

**BETWEEN MODERN TRABZON AND ANCIENT TREBIZOND:  
THE RESURRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL AUTHOR  
IN MACAULAY'S *THE TOWERS OF TREBIZOND***

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**ABSTRACT**

Ostensibly being a travel account, Rose Macaulay's *The Towers of Trebizond* presents a character who resurrects from the ashes of the ancient city. This paper argues that even though this novel can be read as a travelogue, the female protagonist of the narrative is a representation of the historical author and that the central character, Laurie, nourished on the real experiences of her author, reveals to be the narrative voice of Macaulay. This fictional narrative employs autobiography to provide seriousness to the satiric comedy of the travellers and recurrently refers to the ancient city to revive the sense of fantasy and colourful imagination. The author compares young Laurie to the ancient Trebizond while she associates her present state with the decayed contemporary Trabzon, thereby exploring beyond the limits of mere autobiography. This paper, therefore, after reviewing its social vision or biographical references, eventually yet mainly aims to focus on the central character's "unified archetypal dream" of the ancient Trebizond.

**Keywords:** The Towers of Trebizond, Rose Macaulay, semi-autobiographical fiction.

**MODERN TRABZON İLE ANTİK TREBİZOND ARASINDA:  
MACAULAY'IN *TRABZON HİSARLARI* ADLI ESERİNDE  
TARİHSEL (GERÇEK) YAZARIN İZLERİ**

**ÖZ**

Görünürde bir gezi romanı olan Rose Macaulay'ın *Trabzon Hisarları* (*Trabzon Kuleleri*) adlı eseri, antik Trabzon kentinin küllerinde

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kendini arayan ve o küllerde yeniden doğan bir karakteri ele almaktadır. Romanda otobiyografinin, geziye katılmış karakterlerin komik ve satirik hikayelerine daha derin bir ciddiyet kazandırarak amacıyla kullanıldığı, ve aynı zamanda antik kentin (Trebizond) fantezi ve renkli imgelemi canlandığı görülür. Yazar inancını ve fantezisini yitirmemiş masum karakteri antik Trabzon'a benzetirken, günümüzdeki halini o eski şaşaaından eser kalmamış modern Trabzon ile kıyaslar. Dolayısıyla, bu makale Trabzon Hisarları her ne kadar bir gezi romanı olarak okunabilirse de, karakterin tecrübesini, iç dünyasını ve imgelemine antik Trabzon dolayımında araştıran, kafası karışık ve belirsizliklerin ağındaki modern insanı çağdaş Trabzon aracılığıyla betimleyen yarı-otobiyografik bir kurgudur. Bu çalışma, anlatının sosyal vizyonu ve biyografik göndermelerinin ötesinde, özellikle ana karakterin zihninde canlandığı ve kendisiyle özdeşleştirmeye çalıştığı ideal "arketipsel antik Trabzon'a" odaklanmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Trabzon Kuleleri*, Rose Macaulay, Yarı-otobiyografik Roman, Gezi Romanı.

*And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.  
O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall...*  
William Butler Yeats

*I live now in two hells...*  
Rose Macaulay

*The meanings [of Towers of Trebizond]  
are as transcendently elusive as Trebizond itself.*  
Jan Morris

This article, by investigating autobiographical details pertaining to the serious issues raised by Rose Macaulay (1881-1958) seeks to answer how the pervasive attention addressed to the novel so far has been centred mostly on its comic visions of travel writing or autobiographical features<sup>1</sup> as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Cindy Huggins reviews such biographical data about Rose Macaulay: "The daughter of a literature professor. Rose was descended from a long line of reputable English families, including the Macaulays, Conybeares, Trevelyans, Arnolds, Huxleys, and Vaughans. The historian Lord Macaulay was her and father's cousin. Much of Rose's childhood was spent with her parents and five siblings in the Italian coastal village of Varazze, where they lived in the hope of improving

Macaulay's somewhat ambivalent inner conflicts. Revisiting the narrative of *Trebizond*, Macaulay's ironic treatment of adventurous zealous Aunt Dot, Father Chantry Pigg and the quirky Anglican Missions society is observed to mix comic and tragic aspects of life. The travelling team along the Black Sea Region dreams of fulfilling a mission of emancipating Turkish women with the help of a vision of freedom offered by the Modern West and the Anglican church, manifested by hats, tea parties, education, and other surface stuff patterns. Brooke Allen in his "On the Road and Off the Wall" states that the novel "brings together several of Macaulay's abiding interests: exotic travel, liturgical disputation, Church history, and ancient ruins."<sup>2</sup> Allen, with reference to Macaulay, also underlines the fact that Macaulay "[has] a passion for *mélange* and the fantastically impure."<sup>3</sup> The character is seen to have a constant view of the ancient past, "deftly peel[ing] away the centuries" and the reader is invited to see the old Trebizond and the modern Trabzon through the character's eyes. The novel, told in the first person, gives an impression of a travel-book, also having some farcical elements. The novel's farcical elements may keep the readers from penetrating into its serious core and that the protagonist experiences a spiritual quest. Laurie is seen, however, on the verbally polished surface to have set off a journey with intimate yet narrow-minded comrades:

Long involved in an adulterous affair, she feels herself closed off from the Anglican Church but is unable to turn back on it. Here Macaulay, who was involved for twenty years with a married man, writes from experience. Father Chantry-Pigg, who "believed everything, from the Garden of Eden to the Day of Judgment," represents the ridiculous side of the creed; so does Aunt Dot, who urges her niece never to be narrow-minded but always to remember, of course, "that *we are right*."<sup>4</sup>

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her mother's poor health. An incurable tomboy. Rose loved swimming and playing along the shore, and it was here in Varazze that she resolved that she wanted to be a sailor when she grew up, a hope that she never completely surrendered. After completing her studies at Oxford, Rose spent several unhappy years living at home with her parents, before moving to London. Once in London, however, she quickly found her place as the center of literary society, becoming close friends with a variety of writers including, among others, Rupert Brooke, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Storm Jameson, and the Nicolson. In addition to her work as a journalist and broadcast debater on BBC, Rose Macaulay was the author of thirty-six books, including twentythree novels, a critical biography, five books of criticism and essays, four books of history and travel, two volumes of poetry, and an anthology. *The Towers of Trebizond* (1956) is generally considered her masterpiece." Cindy Huggins, "Rose Macaulay", *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 37, Number 3, 1994, pp. 366-367.

<sup>2</sup> Brooke Allen in his "On the Road and Off the Wall" in (Atlantic Review). "On the Road and off the Road," *The Atlantic Monthly* (2003), Web: Nov. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

She has nothing to do with such narrow-mindedness, considering the Anglican Church “a wonderful and most extraordinary pageant of contradictions” and she has a desire eventually to be “inside it.” So, the narrative, states Alice Crawford, represents “a personal quest for wholeness.”<sup>5</sup> Almost the same idea is emphasized when the protagonist is said to be on the trail of exploring “the nature of the good” and in search of “wholeness and pattern in life.”<sup>6</sup> However, suggests Hein with reference to Emery, hers is “a voice from the edge, not from the convicted center, of Christian faith.”<sup>7</sup> Crawford further suggests, the readers “cannot miss her interest in religious experience, ritual and religious social grouping”<sup>8</sup> and can have a tendency to think that *The Towers of Trebizond* is “a culmination of these interests and a deeply personal statement.”<sup>9</sup> Jan Morris, similarly, conceives of the book as a reflection of “temper of thought,” “social class” and “style of humour.”<sup>10</sup> Robert Kuehn stresses that *The Towers of Trebizond* blends “farce, passion and faith” in an oddly fashion.<sup>11</sup>

So, *The Towers of Trebizond* is a novel that mirrors a blend of the stormy past of its author and the present of its protagonist. Turning to her own experiences in love and religion, Macaulay formed a character that serves as her second self and her fictional representation. As the main figure of the book, Laurie, a young woman that accompanies to her old aunt in her journey to the north-eastern Turkey, represents the persona and the fictionalized self of Macaulay from the beginning to the end of the novel. Reliving the identical misfortunes Macaulay had to confront within the past, Laurie reacts in the same way as her owner did and thus elucidates the fact that she has the traces of Macaulay's character in her own personality. Guerinot states that

Her heroines [...] agree with Raphael that “In loving thou dost well, in passion not,” but can find no answer to their grievous plight. Nor can Rose Macaulay, nor can we. The wit, the grace, the poise, the intelligence of high civilization is built on shifting sands, as the ruins she so loved everywhere triumphantly display.<sup>12</sup>

According to Guerinot, Macaulay presents “a kind of disciplined lunacy

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<sup>5</sup> Alice Crawford, review [*Paradise Pursued: The Novels of Rose Macaulay*, Fairleigh Dickinson Uni. Press, 1995] in *Notes and Queries*, issue: March 1996, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Hein, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Jan Morris, (Introduction), *The Towers of Trebizond*. by Rose Macaulay. p.vi.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Kuehn, “Fiction Chronicle.” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 5.2 (1964), p.80; Web: Dec. 2012.

<sup>12</sup> J. V. Guerinot, “The Pleasures of Rose Macaulay.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 33.1 (1987), pp. 112-113.

which is also an investigation of the gravest problems of belief, a serious call to a sober and devout life.”<sup>13</sup>

What happens in *The Towers of Trebizond* from a synoptic perspective? The eccentric travellers aunt Dot and the Reverend Hugh Chantrey-Pigg and Laurie take a journey to the Eastern Black Sea region with an Anglo-Catholic mission. These confused yet imaginative, cheerful and romantic, bigot and ridiculous trio progresses towards the eastern border where aunt Dot and Father Hugh disappear quietly. Behind the Iron Curtain are the Caspian, the Armenian churches and may be some other relics to collect but they failed to return with Laurie, who lonely finds her way to Trabzon. Laurie’s experience in Trabzon lies at the heart of the argument raised in this paper. Particularly in this section Laurie explores her persona and tries to form bonds with the ancient Trebizond and modern Trabzon.

The problem of biographical criticism may bring forth are of consideration in this context since it has certain limitations. As Rimmon-Kenan states, “Of course, the distinction between “fictional” and “nonfictional” is notoriously problematic today.”<sup>14</sup> Even though there is a clear connection between the life of the historical author and the protagonist Laurie, this paper attempts to regard the novel as a narrative overwhelming the mere autobiographical account. The author of Macaulay’s biography [*Rose Macaulay: A Writer's Life*], Cindy Huggins draws attention to biographical criticism with reference to Emery, who admits that “Of course, biographical criticism as a method of reading fiction has serious limitations; it offers little insight into artifice and fails to explain why we are not all novelists.”<sup>15</sup> Huggins questions how she “attempt[s] to present Macaulay's life in the context of her own interpretation of Macaulay's works, to integrate the works -especially the novels- with the biographical and historical facts.”<sup>16</sup> Smith and Watson in “The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists” discuss the issue and foreground the notions of “storytelling” and “identity construction” as they conceive autobiographical telling “performative,” that is, it enacts “self” that makes “I”, the immediate persona. “An ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable,” argue Smith and Watson, rather it is split, fragmented, provisional” as the fragments presented through the pages of *The Towers*. Such mixture (blending and fragmentation), then, becomes more complicated when the attentive reader realizes that it is “a sign with multiple

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<sup>13</sup> Guerinot, p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, “Illness and Narrative,” 2002; quoted in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Eds. J. Phelan, P.J. Rabinovitz, Blackwell, Oxford, 2008, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Cindy Huggins, p.368-369.

<sup>16</sup> Guerinot, p. 122.

referents.”<sup>17</sup> Such unstable and split persona is likely to concern itself in this context with another discussion and can be significant. Huggins refers to Emery’s “three voices” theory may signpost the three distinct voices that can be heard through the pages of *The Towers of Trebizond*. The first voice being heard refers to “comic, social voice, celebrating the joy of life, the triumph of intelligence and courage.”<sup>18</sup> It can be maintained that this is the voice best celebrated by her contemporaries. The second voice, Emery debates, is relatively less heard but evidently more felt by the attentive reader, associated with “a private, emotional voice of inner conflict and anxiety.”<sup>19</sup> This is a “self-questioning” voice linked with the historical author’s real experience (her love affair with a married man, and her departure from -and eventual return to- religious faith), which she “rarely ever spoke.”<sup>20</sup> As for the third voice, it is not concerned with ridiculous social incongruities or individual’s inner conflict, “but instead is a voice of a unified archetypal dream linking the present with past and future ages.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, this paper, after reviewing its social vision or biographical references in the first section, eventually yet mainly aims to focus on the central character’s “unified archetypal dream” of the ancient Trebizond.

As a certain reference to the conventions of the narrative,<sup>22</sup> travel writing provides the author with certain social ridiculous situations to be derided, criticized, parodied or satirized. Moreover, Anglican narrowness is dealt with through this “satirical picaresque.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, travel writings and the social background explored and depicted by them, pave way to the mode of satire as well as narrative description. It can be contended that the author satirizes the idiosyncracies and bigotries of various religious sects with insight. The detailed chronotope of travel and journey in *The Towers of Trebizond* has

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia. “The Trouble with Autobiography: Cautionary Notes for Narrative Theorists” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory* [Collected Articles and Papers] Eds. J. Phelan, P.J. Rabinovitz, Blackwell, Oxford, 2008, p. 357.

<sup>18</sup> Guerinot, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Guerinot discusses, the comments presented by Macaulay in her *PR*, and highlights European interest in the old cities: “who, like all prophets, rejoiced over the ruin of great cities, confident that they had richly deserved their fate, for prophets have believed all large cities to be given over to wickedness, and an abomination in the eyes of the Lord, and no doubt they are right. They have been the most single-minded of ruin-lovers, having no use for cities until they fall, and then rejoicing over the shattered remains in ringing words.” And “Turks she dislikes and Goths, “those disgusting savages who roamed over Europe sacking other people’s cities, who are so praised by German historians, and who ought never to have left the Vistula” (*PR*, pp. 99, 169). (in Guerinot pp. 119-120).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Towers of Trebizond” *New York Review Book Classics*. Online.

been differentiated from the traditional chronotope of adventure, where the characters are portrayed on a temporal level closely attached to its required space where travellers, movements, the landscape replete with imagination, the culture decorated with the colours of food, potion and odour, the spies, the mentally deranged camel (and his unreliable temperament) are all ready to animate humorous situations and ridiculous efforts of an incongruous mission. Particularly, in Jan Morris' terms, "Chantry-Pigg's incense-and-reliquary Anglicanism"<sup>24</sup> and his attitudes towards the clerics of other denominations give rise to comedy in the narrative. The narrator is frequently seen to make fun of the father's "practices and pretensions."<sup>25</sup> At the outset *The Towers* seems a "very funny novel, witty, satirical, and sometimes downright farcical" puts Jan Morris, "nevertheless it is a sad book too. It rises above its own comedy."<sup>26</sup> The travel narrative of Trebizond also houses a character who pursues moments of insight and illumination. Laurie, taking part in this journey, is not seen to escape from faith, but also portrayed as having a strong imagination to revive the ancient city in her mind and fantasy as well as recall gorgeous, beautiful, splendid and magnificent past of the human.

However, taking into consideration the discourse developed through the narrative, it seems possible to carry out a post-colonial reading to foreground the false and biased conviction of the mission that the Muslim women should be enlightened by showing them their way of life is "backwards" and that it is their religion that has been oppressing them under the cover of traditions and false conventions. Aydın, drawing on the attitudes and cliché of the western traveller who conceives of "poor women who are being ill-treated," states, "Rose Macaulay's *The Towers of Trebizond* (1956), is a typical example of exaltation whereas the other one is dramatically humiliated."<sup>27</sup> That the exotic caravan of the mission seeking converts in Anatolia is accompanied by the spies is interesting but what is more interesting in this context is that a Turkish educated woman supports them. Halide shares the mission's perspective that "freeing women from traditional religious bondage" may be helpful.

The author conveys how she feels as well as describing what she sees. In the scenes where she lays comments as well as description and portrayal, she turns into an introspective narrator while she appears to be retrospective narrator when she imagines the ancient Trebizond. This introspective and retrospective narrative, then, "becomes a bewildering montage of story, essays, and digressive comments ranging from the nature and mystery of faith to the

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<sup>24</sup> Morris, p. viii.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> Aydın, Kamil. *Images of Turkey in Western Literature*, Cambridgeshire: The Eothen Press, 1999, p. 122.

habits of those who write travel books.”<sup>28</sup> It is clear that the Levants at the time are all in rage to take a journey into the east, “determined to get their travel book out first.”<sup>29</sup> Aunt Dot is keeping a journal, Laurie continuously makes references to Charles’ and Laurie is recurrently seen to draw illustrations.

But in any case Rose Macaulay was writing fiction, and *The Towers of Trebizond* is a highly unorthodox species of novel. It is true that, in the manner of the time, it sometimes becomes a roman à clef, and hazily identified characters in the narrative must have been easily recognizable to contemporary readers: sometimes indeed real people are named by real names, and need no key at all—Billy Graham for instance, John Betjeman, or Freya Stark. But the tale of it is pure fiction, and pretty wild fiction at that. Dorothea ffoulkes-Corbett, Aunt Dot of the opening line, plans to write her own Turkey book, and sets out from England on a Levantine expedition with her camel and her niece, the narrator. [...] Left behind in Turkey with the camel, the niece, Macaulay’s own imaginative alter ego, wanders fairly aimlessly about the Levant by herself, meeting sundry acquaintances, exploring classical sites, and enduring mildly demanding adventures, before returning to England.<sup>30</sup>

It is observed that Macaulay was herself an adventurous and provincial writer<sup>31</sup> and until the 1950s, as Jan Morris states, Byzantium was a fashionable spot. Morris argues “half the literateurs of England were off writing their Turkey books.”<sup>32</sup> Morris adds, *The Towers* is “in some ways, a great travel book” including “fantasy,” “rich irony,” “self-amusement,” “historical awareness,” “the mingled tolerance and command.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, says Morris, it is an “excellent descriptive writing [], allusive and interpretative.”<sup>34</sup>

“The women carried great bundles and sacks full of things, but the men carried suit-cases with sharp, square corners, which helped them very much in the struggle to get on and stay on the boats, for this was very violent and intense... I thought that women would not stand much chance in a shipwreck, and in the struggle for the boats many might fall in the sea and

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<sup>28</sup> Amy Rambow, “The Towers of Trebizond by Rose Macaulay.” *New York Review Book Classics* (2004) Online.; Also see, the considerate remarks about the foreign travellers in Turkey. “I wonder who else is rambling about Turkey this spring,” wonders Aunt Dot at one point. “Seventh-Day Adventists, Billy Grahamites, writers, diggers, photographers, spies, us, and now the B.B.C.” At times the novel feels as if Macaulay has restaged the mad tea party Writers and comedians have always gotten laughs out of the Englishman abroad (think of the team of Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne in “The Lady Vanishes”). Taylor. Web.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Morris, p. viii.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, Web.

<sup>32</sup> Morris, p. vi.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, pp.vi-vii.

<sup>34</sup> Morris, p. vii.



be forgotten, but the children would be saved all right, for Turks love their children, *even the girls.*" (*TT* ; *italics mine*)

In her descriptive passage of the embarking on the ship, particularly the verbal modifier she uses at the end of the sentence indicates her prejudice, humour and interpretative attempt.

The narrative is also remembered with one of the most striking opening remarks in English fiction: "Take my camel, dear, and "said my aunt Dot, as she climbed down from this animal on her return from High Mass" (*TT* 7) The setting that illustrates the Black Sea coast of Turkey in the 1940s, the story progresses along "the ruins and remnants of a once-vibrant Greek Orthodox culture."<sup>35</sup> The incongruity of the combination and the Mass is indicative of the keen humour and irony of the novel. Macaulay's somewhat subversive discourse carefully departs from the world of eccentric characters and events "slowly to unfold those people and events until their inner significance is revealed, and the culture which generates them brought into alignment with an 'English' perception of the world, while at the same time that 'English' perspective is quietly deconstructed."<sup>36</sup> Of course, the attentive reader will consider "English cultural assumptions"<sup>37</sup> through her wise and witty discourse. The narrator is seen to "observe life with laughing and moist eyes, and her observations are scattered over the pages of the narrative."<sup>38</sup> Tynan suggests that her views are "Not only distinguished, but distinctive."<sup>39</sup> In *The Towers* "the traveller is not a detached and unaffected consciousness; the observer is herself observed."<sup>40</sup>

More than that, she is acted upon by those she observes, at the receiving end of their attentions, even if it is only a few harmless [potions]. There is, that is, implicit in Macaulay's narratives, whether biographical or fictional [or both], a history of interaction between foreign travellers and native population. The travellers as much as the locals are distinguished by their own native prejudices and assumptions. Tourists also have a history. Their subjective formations and preconceptions need to be read and understood.<sup>41</sup>

The narrative makes it clear that the protagonist is as much afflicted with the decay and loss of the ancient city as her immoral stance and loss of faith. In the narrative, particularly towards the end, the space (the remnants of

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<sup>35</sup> Stan Smith, "The Answer Would Appear To Be A Lemon: Rose Macaulay's Civil War." *English Oxford Journals* 54 (2005), p. 15, Web: Nov. 2012.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Katherine Tynan, "Rose Macaulay." *The Bookman*. 51-302 (1916), p. 38, Web: Apr. 2014.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> Smith, p. 15..

<sup>41</sup> Smith, pp. 15-16.

the ancient palace) immediately recalls the fantasy evoking past reminiscences of the ancient city and refers back to the dignified state of the human being.

The choice of Turkey is not accidental. Guerinot argues that the reason for this is the richness of the setting in terms of “comic possibilities.”<sup>42</sup> But, the crucial significance of this choice is “the wrecked Byzantine splendour [which] creates the images that carry the religious theme.”<sup>43</sup> Such Byzantine splendour of the imagined Trebizond accompanies the spiritual quest, which “underlies the satirical novel” on the surface.<sup>44</sup> Tynan argues that “whether or not the moral of her books –if that is not too heavy and dull a Word –is profoundly Christian. Her Kingdom is not of this World.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, Laurie, having lost innocence and purity in modern world, associated in the novel with modern Trabzon, is observed to seek restoration, recuperation, redemption, renewal and reconciliation through the image of the ancient Byzantine Kingdom that is closely tied to the image of Christian Kingdom in Heaven. Guerinot states

[The author] brings to her vast survey a remarkably wide range of response; she is the least narrow-minded of tourists, rejoicing at once in classical architecture, in Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, in pagan palaces and crusaders' castles and Indian rock temples. Everywhere the reader feels her passionate fondness for the past and delight in its ruined artifacts. Especially does her abiding interest in the history of Christianity come through, her love of its extreme beauty and oddity [Guerinot 121]

As regards the autobiographical aspects of the novel, *The Towers of Trebizond*, as suggested earlier, offers an insight into the personal history of its author, Rose Macaulay. Both the novel and the leading character are inspired by the reminiscences and personality of Macaulay, the historical author: “Macaulay presents an intriguing alternative. *Trebizond* offers the story of an Englishwoman named Laurie, whose personality is uniquely her own, while her situation is both individual and common”<sup>46</sup> writes Hein in order to indicate the parallelism between the creation and the creator. Macaulay wrote a book in which the souls of Laurie and Macaulay are mingled, as “In *The Towers of*

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<sup>42</sup> Guerinot, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Guerinot also argues that “even the stylishness of the prose serves a purpose; it reveals Laurie to us. Never has Macaulay used better her trick of suddenly embedding a quotation, because here the mannerism illuminates Laurie's mind; we learn the kinds of things her memory is stored with: “Some of them [Laurie's clerical ancestors] were thus vanquished by the assaults of Manicheism, others by the innocent theories of Pelagius, others again by that kind of pantheism which is apt to occur in meadows and woods, others by the difficulties of thus thinking of the Trinity, and still more by plain Doubt” (TT, p. 13). Guerinot, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Crawford, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> Tynan, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Hein, p. 49.

*Trebizond*, three perspectives blend together: those of Laurie, of Rose Macaulay past, and of Rose Macaulay present.<sup>47</sup> Macaulay created a character that represents the reality of its author in a fictional world or, in Hein's words, a character that is "her own unique fictional self."<sup>48</sup> It is a character that "the questing and questioning Laurie stands both for the Rose Macaulay of the troubled past and for the post-conversion Rose."<sup>49</sup> It may be said that Macaulay transformed the past occurrences in her life into her widely known work.

*The Towers of Trebizond*, depicted to take place in the 1950s, is narrated by Laurie, a young woman about thirty years old. She is in a passionate relationship with her cousin named Vere, who is smart and attractive. What makes this attachment unusual is that Vere is actually married to another woman and has children. Being wholly devout to Christianity, Laurie prefers Vere to God and turns her back to the Church for the sake of love for ten years. There come times when Laurie becomes acutely aware of what she has lost in order to gain love since "from time to time I knew what I had lost" (*TT* 65), but Vere causes her to forget everything else except him and "love and joy gradually drown[ing] remorse." Her understanding of religion lets her conceive that what she adores in the form of love is nothing but 'adultery', which the Christian God firmly condemns, yet she does not wish to be purified from her so-called sins since "I did not really want to be saved from my sins, not for the time being" (*TT* 150). Similarly, Macaulay had a lengthy affair with a married man, Gerald O'Donovan.<sup>50</sup> O'Donovan sometime worked as a Roman Catholic priest and had three children. They fell in love and the affair lasted till they were separated by the grievous death of O'Donovan. Like Laurie, Macaulay was a zealous follower of the Anglican Church. Yet her deep love in him caused her to alienate and isolate herself from the Church, since "Macaulay felt that she could no longer make her confession to a priest or receive wine and bread at celebrations of communion" (59). This alienation or estrangement, as Hein notes, lasted, unlike Laurie, for more than twenty years. For Macaulay, it seemed that the rise of love was only possible with the fall of faith.

The central character, Laurie, is able to silence her inner voice that constantly tells her that what she is doing is nothing but a mistake. Yet the death of love that costs her so great a price causes her to question every detail over and over. Laurie all of a sudden lost Vere in an unfortunate car crash. What makes the event more tragic is that it is Laurie herself that drives the car. Being the main factor in the painful demise of her lover, Laurie feels as if she

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<sup>47</sup> Hein, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Hein, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Hein, p. 58.

has been punished with her own hands by God. “Now, without Vere, Laurie feels that she must live in two hells, for I have lost God and lost, too, the love I want.”<sup>51</sup> Even though she is liberated from committing sin by the death of Vere, she cannot reconcile with God and the Church in a while as she believes that “God was a bad second, enough to hurt but not to cure, to hide but not to seek” (*TT* 50). As a matter of fact, it is not solely love or Vere that Laurie is doomed to lose forever but also God, since she is convinced that “God is leaving us alone for ever; we have lost God and gained hell” (*TT* 55). Thus, Laurie turns deaf to God, the Church and her preexisting faith for ages due to her anger, feeling of abandonment, illusion of punishment and heartsickness.

Besides, the attentive reader recognizes the fact that *The Towers of Trebizond* reveals itself to be a serious narrative rather than comic or satiric. It is a novel of pleasure as well as self-questioning, doubt and religion. It indicates a journey inside as well as a travel outside. Moreover, it is “covertly confessional” revealing “lapse in faith,” “spiritual and romantic unease.”<sup>52</sup> It can also be argued that this is a psychological novel, dramatizes constant inner conflict instigated by protracted adulterous love affair.

Such questioning insight is what makes the novel expand the comic novel and turning out to be a “subtle and paradoxical novel.”<sup>53</sup> The narrative represents “a conscience struggling with sin and faith.”<sup>54</sup> Laurie and her creator, Macaulay, have a multitude of qualities in common. Throughout the novel, Laurie is portrayed as an intricate and deep individual who possesses periods of confusion and ups and downs. Macaulay's choice of a character of depth reflects her worldview, as Hein suggests that “Rose Macaulay believed that human beings are interesting because each person is a mess of contradictions.”<sup>55</sup> What is more, he compares the author with her character in a way that points out the resemblance between the two: “Certainly both she and her creation, Laurie, are complicated beings.”<sup>56</sup> Another feature that creates a bond between Macaulay and Laurie is that both are “person[s] of fortitude.”<sup>57</sup> Both Laurie and Macaulay had to struggle hard with the same misfortunes, such as “experiencing the pain of a terrible human loss, a pain that flows into the suffering caused by anxiety over the loss of meaning.”<sup>58</sup> The two survived the death of hope, faith and life with the death of their beloved ones: Laurie for

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<sup>51</sup> Hein, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Morris, p. ix.

<sup>53</sup> Morris, p. iv.

<sup>54</sup> Guerinot, p. 122.

<sup>55</sup> Hein, p. 60.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Hein, p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Hein, p. 66.

Vere, Macaulay for O'Donovan. Yet, they were able to overcome deep-rooted grief and transform themselves into relatively improved persons by rebuilding constituents of their identity.

Imagination is the other bridge built between the character and the author. “Like her human creator, she possesses an imagination for evil”<sup>59</sup> writes Hein while drawing a likeness between both. Stating that “she has learned -the hard way- to identify the causes and effects of evil in the cellarage of her own psyche and in the lives of others,”<sup>60</sup> Hein offers an explanation to the influence of the experiences on their characters. What they had to endure had an impact on their souls and their worldviews. Their fields of interest are not different from each other as well. Both Laurie and Macaulay are fond of travelling, writing and adventure. The two are, in Hein's words, “religious pilgrims” and experienced “a stretch of spiritual questioning.”<sup>61</sup> The writer and the character went through the same process of “illumination of heart and mind; not the mind only but conscience and the will also.”<sup>62</sup>

The historical author can be claimed to let her character echo her own voice. Like Laurie, Macaulay's worship of her lover, O'Donovan, lasted till the death of the latter. Yet, O'Donovan did not pass away in a car accident in the way Vere did. He died of cancer. Nevertheless, his death could not bring her any closer to God. She was conscious that the separation from the Church was not an easy one to be made up for. “Long years of wrongdoing built a kind of blank – or nearly blank- wall between oneself and God, a wall constructed not by God but one's own actions and rejections” says she. It was more than a coldness that came between her and the Creator; she was fully aware of that she was making a mistake and committing sin through adultery. What makes everything worse is that she keeps doing the same thing even though she knows that it is not moral or, in terms of religion, is actually a great sin. “I see now why belief in God fades away and has to go, while one is leading a life one knows to be wrong. The two cannot live together. It does not give even intellectual acceptance its chance. Now it has its chance”<sup>63</sup> expresses Macaulay. Perhaps it is not merely the adultery she commits that causes her loss of faith in God and the Church of England; it is more than that. It is a widely known fact that God never shuts his doors to the repentant; there was something that kept Macaulay from salvation. It was the feeling of being left all on her own as “her lover had died in 1942, but if there is some trace of bitterness to her portrait of the Reverend the Honorable bigot, even a touch of

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<sup>59</sup> Hein, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*

<sup>61</sup> Hein, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> Hein, p. 60.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*

cruelty, it is perhaps because she had felt betrayed or abandoned by such men of God” (Morris introduction). It was the treatment of those clergymen that always talked about religion, the forgiveness of God and the privilege of Christianity that caused her detachment from God and the Anglican Church. However, she was never able to close her heart to God forever as “long involved in an adulterous affair, she feels herself closed off from the Anglican Church but is unable to turn her back on it.”<sup>64</sup> Macaulay had to struggle with these ups and downs that afflicted her. Maybe she had to remind herself of that it was not God that was imperfect and faulty but his clergymen.

Still, Laurie is obviously a fictional character that bears traces of her creator, but this is not enough in itself to give clues about the later life of Macaulay if her reconciliation is considered. “After all, Laurie does not exist except as a character within the pages of *The Towers of Trebizond*,”<sup>65</sup> says Hein in order to point out the spiritual improvement of Macaulay. Macaulay was able to destroy her resentment at God since “in her seventieth year Rose Macaulay returned to the Church of England as a communicant. She adopted a rule of life, and each morning she attended the early celebration at Grosvenor Chapel, in South Adley Street, not far from her London flat”<sup>66</sup> The enmity that lasted for years was now at an end. Macaulay was able to pray and ask for forgiveness. Laurie could not put an end to her “Anglo-agnostic[ism],”<sup>67</sup> “Laurie was, of course, still when the book ends. So, once was I. Laurie will come later on to where I am now, give her time” (52). This may be accepted as a proof for Laurie's being a textual representation of her author. What is more, the character will act in the same way her creator has done, that is, “... her central character would not always find Trebizond so inaccessible.”<sup>68</sup> Outside of the book, Laurie then will follow her writer and restore her relationship with God and her desperation expressed in these words “I was agnostic through school and university, then, at twenty-three, took up with the Church again; but the Church met its Waterloo a few years later when I took up with adultery ... and this adultery lasted on and on and I was still in it now, steaming down the Black Sea to Trebizond, and I saw no prospect of its ending except with death” (*TT* ) was then healed by Macaulay. Reconciliation of the author provides the character for a salve.

It is known that Macaulay did not publish her book till two years before her death. “By the time she published *The Towers of Trebizond*, in her seventy-seventh year, she had in fact been rescued from disillusionment and returned to

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<sup>64</sup> Allen, “On the Road and off the Road,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (2003), Web: Nov. 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Hein, p. 52.

<sup>66</sup> Hein p. 59.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> Hein, p. 52.

Anglicanism, by another clergyman, the Reverend J. H. C. Johnson” writes Morris on the significance of the publication date of the novel. It seems that Macaulay did not specify the date haphazardly. It is not a coincidence for her to bring out her book that involves in fragments of her story and traces of her personality or, in Hein's terms, a book in which “the artist and the tale are so intimately connected.”<sup>69</sup> She did publish the book after her reunion with the Church of England so that the novel could be a sign of her liberation from the long-term resentment at God and Christianity.

Macaulay composed a work of fiction that was to some extent begotten by the nonfictional incidents and people, including herself; she met in her life. Thus, she seems to have adapted her own experience and the people she encountered to her fiction. Morris states, “It is true that, in the manner of the time, it sometimes becomes a roman a clef, and hazily identified characters in the narrative must have been easily recognizable to contemporary readers: sometimes indeed real people are named by real names, and need no key at all.”<sup>70</sup> Laurie’s so-called confessional story, however, should be read through the ancient Trebizond that provides her with a source of inspiration and imagination, motivating her passion for the sense of faith and religion all-encompassing the variations of wise and witty yet confused desires of the soul. Thought and worship of the earlier centuries and the ancient times is revealed to revive in the mind of the protagonist, who is portrayed to be haunted by the ancient city, influenced by its ambiguities and fascinated by its magical enchantments. Amy Rambow argues “to her Trebizond is not a refuge of the spirit as Byzantium was to Yeats. This bastion of Greek civilization is a melancholy place of crumbling ruins, a ghost city of an age of greatness that had ended when Trebizond fell to the Turks in 1461.”<sup>71</sup> What Rambow wants to underline, it seems, is that the protagonist differentiates between the old Trebizond and modern Trabzon to make a comparison between her vision of potential splendour and faith and her present melancholia and confusion. The ancient city, therefore, turns out to be a resonant metaphor for spiritual wisdom, rather than mere past. The ancient and modern City attains a symbolic sense associated with the spiritual greatness of the Church and corruption. The Greek sorcerer’s potion gains a function of marking such shifts between fantasy and the real. It can be stated that although the protagonist seems to have lost her faith, she continues to rely on her strong ties with and to believe in the ancient Trebizond, “keeper of the world’s dreams, composed of shining towers and domes, luminous, magical, and mystical, whose towers do not fall but are held forever in some enchanted spell.”

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<sup>69</sup> Hein, p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor, p. vii.

<sup>71</sup> Rambow. Web.

“The Church used once to be an opiate to you, like that Trebizond enchanter’s potion; a kind of euphoric drug. You dramatized it and yourself, you felt carried along in something aesthetically exciting and beautiful and romantic” (*TT 131*)

Alice Crawford argues, for the author, Trebizond, not modern Trabzon, signifies the “ideal and romantic and nostalgic vision of the church which haunts the person who narrates the story.” She adds, “the real point of the novel is a great nostalgia for the Church, on the part of the narrator, who is lapsed from it.”<sup>72</sup> Laurie, the protagonist, “with her high romantic dreams, will, ultimately, enter Trebizond, [not Trabzon] her fortress and her ease.<sup>73</sup> The scene below exemplifies such dream and desire:

And added that it would be very nice to be emperor of Trebizond, as Don Quixote and others had been used to wish that they were. At that he waved his [Greek sorcerer] wand and stood looking like an elderly Comus [ancient God] as he offered me the charming-cup, and I thought it might transform me into the inglorious likeness of a beast, or chain up my nerves in alabaster and make me a statue, or root-bound as Daphne was that fled Apollo. Or it might be like an oblivion pill, or like another pill that was going about London just then which made people remember their infancies and their lives in the womb. (*TT 132-133*)

The setting of the novel, Trebizond, actually meant to be a holy city, a sign and a part of Christianity, as “in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Trebizond was a great artistic and trading center; . . . . It was renowned, then, as the final refuge of Hellenistic civilization. In Macaulay’s novel, “Trebizond can be read as symbolizing the Christian faith, or the church” (Hein 51). At the end of the book, Laurie is unable to be reunited with Trebizond or the Church, as Hein states “its heroine appears to be a spiritual failure, a former disciple and disillusioned and despairing. Laurie points out much that is unbelievable and unattractive about Christianity, and of course at the end she remains outside the towers of Trebizond, convinced that she will never enter this fabled city.”<sup>74</sup>

A significant point about the title of the novel that is worth attention is that Macaulay intentionally applies to the term Trebizond instead of Trabzon. This can be interpreted as that Macaulay is aware that some things remain the same even though their forms undergo a change, at least, on her part this is the case. The adulterous relationship could cause her faith to be obstructed for a while, but at its core it is still the same. It is true that its form has gone through a change but its content remains the same. “But it was always Trebizond, not

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<sup>72</sup> Crawford, p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> Guerinot p. 125.

<sup>74</sup> Hein, p. 65.



Trabzon, to Macaulay, and as we laugh our way through the book's adventures it dawns upon us that in her mind it is a city of allegory” writes Jan Morris in introductory part of the novel and adds “it stands there too misty, too tall, to be mere masonry.” It is not only a city but a symbol loaded with meanings for Rose Macaulay. It can also be interpreted as Macaulay's unwillingness to give up her belief in God and the Church of England completely. She still keeps on living in hopes of a better but ambiguous future.

It is not simply the incidents revealed in the novel that gather the author and the character together; it is the echoing of personality of Macaulay in Laurie. Unless examined closely, it is not so simple to distinguish the qualities that are common in both persons, since Hein states that “on a surface level at least, their voices are different.”<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, Laurie bears within herself many qualities that make her “Macaulay's own imaginative alter ego” (Morris 8). First and foremost, their attitudes towards Christianity and the Church of England are very much alike. In the beginning of the book, Laurie is depicted as being a daughter of an Anglican clergyman. This is a hint of Laurie's piety that comes from the family. Just like Laurie, Macaulay had a pious family, “Rose Macaulay grew into a young woman with a religious bent” writes Hein.<sup>76</sup> In addition, she always gave utterance to her strong feelings about religion as well, since “like Laurie, she often said that Christianity was in her blood, as she had many clerical forebears on both sides of her family; but more than family tradition or custom was at work in her spiritual devotion” states the critics.<sup>77</sup> There is another issue worth consideration: neither Macaulay nor Laurie is dogmatist in terms of religion. Their faith is not too strong to blind their eyes to the realities and skepticism is the common features of both, since “... for Laurie, Christian fundamentalism or an infallible church would be a problem – though one she does not have to worry about.”<sup>78</sup> Laurie and Macaulay regard skepticism as a part of “sound faith” and an inseparable element of Christianity, as “first, Christian faith, to be authentic, requires doubt.”<sup>79</sup> Anyhow, according to Jan Morris, Macaulay wrote the novel at a time when people commenced to question their creed; “it was a period of English history when Doubts, with a capital D, were assailing the Established Church of England, and churchgoers whose families had been faithful to its tenets for five hundred years were wondering if its convictions were necessarily true after all.”<sup>80</sup> Macaulay gave birth to her character at the age of

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<sup>75</sup> Hein, p. 57.

<sup>76</sup> Hein, p. 58.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> Hein, p. 57.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*

<sup>80</sup> Morris, p. viii.

sceptics. The characters of both hers and her fictional ego had the traces of that era. It can be said that Macaulay instilled in Laurie her feelings, the spiritual transformation she was to go through by the time she was to write the novel and the other through chances she exposed herself to.

The way the narrator conjectures the old city is of significance and her seemingly nostalgia and melancholia can be reviewed in her longing to the ancient Trebizond:

that lost corner of a lost empire, defeated and gone under so long ago that now she scarcely knew or remembered lost Byzantium, having grown unworthy of it, blind, deaf and not caring any more, not even believing, and perhaps that was the ultimate hell" (*TT* 73).

Guerinot states that "slowly Laurie's imagination transforms the dull Trabzon of today into the symbol of her baffled religious longings" after her meditative recollections.<sup>81</sup> "Trabzon keeps dissolving into Trebizond, he notes, "and Trebizond acquires an anagogic level and becomes the City of God."<sup>82</sup> The protagonist pursues a memory that can heal her and can be her own in fantasizing the ancient splendour and charm interwoven with spiritual wisdom: "in the ruined Byzantine citadel, keep and palace on the heights . . . and in the disused, wrecked Byzantine churches that brooded, forlorn, lovely, ravished and apostate ghosts, about the hills and shores of that lost empire" (*TT* 80). She is in-between, past and present, sleeping and waking, fantasy and fact, Trebizond and Trabzon. Her vision of Trebizond comprises a city "of the world's dreams":

Trebizond as I had seen it, but the Trebizond of the world's dreams, of my own dreams, shining towers and domes shimmering on a far horizon, yet close at hand, luminously enspelled in the most fantastic unreality, yet the only reality, a walled and gated city, magic and mystical, standing beyond my reach yet I had to be inside, an alien wanderer yet at home, held in the magical enchantment; and at its heart, at the secret heart of the city and the legend and the glory in which I was caught and held, there was some pattern I could not unravel, some hard core that I could not make my own, and, seeing the pattern and the hard core enshrined within the walls, I turned back from the city and stood outside it, expelled in mortal grief. (*TT* 209-10)

Laurie seems unlikely to enter "the walled kingdom or the elusive city surrounded by towers shortly. Still Laurie herself gives a clue about what might happen:

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<sup>81</sup> Guerinot, pp. 124-125

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*

“The fact that at present I cannot find my way into it does not lessen, but rather heightens its spell; a magic castle, it changes down the ages its protean form, but on its battlements the splendour lucis aeternae inextinguishably down all the ages lies.” (*TT*)

These moments project the revelatory scenes of the narrative, the ones taking place in the remnant palace and towers of Trebizond where Laurie re-experiences the spiritually elevated and dignified gatherings as sacred as the High Mass:

Anyhow, I lifted my glass to him and drank the potion [...] it was very strong and sweet, and then I sat down under the fig tree to think about it, for I felt rather dizzy, and I shut my eyes. The evening was very warm and still, [...] I heard the sea sighing on the shore [...] I was sitting on the in the banqueting hall, under the row of pointed windows, and the floor was white marble with golden mozaics, and the roof was painted with golden stars, and four high walls were glorious with bright frescos of emperors and saints and Christ, all the Comneni was looking down on their golden-bearded representative sitting on his jewelled throne. Courtiers stood about the door; ecclesiastics with long Byzantine faces sat together [...] Marble pillars supported the starry roof; marble particoes were seen dwindling in graceful perspective into the golden-fruited orchard and balsam-sweet woods; slim-railed balconies supported on delicate columns ran round outside the windows. (*TT* 132)

It is seen that, upon the Trebizond of antiquity and its walls is Laurie’s mind working, illustrating a city of “allegory,” “mysticism,” “spell,” “enchantment” and “dream,” and such “unified archetypal city” is revived. Laurie knows that it is, just as her purity and faith, unattainable once again lost and degenerated in uncertainties. Jan Morris argues, “It shimmers and is fabled, as such cities must be; it stands on a far horizon as in all the best legends”<sup>83</sup> and the protagonist is supposed to be remain “outside the walls.”

To conclude, *Towers of Trebizond* can be read as a travelogue or autobiography and the female protagonist of the narrative seems to be a representation of the historical author, the novel traces the autobiographical details through the imaginative historical view of Ancient Trebizond and the actual experience in the modern Trabzon. The real experiences of the historical author is transformed into a roman a clef in *The Towers of Trebizond*. It is seen that the protagonist sounds like the narrative voice of the author. Besides, the novel presents the reader with a comic and satiric account blended with the elements of travel writing. Under the surface lies a salient serious theme of the narrative that attempts to explore the issues of love, religion, confusion and history. Ostensibly being a semi-autobiographical travel account, *The Towers*

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<sup>83</sup> Morris, p. ix.

*of Trebizond*, presents a character that resurrects from the ashes of the ancient city. The novel uses autobiography to provide seriousness to the satiric comedy of the travellers. The ancient city, Trebizond is represented in a way that revives and reconciles the split psyche of the narrator, who is caught up in lapse of faith. Thus, the narrative explores beyond mere travel account or autobiography; rather it investigates the “unstable self” in Smith and Watson’s terms, through the towers of the ancient city while associating the confused (wo)man with the decayed contemporary Trabzon.