggle



between civilization and barbarism, thus representing England fighting to protect values of western civilization against savagery of the Germans (2010, p. 165). Because the British were aghast by the destruction of cultural treasures such as the Cloth Hall of Ypres or Rheims Cathedral during the invasion of Belgium and France, they associated Germans with the old barbaric tribes Vandals and Visigoths. Hence, the image of the Germans plundering and destroying the western civilization just like the barbaric tribes destroying the Roman Empire cast the British into the role of the defender (Vandiver, 2010, p. 165). In this respect, England's cause of involvement in the war was honourable, just and very much consistent with the white man's burden discourse of the British Empire as the nation was told that they were defending the weak (Belgium) against the strong cruel (Germany) and that it was a war for democracy and freedom. Accordingly, this war between civilization and barbarism was likened to the situation of "the Athenians at Marathon, who kept Greece free from Persian rule, and to the Franks at Tours who kept Europe free from Islamic domination" (Vandiver, 2010, p. 168). Fighting for the values of the western civilization and protecting freedom of Europe against "the German hordes have been worse than those of Attila, the Hun" (Knight, 1915, p. vi) were justifications of England's involvement in the war, imposing the idea that Englishmen should heroically fight and die for these noble causes. This kind of a war propaganda was especially needed to motivate young Englishmen since England as a country was not directly under threat and it was not invaded by a foreign country since 1066, the Norman conquest. Therefore, the government had to persuade the nation that this was worth fighting in spite of its disastrous consequences. In the light of these impositions, Julian Grenfell's poem "Into Battle" also presents the same themes of self-sacrifice for the country, patriotic dedication and the spiritual justification of dying in a battlefield, presenting the romantic attitude towards the war like that of Rupert Brooke:

*And he is dead who will not fight;  
And who dies fighting has increase.  
The fighting man shall from the sun  
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;  
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,  
And with the trees to newer birth;  
And find, when fighting shall be done,  
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.* (Grenfell, 1915/2013, p. 110)

Julian Grenfell, like Brooke is enthusiastic and justifies the death of the soldier in the battlefield by offering him a new life after death as a deification in "Into Battle," reflecting "a deeply Homeric presentation of individual achievement in battle, where battle is its own justification and a valiant death its own reward" (Vandiver, 2010, p. 186). "Into Battle" was written on 29 April 1915, was published in *The Times* on 27 May 1915, the day after Grenfell's death after a head-wound. Both Brooke and Grenfell can be regarded as soldier-poets of pre-war romanticism. Rupert Brooke who died without being involved in action emphasises the patriotism and the romantic attitude towards war, a representative sight of the British national perspective at the beginning of the war.

However, there is an important transition in the attitude towards the war due to the realisation of the real face of the warfare. War is no more an ennobling experience where the heroism was displayed in a face to face combat but in the First World War, the soldiers died in the trenches even without seeing the enemy due to the usage of gas, bombs and the machine guns. Technical and scientific advancement in the weapons changed the fighting strategies and accordingly, it was seen that man could no longer depend on his own courage or strength, since the weapons of the new century destroyed individuality with their capacity of reaching long-distance targets. Therefore, the disillusionment caused by the realisation of the difference between myth and reality, the meaninglessness and the futility of the war, changed the attitude of the soldiers. This attitude was reflected best in Owen's 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', picturing the criticism of the war and the politicians

as well as horrors of the war. To emphasize this irony, Owen makes use of the Latin author Horace's famous Latin tag from his *Odes* which means "of course, *It is sweet and meet to die for one's country. Sweet! And decorous!*" (Owen 1920/2006, p. 1974) both in the title and the concluding line of his poem:

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.*

...

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est  
Pro patria mori. (Owen, 1920/2006, p. 174)*

It is seen that although the perception of war was romantic and patriotic at first, it turned into futility and human tragedy with the realisation of its real nature. As reflected in Owen's poem which tells the hellish scene of a gas attack, fighting no more takes place in a battlefield where courageous men display their prowess and bravery but reduced to trenches dug into the soil where heavy rain of bullets were directed from the newly invented machine guns. With the technological advancement in the weapon industry, the soldiers met with the poison gas, tank and machine guns which do not let men display their courage but just reduce them to long-distance targets to be shot or destroyed. The intensity and the violent face of the mechanised warfare turned these soldiers into not heroes but victims involved in a futile, meaningless situation. They are passive figures in that modern warfare at the realisation point of the lies, truths and pain of war, the real distinguishers of the reality and myth about the nature of combat. Owen, thinking that the duty of a poet is to reflect the truth, revealed the horrors, suffering and the brutality of war in his poems such as "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Anthem for Doomed Youth" and "Futility". Similarly, Sassoon reflected the same themes with his bitter irony and black comedy such as in "The General," "The Glory of Women" and "Survivors". In these poems, war is a tragic experience and soldiers are no more heroes but victims either killed in the battle or survived but handicapped both physically and mentally. Other poets such as Isaac Rosenberg, Ivor Gurney, Charles Sorley, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden all were concerned with the futility of the war and shared the disillusionment of the generation about the nature and the meaninglessness of the war. It is an inhuman experience, reducing men to a position even inferior than the wild animals.

### ***Turkish View of World War I as Reflected in Mehmet Akif Ersoy's Çanakkale Şehitleri (To the Martyrs of Dardanelles):***

The Ottoman Empire, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was in a decline period, as its power as a huge country was fading gradually. The reforms for keeping up with the advanced western civilisation failed and the Ottoman Empire's inability to reform itself led to its being called as "the sick man" by Europe. The Ottoman Empire fought the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, in which small Balkan countries such as Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia allied against the Ottoman Empire to gain land and to cast the Turks out of Roumelia and after seven months of fighting,



the Ottoman Empire was defeated and lost all its lands in Roumelia (Eroğlu, 1990, p. 76). However, after the war, it took hold of Edirne, benefiting from the conflicts about these Balkan countries. With the breakout of World War I in 1914, the Ottoman government tried to ally with the agreement forces, consisted of Britain, France and Russia on grounds that its borders to be guaranteed and the capitulations to be put off. However, these countries did not welcome the offer, in that respect, the Ottoman government had to side with the allied forces, consisted of Germany, Australia, Hungary and Italy. In August 1914, a secret military agreement was signed with Germany through the encouragement of Enver Pasha, according to which the Ottoman Empire would participate in the war as an ally of Germany and would close the Dardanelles (Eroğlu, 1990, pp.76-7). The aim of the Ottoman government in entering this war was to regain the lost land such as Egypt and Tunisia and to establish a new big empire with the Turkish-speaking countries which would become independent when Russia would be defeated (Eroğlu, 1990, p. 76). Although the Ottoman government announced general mobilisation for warfare on the day it signed the agreement with Germany, the government announced impartiality two days later but Germany tried to break that impartiality by sending its two battleships, Goben and Breslav, to Dardanelles. However, the government announced that the Ottoman Empire bought these battleships to prevent the country from getting involved in the war but because the Turkish armada bombed the Russian ports through the order of Enver Pasha, the Ottoman Empire had to participate in the world war (Eroğlu, 1990, p. 77). The toughest battles of the war were fought in Gallipoli to prevent the enemy forces from taking control of the Dardanelles and therefore, the Bosphorus and Istanbul. Both sides had lost soldiers immense in number but the Turkish with strong defence did not let the Dardanelles passed by. This Gallipoli victory is also important from another aspect that it became a path to Turkish National War of Independence after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire with the allied forces in World War I (Kara 1999, "www.ttk.org.tr").

Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873-1936) reflected both the Balkan Wars and the Gallipoli War in his poems. He was regarded as a poet of "the Islamic ideal", who believed in the corporation of Islamic countries (Tansel, 1991, p. 55). It was an idea of an Islamic communion, offered as a magical remedy for the prevention of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in its period of decline. Like Ziya Gökalp's ideas of "turancılık" and like the Turkish nationalists who called for the union of Turkish-speaking countries under one roof, Akif idealised the roof of that union as communion of Islam (Celkan, 1986, pp.172-4). In that respect, Mehmet Akif thought that only the Turkish could be the leader of that Islamic union since they remained as the defender and the protector of Islam through the caliphate for centuries (Celkan, 1986, p. 175). Although Mehmet Akif had undergone religious education, he was also trained in the veterinarian faculty, that is, he also had scientific education. He was conservative in terms of religion but he was also aware of the importance of science and positive thinking and accordingly, he supported the idea that the Western civilisation's progression in terms of science, technology and discipline should be modelled by the Ottoman Empire to keep up with this advancement. (Filizok, 1986, p. 56) He thought of an ideal and an authentic civilisation which would be formed by the combination of the science and technology of the Western civilisation and the Islamic values (Filizok, 1986, p. 57). Also, in terms of literature, Akif was influenced by the western literature, mainly by the French writers such as Victor Hugo, Anatole France, Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola and Lamartine when he was a student and he learnt French to read these writers in original (Okay, 1992, p. xxxi). His work *Safahat* is his first published book, in which selections from his poems are given. The other works came under the names *Safahat: Book One, Book Two* etc. so *Safahat* became a work, consisting of seven books.

*Asım*, the Sixth Book of *Safahat*, written between the years 1919-1924, is a conversation between Hocasade and Köse İmam. Asım and Emin also speak scarcely in the poem. *Asım* may be regarded as a religious, lyrical and a nationalistic verse which centres upon the conversation of Hocasade and Köse İmam in Hocasade's house in Sarıgözel, İstanbul, while World War I is fought. The period is

some time after the Gallipoli War. The father of Hocasade who symbolises Mehmed Akif was once a tutor of Köse İmam (Tansel, 1991, p. 109). Köse İmam, who belongs to the elder generation of Hocasade, comes to exchange views on two matters; once he would tell an event that his neighbour experienced and then he would complain from Asım. They exchange views on the collapse of the family institution, the decline in the villager's health and morality, the suffering of the nation at the hands of the unsuccessful rulers and the generation gaps between the older and the younger generations. They complain that the conflicting debates about secular education and religious education bring the country to chaos. However, the elder Hocasade who symbolises Mehmet Akif is hopeful for future that the Islamic world would recover from this lethargy and the new generation, the generation of Asım would achieve that. This generation defended its country and religion in Gallipoli through all the impossibilities, so they proved that they offer hope for the nation. This section is the place where the poem 'Çanakkale Şehitleri' (To the Martyrs of Dardanelles) is read and the book ends with the departure of Asım from a victorious country to Europe to bring the Western science and technology for the emancipation of Islam and Turkishness. 'Çanakkale Şehitleri' (To the Martyrs of Dardanelles) is a legendary celebration of the victory of Asım's generation in front of the powerful Europe and the world. In this poem, Mehmet Akif turns the historical facts into an epical narration and therefore immortalises the glory and bravery of the Turkish martyrs.

The poem begins with the description of a battle scene, the battle at the Dardanelles. The poet says that there is no battle in history like that and he emphasises that the enemy forces are immense in number, aiming to reach Marmara: *Şu Boğaz Harbi nadir? Var mı ki dünyada eşi?/ En kesif orduların yükleniyor dördü beşi,-Tepeden yol bularak, geçmek için Marmara'ya-/ Kaç donanmayla sarılmış ufacak bir kıtağa?* Although the land they surround with their armadas is such a small place, they try to do so with all their forces. The enemy gathered so many in numbers that even the horizon cannot be seen. It is a very strong picture of the difficulty of the Turkish side in the war. In the following lines, the poet emphasises the variety of nations and criticises the Europeans because of their cruelty and likens them to hyenas, animals without any emotions, led out from their cages: *"Eski Dünya, Yeni Dünya, bütün âkvam- beşer,/ Kaynıyor kum gibi... Mahşer mi, hakikat mahşer,/ Yedi iklimi duruyor cihânın karşısında;/ Ostralya'yla beraber bakıyorsun: Kanada!*<sup>3</sup>

Because Europe is regarded as an example of civilisation with its scientific, technological and humanistic advancement, this cruelty and tyranny cannot be matched with it. Sema Uğurcan points out that Mehmet Akif has two points of view about the West, both as an ally of the Turkish and against whom the Turkish fought in the First World War (1986, p. 154). In this poem, the West is presented as a monster against whom the Turks fight with all their power and faith but he has another poem in which the West is presented as a favoured model of civilisation with its scientific, technological and humanistic advancement, portrayed as Germany, the ally of the Turkish in the war. Mehmet Akif was against the cruel West and thought that only Germany regarded the Turks as friendly. For him, Germany became the representative of civilisation in the twentieth century through their disciplined study and not fighting with any other nation (Uğurcan, 1986, p.156). Akif mostly hates the British as a Westerner. He sees Britain as a bloodsucker because through its imperialism, Britain exploits India and Egypt which are Muslim lands. He hates that country because Britain makes these colonies fight with her own enemies, such as the soldiers from the colonies fighting against the Turkish in the

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<sup>2</sup> What is that war of the Strait - in the world is there a war equal to it?  
With great forces are pressing against, four or five of the armies mightiest.  
Finding a way on hill to pass to the Marmara Sea -  
They besieged such a small land with how many a navy?

<sup>3</sup> The Old World, the New World, peoples of all nations  
Are boiling like sand; is this doomsday? Truly, doomsday it is.  
The seven climes are standing against you  
Australia, beside it, you see Canada too!



Gallipoli war (Uğurcan, 1986, p. 155): "Çehreler başka, lisanlar, deriler rengarenk. / Sâde bir hadise var ortada: Vahşetler denk. / Kimi Hindu, kimi yamyam, kimi bilmem ne belâ...<sup>4</sup>

For Akif, the only nation Britain could not touch was the Turkish, so they had plans to weaken them based on the separation of the Arabs and the Turks on the grounds of nationalism. Akif also hates France as an imperial country since France urged its colonies Tunisia, Algeria and many men from its colonies in Africa to fight with its own enemies, even used them as a shield for French army in the battlefields. These men from the colonies had no right to refuse to fight or die for the imperial country since their families would be massacred otherwise. The same thing is also done by Russia in northern countries, especially in Caucasia, many villages were burnt (Uğurcan, 1986, p. 155). So, Mehmet Akif thought that all these countries were against the Islamic world and was amazed by their cruelty that he could not believe these people can belong to the twentieth century:

*Ah o yirminci asır yok mu, o mahluk-u asil,  
Ne kadar gözdesi mevcut ise hakkiyle sefil,  
Kustu Mehmetçiğin aylarca durup karşısına;  
Döktü kanındaki esrarı hayasızcasına.  
Maske yırtılmasa hala bize âfetti o yüz...  
Medeniyet denilen kahbe, hakikat, yüz­süz.<sup>5</sup>*

In these lines, Akif reflects that although the twentieth century is regarded as the age of advancement and technology, the real face of the West is revealed through the cruelty and violence of the European countries. Although these European countries are associated with civilisation, they in fact abuse technology to shed blood. Akif here criticises the abuse of science and technology by saying that "Medeniyet denilen kahbe, hakikat, yüz­süz" (22). Then Akif presents a hellish picture of the ongoing battle, telling how the bombs thrown to the trenches kill the heroic Turkish soldiers. Each bomb kills hundreds of men and he likens this scene to a snowstorm. The picture the poet gives resembles to a hellish scene:

*Kafa, göz, gövde, bacak, kol, çene, parmak, el ayak;  
Boşanır sırtlara, vâdilere, sağnak sağnak.  
Saçıyor zirha bürünmüş de o nâmerd eller,  
Yıldırım yayılımı tufanlar, alevden seller.  
Veriyor yangını, durmuş da açık sinelere,  
Sürü halinde gezerken sayısız tayyâre.  
Top tüfekten daha sık, gülle yağın mermiler..  
Kahraman orduyu seyret ki bu tehlide güler!<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Faces different, languages different, skins of various colors  
The only feature shared by all simply: in brutality they are equal  
Some of them are Hindu, some of them are cannibal, what damnation some of them?

<sup>5</sup> O what an age is it the 20th century, that noble creature  
In fact, all the merits of it are just disgrace  
Puked against Mehmetçik for months standing opposite  
Threw out the mystery in its belly, ignominiously  
If the mask was not torn, its face was still as beautiful as a belle's  
The whore called civilization, in fact, faceless

<sup>6</sup> Head, eye, torso, leg, arm, jaw, finger, hand, foot  
Showering on the slopes, in valleys in torrent  
Those despicable hands covered in shield are scattering  
The floods of thunderbolts, the floods of flames  
Showering fires onto the bare chests  
Countless planes flying over in herds.  
Missiles more frequent than rifles, with cannon balls, raining bullets  
Watch that heroic army! It laughs at this threat.



The scene described here is a hellish sight of the battle; because of the continuous bombing and the bullets of the machine guns, many soldiers are shot and the parts of their bodies- heads, fingers, legs, arms- are scattered all around the battlefield. However, in spite of that scene of violence and cruelty, the courageous army is not afraid; they even laugh at this threat. After the battle scenes, Akif presents the courage, heroism and the endurance of the Turkish soldiers. They fight against the enemy and most die. Apart from these qualities, the driving motive behind this endurance and courage is the faith of the soldiers which is placed by God in their hearts. Here, Akif gives the fact that against these more powerful enemies, the only weapon of Turkish soldiers is their religious faith and only with this faith can they endure and bravely cope with the enemy. Mehmet Akif emphasises the bravery of the new generation and celebrates how they defended their honour against the enemy forces: “Asım’ın nesli...diyordum ya... Nesilmiş gerçek;/ İşte çiğnetmedi nâmusunu, çiğnetmeyecek./ Şühedâ gövdesi, bir baksan a, dağlar taşlar/ O, rükû olmasa, dünyâda eğilmez başlar,<sup>7</sup> Akif not only praises the younger generation, the generation of Asım for defending the country bravely against the enemy forces, but also emphasises that Turkish soldiers would bend their heads and retreat only in front of God but not for any other beings. Akif, patriotically points out that, the Turkish would never let any other nation oppress their country and the soldiers die for this ideal. Dying while defending their nation, country and faith make them ascend to martyrdom, regarded as the highest rank in Islam. Akif reflects this ideal and the heroism of the martyrs very powerfully in his following lines.

*Vurulup tertemiz alnından uzanmış yatıyor;  
Bir Hilâl uğruna, ya Rab, ne güneşler batıyor!  
Ey, bu topraklar için toprağa düşmüş, asker!  
Gökten ecdâd inerek öpse o pâk alını değer.  
Ne büyüksün ki kanın kurtarıyor Tevhid’i...  
Bedir’in arslanları ancak, bu kadar şanlı idi...<sup>8</sup>*

The crescent symbolises the flag of the Ottoman Empire and is also a symbol of Islam (Okay, 1992, p. xci). The sun symbolises the Turkish soldiers who die for the emancipation of the country, so soldiers had to die for the sublimation of the country and the religion. Akif thinks that the blood of the martyrs in Gallipoli rescues the belief of the uniqueness of God, the core of Islam reflected by the word Tevhid (Uğurcan, 1986, p.153). Moreover, the poet likens these martyrs to the ones who fought the Battle of Bedir with Mohammed, the prophet of Islam against the non-believers. The martyrs of the Battle of Bedir also defended the Islamic religious faith so for Akif, the Gallipoli Wars are the modern adaptations of the Battle of Bedir for the Islamic world, aiming at the defence of the Islamic religious faith as well as the country and the Turkish nation (Okay, 1992, p. lxxxix). Orhan Okay points out that in the First World War years, the only completely independent Islamic country was the Ottoman Empire, so the Ottoman Empire was regarded as the last fortress of Islam and so was Gallipoli for the Ottoman Empire. (1992, p. lxxxix). In that respect, the powerful resistance in Gallipoli was taken as a herald for the emancipation of both the Turkish nation and the Islamic world. Therefore, the martyrs of Gallipoli are as noble, holy and glorious as the martyrs of the Battle of Bedir. The same idea of the

<sup>7</sup> As I was saying “the Generation of Asım, yes, truly a generation it is:  
Yes again, he hasn’t let his honor be offended. Never will he. Never. He won’t.  
A body of a martyr, oh look, the mountains, the rocks ....  
If there weren’t that bowing in prayer, the heads wouldn’t be bowed  
even once in the world.

<sup>8</sup> Lying down, in a restful sleep, shot in forehead spotlessly clean,  
O Great Lord! For just one Crescent, how many suns are setting?  
Oh Soldiers, who have died on this soil for the sake of this earth,  
Kissing on forehead by ancestors descending from the heaven, you are worth  
So exalted are you that your blood is saving the Pillar of Faith, true  
Only the lion-like soldiers of Bedr were as much glorious as you



defence of the Islamic faith is also given close to the ending lines of the poem: Sen ki, İslâm'ı kuşatmış, boğuyorken hüsrân;/ O demir çemberi göğsünde kırıp parçaladın. <sup>9</sup>

In the following lines, Akif states that the martyrs of Gallipoli are so glorious and heroic that they even go beyond history. The poet makes a comparison between history and the eminent Gallipoli martyrs and rather than history, Akif finds eternity suitable for these triumphant soldiers so that they will not remain in the past but their victory will remain forever: "Sana dar gelmeyecek makberi kimler kazsın?/ "Gömelim gel seni tarihe!" desem sığmazsn./ Her ü merc ettiğin edvâra da yetmez o kitâb.../ Seni ancak ebediyyetler eder istiâb". <sup>10</sup> Akif also glorifies the martyrs by designing a magnificent tomb for them in the poem. He places the Kaaba for the martyrs as a tombstone, which is regarded as the heart of the Islamic world. The poet covers their bodies with sky as a bedspread in their bleeding grave, he places the Pléiade to light the grave as a chandelier and the moonlight will guard their tomb. This chandelier will be replaced by dawn and the soft lights of the setting sun will bandage the wounds of the martyrs. Although Akif makes the entire cosmic world serve to the martyrs of Gallipoli in his imagination, he thinks that what he has done will not be enough for these glorious soldiers. <sup>11</sup> Mehmet Akif praises and honours Turkish martyrs that much because with their defence and resistance at Gallipoli, they showed their ancestors Salahaddin and Kılıç Arslan how glorious they are. They replaced the disappointment and hesitation of the Islamic world with victory so these martyrs in fact do not need a tomb since the Prophet is waiting to embrace them with open arms: "Sen ki, a'sâra gömülse taşacaksın... Heyhât!/ Sana gelmez bu ufuklar, seni almaz bu cihât.../ Ey şehid oğlu şehid, isteme benden makber,/ Sana âğuşunu açmış duruyor Peygamber."<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

Gallipoli victory is one of the most important victories in the world history, won by people who fought with all their faith, courage and endurance against an army both advanced in number and technology. It was regarded as a defence of the country, nation and religion, so this victory of the Turkish side is

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<sup>9</sup> You shattered the iron hoop on your breast  
O You, your name travels to stars with your soul

<sup>10</sup> Who must dig a grave not narrow for you?  
If I say 'Let's bury you into history', there, you won't fit into  
That book won't be enough for the era you shattered  
Only the eternities can hold you in their vastness.

<sup>11</sup> If I erected Ka'bah on the head of your grave saying "This is your tombstone",  
If I covered it with the inspiration of my soul,  
Then, if I took the heaven's dome, as Makkah's clothes,  
And lay it with its all stars on your bleeding sarcophagus,  
If I made a roof with purple clouds for your open shrine,  
If I extended the Pleiades with seven storey,  
You, covered in your blood, resting under this chandelier,  
If I brought the moonlight there,  
If I kept it till daybreak as your tomb keeper,  
If I illuminated your chandelier with the morning light,  
If I wrapped your wound with the descending veil of west every evening,  
Again, I cannot say, for your memory at all, I did something.

<sup>12</sup> O You, outgrow them you will if buried in works of art,  
These horizons can't contain you; for you, this holy war not enough.  
Oh Martyr, son of a martyr; don't want a grave from me.  
There's standing the Prophet with open arms to hug you.

immortalised in the lines of Mehmet Akif Ersoy. It is seen that, the soldiers do not speak in the poem, maybe because their duty is to fight and die for the emancipation of the country; but Mehmet Akif speaks on behalf of them, displaying all their glory, bravery and faith. Different from the English war poems reflecting the futility or the agony of the war, Mehmet Akif presents a picture of Turkish soldiers, courageously sacrificing themselves. This war meant perseverance for the Turkish side since they had to be victorious not to let the enemy forces to take hold of Dardanelles and therefore Bosphorus and Istanbul. It was a matter of survival as a country, not to be conquered and distributed between the triumphant armies. However, for the English perception, the perspective and motivation were totally different. War as a concept was still an ennobling experience, an act of heroism in the imagination of the British volunteers and these young students of distinguished public schools, mainly educated in Classics went to enlist with the reminiscences of passages from Homer's epics in their minds. With the influence of the government propaganda imposed on the British people that England would enter the war to settle the conflict created by Germany and therefore for the right cause, these volunteers with a romantic perception of saving the world and defending the western civilization, put on soldiers' uniforms and went to fight. However, the romantic and patriotic perception of war at first, turned into futility and human tragedy with the realisation of its real nature and this disillusionment, the sense of meaninglessness and the tragic sight of the war is best reflected by the English war poets after Brooke and Grenfell.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no financial conflict of interest with any institution, organization, person related to our article titled “

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## Genisletilmiş Özet

Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında yazılan İngiliz şiiri savaşa dair çeşitli bakış açılarını yansıtmaktadır. Savaşın ilk yıllarında, ağırlıklı olarak vatan için yapılan fedakârlığı, savaşta cesurca ölmenin onurunu kutlayan ve teşvik eden vatanseverlik temalı şiirler görülür. İngiliz savaş şairleri tarafından yansıtılan bakış açısı ilk başta bu savaşın demokrasi, özgürlük ve Batı medeniyetini korumak için verilen bir savaş olduğu yönündedir. Rupert Brooke ve Julian Grenfell gibi şairler, ülke için savaşmanın ve ölmenin onuruna vurgu yapmanın yanı sıra şövalyelik duygularını yansıtan, savaşa karşı romantik bir tutum sunan şiirler yazmışlardır. Ancak bu romantik tavır, kendini vatan için feda etme fikri ve vatana bağlılık, savaşın gerçek yüzünün anlaşılmasıyla birlikte ısraba dönüşmüştür. Savaş, artık cephede düşmanla yüz yüze çarpışmalarda kahramanlığın sergilendiği insanı yüceltici bir deneyim olmaktan çıkıp, teknolojinin ilerlemesinin bir sonucu olarak kimyasal gaz, tank ve makineli tüfek gibi silahların ilk defa kullanımı nedeniyle askerlerin düşmanı görmeden öldüğü bir siper savaşına dönüşmüştür. Ayrıca savaşın İngiltere'nin toprak bütünlüğünü tehdit eden bir unsur olmadığı ve milli güvenlik tehdidi içermediğinin anlaşılması da milyonlarca gencin politikacıların hırsları yüzünden öldüğü gerçeğini göstermiş, bu anlamda İngiliz savaş şiirine siper savaşının acısı, ısrabı ve öfkesi damgasını vurmuştur. Üstelik Birinci Dünya savaşı başlarken kimse Avrupa'da bir savaşın altı aydan fazla süreceğini beklememektedir. Bu nedenle zaman geçtikçe askerler savaşın bu öngörülen zamanda bitmeyeceğini anlamaya başlamışlar ve böylece acı ve asla eve dönemeyecek olma korkusunun da etkisiyle savaşın başlangıcındaki yurtseverliğin yerini öfke, nefret ve hayal kırıklığı almıştır. Buna göre Wilfred Owen, Sigfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles Sorley, Edmund Blunden ve daha niceleri gibi şair-askerler, şiirlerinde savaşmanın beyhudeliğini ortaya koymuşlardır. İngiliz savaş şairleriyle ilgili en önemli şey, savaşa katılmadan sıtma nedeniyle ölen Brooke dışında hepsinin savaşa katılması ve kendi savaş deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak şiirler yazmalarıdır.

Osmanlı Devleti de Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na Avusturya-Macaristan, Almanya, Bulgaristan'dan oluşan İttifak Güçlerinden biri olarak, Almanya'nın yanında katılmış ve İngiltere, Fransa, Rusya ve İtalya'dan oluşan Müttefiklere karşı Gelibolu'da İngilizlerle savaşmıştır. Ne yazık ki Türk şiirinde İngiliz savaş şairlerinin aksine bilinen bir şair-asker örneği yoktur. Türk tarafının kesin bir zafer kazandığı Gelibolu muharebeleri hakkında profesyonel şairler tarafından yazılmış birçok şiir bulunsa da, Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un "Çanakkale Şehitleri", Türklerin savaş algısının en iyi temsilcisi olarak akla gelen şiirdir. Çanakkale Savaşı sonunda Türklerin cesur savunması nedeniyle İtilaf Devletleri ne boğazlardan geçebilmiş ne de ülkelerini işgal edebilmiştir. Bu anlamda Gelibolu zaferi, hem sayı hem de teknoloji olarak gelişmiş bir orduya karşı tüm inanç, cesaret ve dayanıklılıklarıyla savaşan insanların kazandığı dünya tarihindeki en önemli zaferlerinden biridir. Çanakkale savaşı Türkler açısından vatanın ve milletin savunması olarak görülmüş ve Türk tarafının bu zaferi Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un dizelerinde ölümsüzleştirilmiştir. Bu yönüyle Çanakkale Şehitleri, vatanın kurtuluşu için kendilerini feda eden kahraman şehitlerin efsanesi olarak kabul edilebilir. Savaşın beyhudeliğini, siper savaşının ısrabını, makinalı tüfeklerin korkunç sesi eşliğinde "sığır gibi ölenlerin" yasını tutan İngiliz savaş şiirlerinden farklı olarak Mehmet Akif "Çanakkale Şehitleri" şiirinde güçlü bir düşmana karşı vatan savunması için cesurca kendilerini feda eden kahraman Türk askerlerinin portresini sunar. Türkler açısından bu savaş yenilgi halinde topraklarının işgali anlamına geldiğinden topraklarını canları pahasına savunmuş ve Çanakkale'nin geçilmesine izin vermemişlerdir.

*Akif, şiir boyunca Türk askerinin cesaretini, kahramanlığını ve dayanıklılığını sergilemekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda Avrupa medeniyetini de eleştirir. Bilimsel, teknolojik ve hümanist gelişmelerle Batı'yı gözde bir uygarlık modeli olarak gören bir şair olarak Akif savaşta sergilenen zulüm ve zorbalığı Avrupa medeniyeti ile bağdaştıramaz. Bu nedenle Akif, bilim ve teknolojiadaki bu ilerlemenin öldürücü silah geliştirme aracı olarak kullanılmasını kınamakta ve bunu bilimin kötüye kullanılması olarak görmektedir.*

*Gelibolu zaferi, dünya tarihinin en önemli zaferlerinden biridir ve tüm inançları, cesaretleri ve dayanıklılıkları ile sayıca ve teknoloji olarak gelişmiş bir orduya karşı savaşan insanların kazandığı zaferdir. Vatanın, milletin ve aynı zamanda da dinin işgal kuvvetlerine karşı savunması olarak görülmüş ve Türk tarafının bu zaferi Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un satırlarında ölümsüzleştirilmiştir. Belki de görevlerinin vatanın kurtuluşu için savaşmak ve ölmek olduğu için askerlerin şiirde konuşmamasıdır, ancak Mehmet Akif şiirinde onların adına konuşmakta, onların tüm görkemlerini, cesaretlerini ve inançlarını sergilemektedir. Mehmet Akif, savaşın anlamsızlığını ya da ıstırabını yansıtan İngiliz savaş şiirlerinden farklı olarak, Türk askerlerinin cesaretle kendini feda ettiği bir tablo sunar. Düşman kuvvetlerinin Çanakkale Boğazı'nı, dolayısıyla İstanbul Boğazı'nı ve İstanbul'u ele geçirmesine izin vermemek için galip gelmeleri gerektiğinden, bu savaş Türk tarafı için büyük bir direniş anlamına geliyordu. Bu savaş, fethedilip muzaffer ordular arasında dağıtılmamak için ülke olarak hayatta kalma meselesiydi. Ancak İngilizler için savaşa bakış açısı ve motivasyon tamamen farklıydı. Bir kavram olarak savaş, savaşa gönüllü olarak katılan İngiliz askerlerin hayal gücünde soylu bir deneyim, bir kahramanlık eylemiydi ve İngiltere'deki seçkin devlet okullarının, çoğunlukla Klasik Edebiyat üzerine eğitim almış bu genç öğrencileri, zihinlerinde Homeros'un destanlarından okudukları ve etkilendikleri bölümlerin etkisiyle askere yazılıp cepheye gitmişlerdi. İngiltere'nin Almanya'nın yarattığı çatışmayı çözmek ve dolayısıyla haklı bir amaç için savaşa gireceği yönünde İngiliz halkına dayatılan hükümet propagandasının etkisiyle, dünyayı kurtarmaya ve batı medeniyetini savunmaya yönelik romantik bir algıya sahip bu gönüllü gençler şövalyelik onurunu hatırlatan değerlerle savaşa katılmışlardı. Savaşın gerçek, acımasız ve anlamsız doğasının anlaşılmasıyla şiirlerde ilk başlarda yansıtılan romantik ve vatanperver bakış açısı bir insanlık trajedisinin yansıtılmasına dönüşmüş ve bu bağlamda İngiliz askerlerinin yaşadığı hayal kırıklığı, anlamsızlık duygusu ve savaşın trajik görüntüsü İngiliz savaş şairlerince Brooke ve Grenfell'den sonra en iyi yansıtılmıştır.*

