

## **Anxiety of Luxury: Istanbul Hilton Hotel at the Stage of the Turkish Cinema during the 1960s-1970s**

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### **Abstract**

This study looks at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, an important product of liberalism in architecture during the 1950s in Turkey. The dichotomies concerning the hotel, i.e., the reconciliation of East-West, contextualizes the architectonics of the hotel and evidently ascertains an “anxiety of the Orient” for the “foreign” tourists. This study aims to analyse the hotel via two new arguments: (1) The hotel provides a wide field of new information when analysed via Yeşilçam film, the prominent moving-picture industry in Turkey. Yeşilçam films provide non-negligible supplementary archive of the venues and the immediate surroundings of the hotel with an insight to the behaviours of groups and individuals of a certain time and place. (2) While the 1950s was the decade of an “anxiety of the Orient” for the “foreign” tourists in experiencing the hotel, during the 1960s-1970s, the hotel became an arena of “anxiety of luxury, wealth and prosperity” for the “local” tourists. Hence, in this study, six films are analysed from these two salient decades which locate the Istanbul Hilton Hotel as the main stage: *Turist Ömer* (Tourist Omer) (Saner, 1964), *Hırsız* (The Thief) (Davudoğlu, 1965), *Ah Güzel İstanbul* (Oh Beautiful Istanbul) (Yılmaz, 1966), *Oyun Bitti* (The Game End) (Elmas, 1972), *Vurgun* (The Profiteering) (Ökten, 1973) and *Ne Umduk Ne Bulduk* (What Hoped What Found) (Ökten, 1976).

**Keywords:** Istanbul Hilton Hotel, Luxury, Hotel Interiors, Interiors in Films, Post-war era.

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the Second World War ended in 1945, formidable ruptures occurred in the world and especially in the European geography. In the first decade of the post war era, “capitalism and communism”, “individualism and communitarianism” polarizations occurred under the balance of the USA and the Soviet Union in the Western and Westernizing cultures (Boyacıoğlu, 2020, pp. 15–17). Europe, as the cradle of the modernization during the interwar period, was replaced by the USA in the post war era as the cradle of the international style and globalization (Tapan, 1984, pp. 105–118; Tekeli, 1984, p. 24).

With the establishment of the multi-party governance in 1945, the Democratic Party (DP) won the elections of the 1950; meanwhile, the founding government of the Republic was now at the opposition (Vanlı, 2006, pp. 206–209). DP aspired to be part of the capitalist economic system. The new Turkish government with an aim of strengthening its relations with the West, consolidated the collaboration with the USA; participated in the Korean War (1951) and became a NATO member (Gürel, 2009, p. 64). Meanwhile, foreign aid to the country was established via the “Marshall Plan” which directed loans to mechanization in agriculture; consequently, the 1950s were referred to as the “tractor years” (Batur, 2005, p. 46).

The aim of the new government was to take full advantage of becoming an actor in the international arena. The government hoped to attract tourists to the country and develop its tourism infrastructure and consequently establish an economic growth via a collaboration with the USA. The post-war military and economic aid to Turkey was born out of a partnership: the Retirement Fund Organization of the Turkish Republic signed an agreement with Hilton Hotels International on November 26, 1950 by the decision of Council of Ministers (Tozoğlu, 2007, p. 26). The Hilton Hotel as a hospitality project is significant in the sense of opening to the world and signified the secular Turkey of the Republican manifesto which imagined the country as an ally of the Western World.

The treaty on the construction of the Hilton Hotel was signed on August 9, 1951 by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Hilton Hotels International with the full support of the Turkish government (Altun, 2015, p. 17). The company of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was one of the actors of the second sweep of the International Style during the 1950s, and Istanbul Hilton Hotel was the result of the company's partnership with a contemporary Turkish architect Sedad Hakkı Eldem. This collaboration and the resultant product officially introduced the International Style in architecture for the second time in Turkey. The first phase of international style in Turkey had begun at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s giving birth to "binary oppositions of tradition versus modernity" (Bozdoğan 2001, 62). Due to the precipitousness of the new state to modernize, the solicitation was the trans-nationalization of architecture with globalization (Bozdoğan and Akcan 2012, 50). During the 1930s, German experts had dominated the field while in the second phase of international modernism of the 1950s, American experts had a stronger hold in the industry (Sey 1984, 167).

The Istanbul Hilton Hotel Project was beneficial for both partners. To establish "dominance" in the countries which were under the threat of communism, this project was anticipated by the USA and thus supported by American Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) (Akcan, 2001, p. 38). As envisioned by Conrad Hilton, the dominance of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel in the topography has been nothing but political and it provided a visual and physical control between East and West. According to Hilton, the construction of hotels by Hilton International at critical points in the world was establishing something what satellites and H-bombs could not, and that was being victorious against communism (Hilton, 1958, p. 1; Wharton, 2016, pp. 149–150).

This project defined a new field of modernity via the spread of Americanization in everyday life and architecture while also facilitating the import of construction materials because of the liberalized trade. These developments ensured the consequent revival in the construction sector (Batur, 2005, p. 46). The construction also became an *ecole* of reinforced concrete structures in Turkey (Tozoğlu, 2007, p. 31). Istanbul Hilton Hotel became an exemplary hotel with its construction materials and techniques, architectural forms and spatial relations, its interiors, and furnishings, and more significantly, with an introduction of a new daily life via all these, the hotel changed the entertainment culture in Istanbul. Many other hotel projects followed Hilton's example in Istanbul and the rest of Anatolia, such as the Çınar Hotel, Eskişehir Porsuk Hotel, the Grand Efes Hotel, the Grand Tarabya Hotel, and the hotels at Mount Uludağ (Atmaca Çetin, Tuna Ultav, & Uz, 2019; Tuna Ultav & Savaşır, 2014).

### **Aim and Scope**

Rosenstone states that cinema provides "new ways of thinking about our past" and which may be found unsettling by historians "because they escape the confines of words and provide elements – visual, aural, emotional, subconscious (Guynn, 2006, p. 68; Rosenstone, 1995, p. 235). Films, which reflect their production era, function as memory banks and cinema is the most important artistic tool to historicize the moment and strengthen social memory (Nora, 1996; Ümmetoğlu, 2020, p. 145). As cinema perfectly mimics the passage of time in a single shot and shows the movement of real occurrences in concrete space, it gives the viewer a convincing analogue (Guynn, 2006, p. 72).

Moreover, cinema plays an utmost role in the settlement of the Western civilization to the Eastern countries (Kurtoğlu, 2020, p. 39).

The historical development of *Yeşilçam*, the main film-making industry of Turkey during the twentieth century, paralleled many important events and changes in the country (Hakan, 2008; Teksoy, 2008). The 1950s was tumultuous as there were tensions between Adnan Menderes' Turkey and the secular citizens. During DP governance, alliance between landlords and businessmen were consolidated; liberal economic principles, thus foreign capital was sought after; secular principles were compromised; and collaboration with the United States were favoured rather than independency of the country. This led to reactions and protests by the intelligentsia and eventually ended in a military intervention on May 27, 1960. After this intervention a short-lived democratic expansion introduced the establishment of autonomous Turkish Radio and Television (TRT). In 1960s, the film production increased to 80 per year; further increased to 209 per year after 1967, and to 300 as of 1972 (Teksoy, 2008, p. 42). These years consolidated the foundations of national cinema.

Öztürk (2005, pp. 15–16) discusses the interaction of cinema with cities (as a mechanism of modernity) and says that the city is not simply a decoration or a passive frame but forms the atmosphere of the film narrative. Istanbul is one of the indispensable cities of Turkish cinema; even the national cinema takes its name from one of the streets of this city called *Yeşilçam*. Istanbul Hilton Hotel, one of the most iconographic entities within the city after the Second World War, has also become part of storytelling of *Yeşilçam*, contextualizing its luxury within the socio-political environment of the country.

Istanbul Hilton Hotel has been much discussed in the architectural historiography of Turkey contextualizing reconciliations of East-West, American-Turkish cultures, and rationality-exotiqueness. However, especially after the 1960s with the changing socio-economical and socio-cultural conditions in Turkey, the hotel gained a new role which has yet to be discussed. The formal appearance of the hotel in the city, the experiences offered there and eventually the symbolic meaning of its presence started to incorporate an "anxiety of luxury" for the Istanbul's locals, and this was frequently featured in *Yeşilçam*. The pun on "anxiety" here nods to Akcan's article from 2001.

To exemplify a few of the anxieties, people from proletarian class, who meet in this hotel for the first time, are under the sheer pressure to play "wealthy" to one another or, people, who are in search for a good fortune or seek to find an eligible wealthy bachelor/bachelorette, come to the hotel for such interactions. Moreover, scenes which take place around the hotel and its venues has a refreshing ambiance. All reunions of lovers, happy beginnings and spending quality time during the fortunate days occur in and around the venues of the hotel.

Due to Istanbul Hilton Hotel's such representation in *Yeşilçam* films, these act as essential documentations on hotel's spatial experiences of the immediate environment and interior spaces. They thus present a prominent archive which display information about many factors of social and daily life of the Istanbulians, i.e., both the elite and the proletarian classes of the post-war era. The films provide clues to understand the behaviours of groups and individuals in a specific time and place. These clues are about daily habits and preferences, the routes of the regulars, dressing styles, food consumption patterns, and entertainment (dancing, music) preferences.

The aim of this study is thus to examine the symbolic role of Istanbul Hilton Hotel in the daily life of the city dwellers and especially its importance for the "socialites" and "proletarians" of Istanbul. The experience and perception discrepancies of the lower income and higher income classes will be considered via an analysis of the hotel's portrayal in the *Yeşilçam* films of the specified period: the 1960s and the 1970s. In this context, a new discussion will be introduced in addition to the themes such as "East-

West", "Orientalism-Americanization" and "exotic in comfort" and the hotel will be evaluated contextualizing the "anxiety of luxury, prosperity and wealth."

### **Methodology**

During the 1960s-1970s, the portrayal of Hilton and other Hilton-type grand hotels in Turkish cinema had become a trend. Istanbul Hilton Hotel was one of the very first to be used as a set in Yeşilçam. The hotel's appraisal was to such an extent that its publicity continued even in films which do not form a direct relationship with the hotel itself in the scenario. Even then, the hotel was an element of prominence in the scenes of urban flows, important dialogues, and the fortunate foreshadowing in the scenarios. In the films, the hotel became an iconographic message to symbolize luxury, prosperity, wealth, and so-suggested consequent happiness. In some of the films, the venues of the hotel were used to such an extent that without the Hilton factor, the films lose the fictional integrity.

When the films are analysed according to their decades, during the 1960s and the 1970s, the display of the hotel becomes quite bold and conspicuous while during the 1950s, this trend is quite new, and during the 1980s, the decline obvious. This might be related to the fact that in the 1950s, the hotel was considered a museum piece which could only be experienced by the "distinguished" few, while for the 1980s, the hotel becomes simply another one of the many Hilton-type hotels, thus there is a decline of interest.

Thereby, this study focuses on three films from each salient decade, i.e., the 1960s and the 1970s. Moreover, the study will only focus on the films which altogether provide a comprehensive spatial information of the hotel to discuss all the spaces, spatial relations and the provision of experiences provided to the users. Cases as representatives for evaluation thus include: *Turist Ömer* (Tourist Omer) (Saner, 1964), *Hırsız* (The Thief) (Davudoğlu, 1965), *Ah Güzel İstanbul* (Oh Beautiful Istanbul) (Yılmaz, 1966), *Oyun Bitti* (The Game End) (Elmas, 1972), *Vurgun* (The Profiteering) (Ökten, 1973), *Ne Umduk Ne Bulduk* (What Hoped What Found) (Ökten, 1976).

### **"ANXIETY OF LUXURY" FOR ISTANBULIANS DURING THE 1960s-70s**

After the Cold War, peaceful rapprochements of the East and the West took place in the construction sector and Istanbul Hilton Hotel was one of the resulting products of this collaboration (Batur, 2005, p. 46). The fact that this newly built hotel (despite not meeting the American standards of speedier construction and the deficiencies in the provision of state-of-the-art materials) provided all the technological amenities acquainted by the West has raised new concerns: In Turkey's anxiety of Americanization and the USA's anxiety of establishing a "little America" in the East; the incentive of tourist/consumer in search for "orientalist experience" or "picturesque orientalism" was disregarded (Wharton, 2016, p. 144). To balance this, the final product aimed to combine "civilized, mechanical, rational and progressive West" with "spiritual, exotic, irrational and joyful East" and the dichotomies of "decorative-tectonics", "entertainment-functionality" and "traditional-progressive" were established in one building (Akcan, 2001, p. 42).

For this purpose, the Eastern part of the "reconciliation" was realized by articulation of curved elements and domes onto the modern elements (i.e., the entrance canopy, the bazaar area, the domes of the reception, dining hall named *şadırvan* as a hyperbole of a traditional urban fountain, curved vaults of the roof terrace, etc.) or by placing items with ornamental craftsmanship in interior spaces. Essentially, this is not a successful reconciliation but rather the articulation of the East to the West. Consequently, "compromise of the East and West" remains open to discussion.

The "picturesqueness" has been provided primarily with a panoramic view of the historic Istanbul silhouette experienced within the sanitary luxurious interiors which offer all the comforts of the Western lifestyle. Moreover, this "picturesque orientalism" could only be

acquired through profit-making spaces. In other words, spending money was essential for this experience. Places to spend money included the public spaces such as the lobby bar (*Lalezar Bar*), dining room, dance hall on the roof terrace, and the expensive rooms which present a breath-taking view of the Bosphorus. As Conrad Hilton intended, capitalism was victorious in multiple ways: the “panoramic picturesqueness” was not presented in the service areas and cheaper rooms placed on the side facing the city (Wharton, 2016, p. 144). This victory was often demonstrated in Yeşilçam films contextualizing not only the physical dichotomies but also social ones.

Even though, Turkey was not part of the Second World War, there were critical changes in the socio-political character of the country in the post-war era with the embracement of liberal economy and the removal of importation and exportation barriers in trade. Turkey re-integrated into international trade, resultingly, intense internal migration occurred due to the unemployment of farmers because of mechanization in farming. Eventually, unemployment levels reached a new peak, and the large cities became crowded with unemployed proletarian class. Meanwhile, the wealth of the “already-rich” increased even more with investments as new factories were established with the new machinery brought from abroad.

The gap of social classes thus deepened. This socio-economic discrepancy was often expressed in the Yeşilçam films of the era. In the book *Anayurt Oteli* (Atılgan, 1973) and its film adaptation (Kavur, 1987), the depressions of living in an introverted Anatolian town and its devastated routine life is presented by the impecunious hotel-owner’s internal struggles. These struggles demonstrated a longing for a chance to be part of the big cities. However, those who come to big cities from Anatolian villages began to live in poverty and misery due to unemployment. In the films, laborers seek to escape the poor conditions and found liberation in escaping to a foreign country (*Oyun Bitti*, 1972); people seeking for medical treatments wish to leave for Europe (*Turist Ömer*, 1964), and even the wealthy families desire to settle in Europe and have their children educated there (*Hırsız*, 1965).

However, the distinguished class, which had preserved its status and consolidated its wealth, did not abandon the habitual luxury consumption. At that era, the new trends were followed by two approaches; one of which was to follow projects and practices in architecture and the other was to follow the display of everyday life and the latest fashions in the popular magazines (Batur, 2005, p. 48). Regarding the latter, in the 1950s, “exhibitions, museums, catalogues, fairs, advertisements and films” (Gürel, 2009, p. 54) contributed to the spread of American modernization by presenting examples of modernized houses and their furnishings. As there were many advertisements of women in front of the images of modern architecture during the 1930s; this gender-based consumerism became widespread once again with the second phase of the internationalism during the 1950s and onwards (Bozdoğan, 2001, p. 84). As local alternatives to the American magazine called *American Life*, a variety of journals emerged such as *Millet: ilim-fikir-sanat mecmuası* (Nation: science-idea-art) (1942-44), *Muhit: resimli aylık aile mecmuası* (Neighborhood: monthly family magazine with illustrations) (1928-30), *Yedigün* (Seven days) (1933-46), *Hayat: Haftalık Mecmua* (Life: Weekly Journal) (1956-1965), *Hayat* (Life) (1920s), *Ev-İş* (Home-Work) (1932-52), *Kadın Dünyası* (Woman’s World) (1950s) and *Arkitekt* (1931-80).

Luxury hotel projects also played a conspicuous role in the spread and adoption of the American culture and its lifestyle after the Second World War by promoting interior design, furniture, sanitaryware and other everyday items (Wharton, 2016, p. 141). Prominent buildings such as the Istanbul Hilton Hotel especially set new trends for the new housing and the production of interiors: The use of “Hilton” type derivative sanitaryware and armature started a movement called “Hiltonism” as criticized by Vanlı in 1958 (Vanlı, 1958, pp. 31-32).

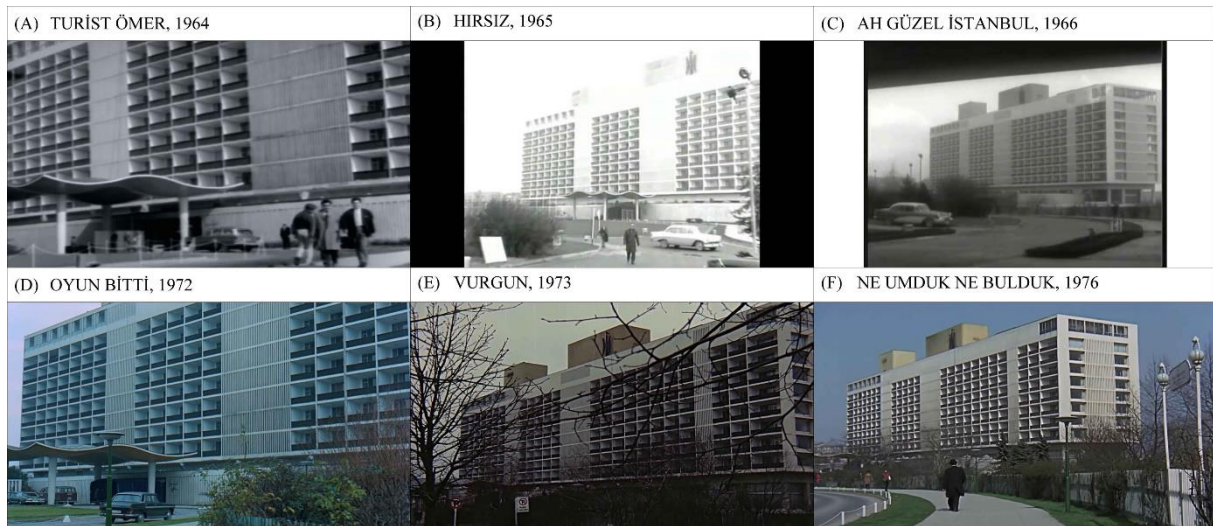


The Istanbul Hilton Hotel not only contributed to the widespread use of modern furniture, furnishing and repetition of the other architectural forms and daily items, but also introduced new entertainment and culinary culture to the social life of Istanbul dwellers. Thereby, Yeşilçam films also portrayed this new culture: The five o'clock tea parties were held in the lobby-bar called *Lalezar Bar* (*Ne Umduk Ne Bulduk*, 1976); and while expensive drinks were served in the luxuries dining halls (*Vurgun*, 1973), casual drinks were served by the poolside (*Turist Ömer*, 1964). One of the fundamental components of American modernization was the “American bar” and its widespread use was not only in the public entertainment spaces but also in the private hotel rooms (*Hırsız*, 1965; *Vurgun*, 1973). Subsequently, the American bar spread to residential architecture as a special corner of hosting guests and socialization (Gürel, 2009, pp. 59–61).

## ISTANBUL HILTON HOTEL IN AN “ANXIETY OF LUXURY” AS PORTRAYED IN YEŞİLÇAM

### The Transition Zone: Canopy, Reception, and the Bazaar

Standing like a giant in the skyline of Istanbul, if the Istanbul Hilton Hotel became part of the scenario or the set in Yeşilçam films, its mass is approached always from the same angle (Figure 1). This angle is caught right after entering the park on the path to the mass of the hotel which appeared like an object displayed in a glass cage. The angle of the mass is soon followed by Sedad Hakki Eldem’s “Flying Carpet” canopy at the entrance. It is a symbolic statement in films that the people who can reach there are privileged as the hotel is no longer witnessed from the city but from proximity.



**Figure 1.** The Mass of Istanbul Hilton Hotel in Yeşilçam.

The magical attraction for the tourists starts at the entrance as the Eldem’s canopy, which creates an exterior-interior purgatory, “welcomes Western guests who are ready to experience the spirit of the Orient” (Tozoğlu, 2007, p. 41) (Figure 2). In Yeşilçam films, this detail was the symbol of the hotel: Even when the main mass was absent, this canopy alone was sufficient to suggest its presence. The moment of entrance in the films, not only acted as a purgatory of exterior-interior but also as a gate to the world of “luxury” with the privileged approach of expensive vehicles, the reception of the “foreign” tourists or only the “distinguished” Istanbul socialites. The expected profile was quite signified with the attendants hindering the approach of the “regular people.”



**Figure 2.** The Canopy as the Transition Zone.

In the 1960s-1970s' zeitgeist, many films of Yeşilçam portrayed ridiculed individuals (villagers or new-money) who did not belong in modern spaces of luxury. These individuals struggled to become part of the high society by trying to learn how to behave in them; and not knowing the etiquette rules of luxurious Western style was considered their fault (after the 1970s, there was a paradigm shift, and then the forgetting of the Anatolian roots was also criticized). The film *Turist Ömer* criticizes this elitist approach of the hotel. Tourist Omer (Sadri Alışık) is a freelance "local" tourist in the city who lives according to his desires without any concerns about life. The basic reason he visits the Istanbul Hilton Hotel is to collect cigarettes because the "best thrown-away cigarette butts" could only be found in the wealthiest hotel in the city (Figure 2a). A dialogue occurs between Omer and the attendant at the entrance of the hotel as he attempts to enter the hotel and the attendant stops him by stating implicitly that he could not enter with "that" clothing criticizing his appearance unfitting (Figure 2b). Answering this, Omer makes a very truthful observation and criticism: "You would let me in if I was a foreign tourist, you do not let me in because I am a local one."

Accidentally finding himself in the ownership of real money, Omer becomes exactly what he criticizes: He makes his first visit to the Istanbul Hilton Hotel and meets with the same attendant again. Seeing his new expensive car and "classy" friends, the attendant starts talking in French with him, however Omer once again corrects him by stating that he is a "local" tourist and not a "foreign" one. To demonstrate his "local-foreignness", before going in, he struggles with the revolving door which is parodied as a symbol of luxury and technology (Figure 2c). The sliding/revolving door struggle, which has been constantly parodied in the films such as Charlie Chaplin's *The Cure* (1916) and Jacques Tati's *Play Time* (1967) and many others, was also re-enacted in Yeşilçam films as a criticism of discomforts of modern architecture despite its claims to provide comfort in simplicity and rationality.

Money and Hilton name are adumbrated with each other. In the film *Hırsız* (The Thief), Selma (Fatma Girik) wants to meet her estranged father. With her mother Güner (also

Fatma Girik), they are hosted by the father Osman Türker (Sadri Alışık), who, embarrassed of his devastated condition, acts as a wealthy businessman to impress his daughter. Once again, there is a struggle to play the wealthy “local” tourist. The only place he could accommodate his family is no other place but the Istanbul Hilton Hotel as the symbol of luxury, wealth, and prosperity.

In the film, the entrances and exits are quite frequent, and the most eminent events take place at the entrance before the canopy (Figure 2d-g). Selma introduces her boyfriend to her father for the first time – albeit accidentally – here; Osman, followed by the police, takes his daughter out for the last time on a trip to Istanbul; and after the theft, he confronts the police beneath the canopy. The canopy signifies the important events as it signifies the hotel itself.

Occasionally, the cubic blocks at the entrance to the hotel’s site form thematic scenes. These act like towers marking the gates of a citadel, forming a barrier between the hotel and the city. It is here, with the reflected mass of the hotel on the glass facades at the background, Selma questions her boyfriend’s absence from the hotel to which he replies: “I do not have a billionaire father like you do, not everyone does” (Figure 2g). This demonstrates that the hotel cannot be experienced by the “common” people; and the reflections of the hotel remain as glimpses of its luxuries to an outsider as signified with this scene.

The reception and the galleries of the main entrance floor has often been used as a stage in Yeşilçam films of the 1960s-1970s. This volume below the main accommodation mass beholds the reception, vertical circulation (the elevator shafts) and social gathering areas. Due to the widespread use of glass curtain walls, all these spaces provide the panoramic view of the historic Istanbul on one side, and on the other side, the greenery from the inner courtyard of the *bedesten* (bazaar area) flow into the space. Without the load bearing walls, the space is fluid and with the large windows, it is bright, perceived voluminous.

Perhaps the discussion of “the balanced East and West” is most evident at the reception and the bazaar. The white rectangular slab has been defiantly cut into circular shafts, and from these subtractions, lead-coated small domes emerge holding the lighting fixtures. Nonetheless, these oriental details are balanced with technical equipment and contemporarily modern materials: The entrance hall, waiting room, lobby bar (*Lalezar Bar*) and the terrace on the ground floor are completely paved in marble, the window frames are of aluminium and the door frames of the service areas are in steel (“Turistik Otel,” 1952, p. 61).

On the other hand, the ambiance of the reception is quite nostalgic with the warmth of the widespread use of timber panelling and thus removes the desolation of the voluminous space. However, this space is only a transitional space. In the transition from this place to the main mass, marble covered walls and steel elevators appear, and the change in the use of materials provide a sharp contrast to the reception with the cold technological aesthetics of the elevators and the white marble cladding of the walls.

The contrasts of the reception and elevator galleries elaborate a threshold from bad fortune to a good one. In the film *Ah Güzel İstanbul* (Oh! Beautiful Istanbul), traveling photographer Haşmet İbriktaroğlu (Sadri Alışık) provides a shelter to Ayşe (Ayla Algan), a villager girl from Anatolia who escaped to Istanbul to become a singer. He helps her to get a job as a singer by introducing her to his friend in the industry. Eventually, after her first performance, Ayşe’s singing in her “authentic Anatolian” character draws attention.

From that point on, Ayşe, rapidly climbing the steps of fame, stays at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel (Figure 3). Reaching the status of the “distinguished” class, her fast rise of class is symbolically summarized in the film as she, in her new clothes and with a spaniel dog as



a showpiece of her wealth, rapidly walks through the revolving door, passes the long lobby, and gets on the elevators (Figure 3a-c). This is a parody of the magazine news (*Hayat* magazine's 49<sup>th</sup> issue in 1957) commercializing a tourist who entered the hotel with an spaniel dog in a bag and the sensation it created (Yavuz, 2015, pp. 68–131). The revolving door of the hotel symbolizes a threshold for Ayşe in the transition from her devastated life to becoming a successful and famous vocal artist. Meanwhile, Haşmet, who remains poor, gets out of her life.



**Figure 3.** *Ah Güzel İstanbul*, 1966. The Reception.

However, her fall from grace comes soon as her authentic Anatolian style quickly becomes demode. After seeking Haşmet's help and having been rejected by him, she returns to the hotel, depressed. At the reception, the attendants remind her of the debt (Figure 3d-h). From that point on neither the luxury, prosperity, and wealth that the hotel represents, and the life she had sought, pleases her. Her fall from grace was even faster than her rise and the same threshold is passed on a stretcher after her suicide. The farewell to the hotel occurs before the wall with the inscription of Istanbul Hilton Hotel quite clear (Figure 3i), symbolizing the end of her glorious life: The Hilton phase is over.

Trickery becomes the main theme in many films which demonstrate the struggle to become part of the luxury. In the film *Vurgun* (the Profiteering), con artist Prince Ertuğrul (Cüneyt Arkın), newly released from prison, is assigned by the mafia network to win the heart of the vocal artist Gönül (Gönül Yazar) and deceive her to confiscate her fortune. For this job, a hotel room at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel is booked. The hotel offers a bazaar area to its customers where the stores of the bazaar are gathered around the inner courtyard, and the corridors surrounding the courtyard are crowned with lead domes, like the reception area, thus resembling the domed closed bazaars; i.e., *bedesten* of Istanbul. This bazaar provides all kinds of shops such as milliner, antique shop, bank, barber, and a beverage shop as the hotel aims to provide for all the needs of its customers without a visit to the city. The facades of these shops (like in the waiting hall) are covered with Kütahya tiles ("Turistik Otel," 1952, pp. 59–61) (Figure 4). The preparation of Ertuğrul

and his crew starts at the barber of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, thus the realm of Hilton opens its gates to him and his crew.



**Figure 4.** *Vurgun*, 1973. The Bazaar and the Barber Shop.

### Smoke and Mirrors: First Encounters and the Galleries

The galleries and elevators, as zones of transition and passing, becomes venues of first encounters. In the film *Oyun Bitti* (The Game Ends), mechanic Doğan (Cüneyt Arkın) and singer Zeynep (Filiz Akın) meet for the first time in the elevator gallery of one of the accommodation floors (Figure 5a-b). The hotel symbolizes a hopeful new beginning for the couple as from that point on, in an anxiety of luxury, they start playing the role of socialites. The elevator they share halts due to a power failure. Doğan, already accustomed to his role, to show off his wealth and experience abroad, belittles the hotel by saying "Such things frequently happen in this hotel." This is an attempt to display his "sophisticated lifestyle" by adumbrating his European experiences via emphasizing that in the European hotels no such occurrences take place. However, the Istanbul Hilton Hotel proves him wrong as the generators soon activate, after all, as stated in the hotel's construction report: The hotel includes a 200 hp diesel safety generator that automatically switches on during power failures ("Turistik Otel," 1952, p. 62). As they say farewell, Doğan gets on his client's state-of-the-art car under the "Flying Carpet" canopy which consolidates his wealth in the eyes of Zeynep.



**Figure 5.** The Gallery Space and the Elevators.

In the film *Ne Umduk Ne Bulduk* (What Hoped, What Found), a mother-daughter duo (Adile Naşit and Gülşen Bubikoğlu) meet Doğan (Aytaç Arman) at the elevator gallery. He is a mechanic who upon this meeting feels to urge to play a rich businessman. Once again, the elevators of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel physically and symbolically connect people and force them to act in an anxiety of wealth (Figure 5).

The hotel's elevator galleries provide all the amenities of the contemporary technology. With the metallic doors, buttons, and lights; regardless of the décor of the place, the

exposed technical equipment is associated with luxury (Figure 5-df). Meanwhile, inside the elevator, contrasting the galleries, there is a different atmosphere almost evoking grotesque interiors. The mirror also increases this effect with its golden gilded frame. The enrichment of the décor demonstrate that the metallic surfaces were not considered enough to demonstrate the luxury as the dilemma of the exotiqueness and rationalism is omnipresent. As they get out of the elevator at the entrance level, the transition from the cold elevator gallery to the warmth of the timber panelled reception (the same dilemma) symbolizes the beginnings of a warm interaction between the couple and foreshadows a good fortune. The so-called wealth of the mechanic becomes consolidated in the eyes of the mother and daughter with the delivery of a state-of-the-art car to him under the canopy. Hilton as a site of anxiety of luxury force this young couple of proletarian class, namely Zeynep and Doğan, into the role of socialites.



**Figure 6.** The Waiting Hall.

In *Vurgun*, the first encounter takes place at the elevator gallery of the reception floor (Figure 5c). Once again, this gallery has been used as a place of encounters when the reality is hidden under the mask of wealth. In fact, there is hardly a moment when the “silent role of playing the distinguished class” does not occur in the elevators or its galleries. Before the initial encounter with Ertuğrul, Gönül and her attendant leave the lobby. The lobby is subtly adorned with orientalist influences: The south wall of the waiting room was designed by Sedat Hakkı Eldem as an abstracted tile wall which refers to traditional Seljuk/Ottoman/Turkish architecture in forms referencing the classical turquoise *Kütahya* tiles (Tozoğlu, 2007, p. 43) and thus creates an effect that suppresses the entire space (“Hotel in Istanbul,” 1955, pp. 240–246) (Figure 6). Due to Eldem’s infamous turquoise wall’s dominance in this space, turquoise and blue tones are preeminent in furnishings. The blue carpets with exaggeratingly enlarged Turkish *kilim* patterns as the flooring; comfortable low sofas of deep blue fabric (resembling *sedirs*); large plants in pots and giant lampshades; the silk curtains softening the glass facades; all these provide the ambiance of a giant residential living room (Figure 6b). The “Turkish coffee service” is provided in this space which became indispensable to provide an experience of the Orient. This service triggered a new occupancy as the “beautiful coffee caterer” (*Kahveci Güzeli*) who serves the traditional welcoming coffee in traditional costume, mostly performed by young women (Altun, 2010, p. 90, 2015, p. 39). In *Oyun Bitti*, the mechanic Doğan delivers the car keys to its rich owner as he receives this service (Figure 6a), an experience bought as part of the sold oriental experience.

### **Hybridism: Entertainment in Hilton’s Luxurious Venues**

Hybridism of design and function is most preeminent in the spaces of entertainment: the American consumption behaviours are served in “oriental” package while some Anatolian traditions of consumption are articulated in spaces of modernity.

The Americanization project would be incomplete without the introduction of poolside pleasures of the American suburbs in the Istanbul Hilton Hotel. Poolside pleasures and parties in the summer months and even in the intermediate seasons were experienced



here by the “distinguished” class of Istanbul and these gatherings were constantly advertised in the magazines of the period like *Hayat*’s 20<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> issues in 1957 (Yavuz, 2015, pp. 68–131). This pool and terrace designed in the shape of the famous footprint has thence been the set of many Yeşilçam films.

In the film *Turist Ömer*, the protagonist – a local tourist who is quite foreign to this new poolside luxury – is treated like a gentleman in his accidental wealth. He enjoys the poolside pleasures as he sips his drink and chats with his friends (Figure 7). For payment, he has an intrinsic struggle to tip the waiter more handsomely (than he ever would) and fixes his initial tip, demonstrating an anxiety to spend more money. His disbursement habits are thus shaped by the hotel, whereas the viewer has no doubt that he would go back to his previous behaviours outside the hotel.



**Figure 7.** *Turist Ömer*, 1965. The Poolside Pleasures.

In the interiors, hybridism become more prevalent. In *Oyun Bitti*, the couple agree to meet for the first time in the lobby bar of the hotel called *Lalezar Bar* (Figure 8). In Yeşilçam, this place has become indispensable as the meeting place of the Istanbulian socialites. The luxurious orientalist details are most assertive here. Also known as the “Tulip Room” (*Lale Odası*), it was referred to as the harem due to its initial function as the women’s gathering space during the 1950s (Gürel, 2009, p. 56; Tozoğlu, 2007, p. 45). As of the 1960s, this space started to function as the *Lalezar Bar*. The dual language of the space, i.e., the contemporary Americanized bar function disguised in the Orient, was much favoured by both local and foreign tourists. The marketed experience also worked both ways. Drinking at the bar and five o’clock tea parties were consumed by the local tourists; whereas the services of Turkish coffee and “narghile” cocktails provided the intense experience of the Orient for the foreign ones.

In this space, the historicist approach is exaggeratingly visible from the elements bearing Ottoman/Islamic characteristics. The oriental identity that “exoticizes” the space is provided by the décors, furniture, and interior design. Even though in the display of the modern architecture in media, the windows are usually covered with curtains to create a stage effect (Colomina, 2020, p. 255); in the scenes of the *Lalezar Bar*, the silk curtains – stretching from the ceiling to the floor – are pushed aside, and the magnificent view of the Bosphorus with its “oriental picturesqueness” is displayed (Figure 8c).

The scenes locating the couple in *Oyun Bitti* at one of the most prestigious spots of the lobby bar is displayed from different angles by placing *şadırvan*, an oriental urban fountain, at the very centre of this spatial organization (Figure 8a-b). In *Vurgun*, similar venues are displayed as the couple arrange a first date in the *Lalezar Bar* before the *şadırvan* (Figure 8d). The fountain piece is framed by silvery gold columns, connected to decorative arches with adorned pediments, all falsely act to bear a lead dome. It appears that the extent of ornaments could not be efficacious enough for the provision of the intended oriental appearance. *Sedir* circumscribes this fountain, and the proliferation of seating units and coffee tables of the entire space start from this central piece. Here, Ertuğrul, who wants to impress Gönül by talking about his wealth, receives a (fake) phone call about his large budget works abroad, meanwhile, Gönül sips her Turkish coffee (Figure 8e). The instance of talking about foreign affairs while drinking Turkish coffee is the reflection of the character of the society and its spatial petrification



eclecticized by the Eastern and Western cultures, while the anxiety of luxury and wealth is also apparent by the discussions on the phone.

This fountain is not the only element belonging to the Orient in the *Lalezar Bar*. Even on the suspended ceiling above the bar area, the fringe decoration used in the fountain continues, and bronze oriental lanterns like Alaaddin's lamp are hung from the ceiling (Zat, 2005, pp. 238–239) (Figure 8d). In this orientalism, the "American bar" has not lost its place nor the piano which was placed at the focal point as an object expressing the Western social stance (Gürel, 2009, p. 48). Despite these, the bar culture has its share of orientalism. The gilded columns behind the bar, the abstracted stalactite panels, and the golden Ottoman motifs behind the bar chairs ("eye" or "tulip" abstraction) even mark the bar as oriental (Figure 8d).

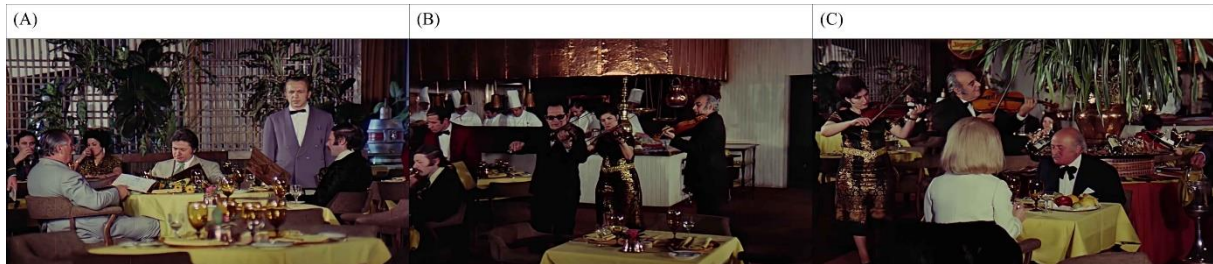


**Figure 8.** The *Lalezar Bar*.

"Five o'clock tea parties" became popular in the *Lalezar Bar* and had an eminent place in the daily life of the Istanbulian socialites. The regulars who wanted to make a statement was thus dressed "elaborately" between four and seven in the afternoon, and spent time here (Altun, 2010, p. 72, 2015, p. 89). In the film *Ne Umduk Ne Bulduk*, the mother (Adile Naşit) decides to benefit from her daughter Zeynep's beauty (Gülşen Bubikoğlu) to find an eligible wealthy bachelor. Their search begins at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel where the high society gathers. Consequently, Zeynep and her mother joins the "five o'clock tea party" at the *Lalezar Bar* (Figure 8f). While the most effective architectural element of the space is the oriental urban fountain, the anxiety of luxury incomparably prevails. While enjoying their afternoon tea, the mother-daughter duo overhear that the socialites are vacationing in Mount Uludağ - the ski resort - and decide to go there. Mount Uludağ was the centre of skiing during the 1960s and 1970s as a place to be explored, experienced, and consumed (Inal, 2019, pp. 80–85). Identified with the upper income classes, the winter leisure activities of the socialites were also rendered in the Yeşilçam films of the period (Avcı Hosanlı & Şumnu, 2023 [online first 2021]).

In *Vurgun*, the couple further continue to experience the luxurious amenities of the hotel. Luxurious dining at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel as represented in Yeşilçam films is a privilege of the few. The dining hall with a capacity of 850 customers, located below the entrance level, opens directly to the terrace. This hall, due to an advantage of the sloped topography, also offers a view of the Bosphorus. Meanwhile, the kitchens, storage and service units of the dining halls are gathered on the city front ("Turistik Otel," 1952, p. 61). It can be argued that there is a calculated balance of the East and the West in the dining hall's spatial organization and furnishings. The partition panels and suspended timber ceiling resemble Eldem's interpretations adopted from the Turkish houses' timber

window grills (Figure 9a). However, in its spatial organization, the open kitchen space is in accordance with the American dining culture (Figure 9b). Despite this spatial relation, its decoration once again speaks Eastern with the pediment of the suspended ceiling in gilded embroidered floral and tulip motifs. Moreover, despite the simplicity of the seating units, the prefoliation of the chairs and tables in the space are once again around an abstracted domesticated urban fountain at the centre which functions as a service unit for the dishes (Figure 9c). Once again, the anxiety of luxury prevails. It is in this dining hall, Ertuğrul acts pretentious: He encounters with the waiter through an intermediary translator; the waiter approaches him in a foreign language (once again he is treated as a “foreign” tourist); and he jests by ordering the violin concerto to Gönül’s table.



**Figure 9.** *Vurgun*, 1973. The Dining Hall.

### **The Peak of Luxury Only Experienced by the Privileged Few: The Private Rooms**

In *Hırsız*, a considerable amount of screen time of the film takes place in the rooms of the hotel. Even though the entertainment spaces are experienced by all, the amenities provided by the hotel rooms are only experienced by the distinguished few (Figure 10).

In the hotel rooms of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, all comforts of the West are provided. Each room has its own private bathroom, and these bathrooms include sanitaryware designs which would soon be named by the socialites as “Hilton wash basin”, “Hilton water closet”, “Hilton shower cabin” and these Hilton-type models were to be demanded in residential interiors. In the bathrooms, the newest and first-class products were used such as chrome fixtures, bright enamel bathtub, a large counter holding the wash basin that can also be used as a dressing table, flush toilets, bidets with shower, and even a third tap in the wash basins to serve ice-cooled water (“Turistik Otel,” 1952, p. 62).

The rooms designed as studios are used as living rooms during the day and as bedrooms at nights (“Turistik Otel,” 1952, pp. 56–59). Not alien to the usage of the rooms (*oda*) in the traditional Anatolian houses, American cultural elements were integrated to the rooms such as the “American bar” which became indispensable for the entertainment of the guests. This element soon became quite common in residential interiors and the hotel once again proved to be the trendsetter and a tool for the spread of the American culture and consumerism (Gürel, 2009, pp. 59–61).

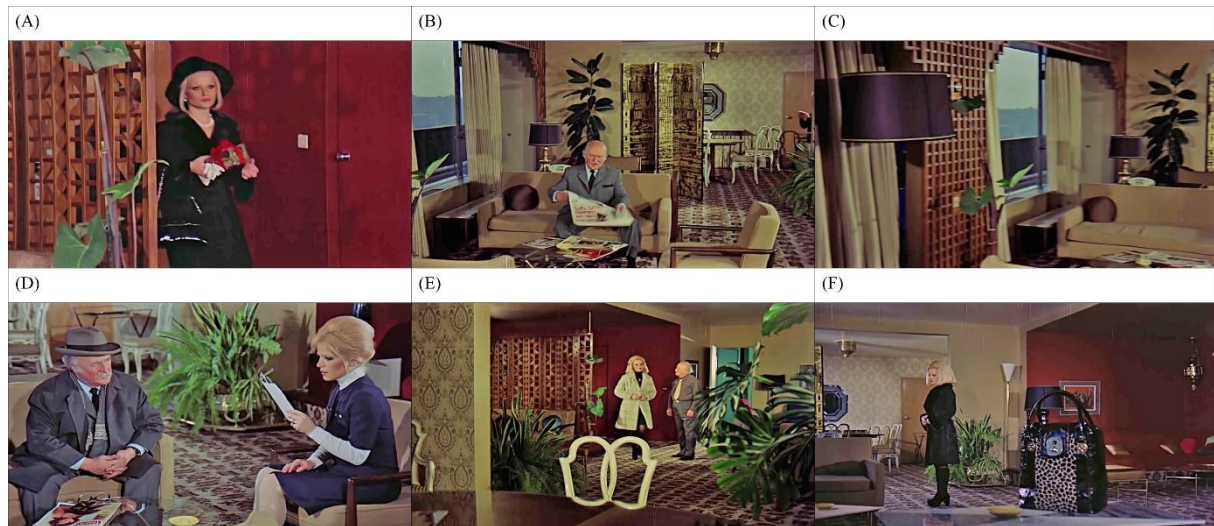


**Figure 10.** *Hırsız*, 1965. The Private Hotel Rooms.

The hotel's rooms are accessed with automatically controlled card key systems in double-wing aluminium cased doors (Altun, 2015, p. 43). Each room is equipped with two separate telephone lines where one connects to the administration of the hotel while the other connects to a variety of services provided by the hotel ("Turistik Otel," 1952, p. 63). Güner, the mother in *Hırsız*, is constantly portrayed using this distinguished communication means without leaving the room throughout the film, preferring the comforts of the hotel to the city (Figure 10d).

The hybridism of function and design is also apparent in the rooms. For example, as the scenes from *Hırsız* demonstrate, the American bar is crowned with contemporized Alaaddin's lamps (Figure 10a) and the partition panels in the rooms are in the forms referring to Eldem's inspirations from Turkish house window railings (Figure 10g-i). Hybridism is also witnessed in the room scenes of the film *Vurgun*. The same partition panels are once again placed at the entrance of Gönül's room (Figure 11), and these panels also frame the windows as the view of the Bosphorus penetrates the room amongst these (Figure 11b-c). As observed, despite all the contemporary amenities, the most astonishing aspect of the rooms is still the panoramic view of Istanbul in its "oriental picturesqueness" (Figure 10c, 10e, 10k, 11b and 11c).





**Figure 11.** *Vurgun*, 1973. The Private Hotel Rooms.

Hybridism is further witnessed via furniture. Simple-and-refined and oriental furniture are seen together in the rooms. As observed from *Vurgun*, while the seating units are low, simple, and comfortable; the dining room set has a classical language with elaborate wood carved furniture (Figure 11). The large motifs of the carpets are still the exaggerated Turkish *kilims* (as of the other public spaces of the hotel, i.e., waiting hall and galleries) and the golden hues are omnipresent.

The most eminent plot twists occur in the hotel rooms: The money transfer takes place where “money matters,” that is, at the Istanbul Hilton Hotel as the symbol of capitalism (Figure 10-11). In *Vurgun*, the bag filled with money is purposely placed at the centre of the room and the focus of the camera lens (Figure 10f). The opportunities that these transfers promise to offer are exactly what the hotel offers to its customers: comfort, luxury, wealth, and “culture” which – assumedly – could only be obtained with money and the film provides an ironic criticism to this issue.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, Istanbul Hilton Hotel, which has been a subject to frequent discussions due to its importance in the architectural historiography of Turkey, is analysed and evaluated in a new scope: via the lens of Yeşilçam. This approach provides an alternative way of looking at a significant architectural product from the perspective of daily usage and consumption patterns. The films portray interactions of people in the interior spaces and venues of the hotel and narrate the consequent experience. This approach inferentially re-evaluates the hotel’s position in design history by providing a supplementary archive to the previous ones.

The portrayal of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel in Yeşilçam films became a literal and symbolic representation of a lifestyle. The interactions were documented in different scales of physical approach from the immediate environment to spatial relations and to the perception of individual interior spaces and décor. The films not only became essential archives to document architectural spaces, but their rendering also provided the means to analyse the “Eastern-Western”, “Americanization-exotiqueness”, “orientalism-modern” dichotomies and their translation into “luxury-devastation” dichotomy during the period of analysis.

The films demonstrate the meaning of the name “Hilton” in the socio-cultural environment of the contemporary Istanbul in the 1960s-1970s. This is established by focalizing the emotions, i.e. anxieties, triggered in the minds of Istanbul dwellers by the name and the consequent behaviours. All films demonstrate that the hotel became a tool



to display the social stratification of the distinguished and proletarian classes; and the attempt of the latter to become the former.

Contextualizing the scenarios of the films and the venues of the hotel, luxury and wealth were adumbrated with the American consumption habits packaged in the Orient. This caused "anxiety" for the users of the proletarian class. It can be argued that the cause of "anxiety" for the "local" tourists was related to the avant-garde approach of the hotel and not to the unfamiliar design language of Modernism, since the country was introduced to the modernist buildings since the 1930s. Moreover, despite the promise of break with the tradition by the modernist agenda, the provision of luxurious spaces and contemporary amenities packaged in the Orient - the hybridism of form against function - might have caused this anxiety. The consumption patterns were new, but they were disguised in a familiar historicist approach which was also no longer part of the locals' daily life. Whereas the will to experience the technologies, interiors, the décor, and the furniture of the hotel, and to imitate these (and to be the first to catch up with the trends) in the residential interiors caused an "anxiety" for the users of the distinguished class. While the rendering of these phenomenon in the Yeşilçam films encouraged the longing for luxury/prosperity/wealth; the same rendering provided criticism, initially with parody and eventually with irony.

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