



MEMORY IN YAŞAR KEMAL'S NOVELS

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how Yaşar Kemal uses memory in his novels. As a writer who tends to transform his own memory into the memory of his characters through literary creation, Yaşar Kemal employs trauma and fear of death as an underlying theme that connects his memory and imagination to those of his characters no matter what the cause of the trauma is. As a child at the age of five, Yaşar Kemal experienced the greatest trauma of his life: he witnessed the murder of his father by his adopted brother at the village mosque during evening prayers. Like Yaşar Kemal himself, most of his protagonists are deeply traumatized and suffering individuals who are incessantly haunted by the painful scenes of their traumatic experiences and who try to have a sort of self-psychotherapy through deep inner journeys. The paper examines several of Yaşar Kemal's important novels through this perspective and demonstrates how he has constructed his characters' memory.

Keywords: Yaşar Kemal, Memory, Trauma, Fear of Death, Self-psychotherapy.

Introduction

Yaşar Kemal, a great writer of Turkish and World Literature, considers psychological depth as the benchmark of great literature (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 179) and believes that "the novelist's job is to reach the deepest part of human psychology" (Yaşar Kemal, 2005: 286).¹ In accordance with this view, he has furnished his novels with great psychological depth, which is predominantly autobiographical. And, of course, characters' memories are a significant part of the psychological depth in Kemal's fiction. Like Kemal himself, the majority of his main characters are deeply traumatized and suffering individuals who try to have a sort of self-psychotherapy through deep inner journeys. Textual evidence shows that Kemal actually hides himself in the psyches and lives of his characters. In fact Kemal himself states that "Every writer writes his own life" (Gürsel, 2000: 105). Of course, this writing is in the form of literary creation and fiction, not in the shape of memoirs, which Kemal thinks does not include creation (Kabacalı, 1992: 79). In his view, "The novel is one hundred percent creation" and boils down to "finding psychological possibilities in man" (Kabacalı, 1992: 78).

By comparing Yaşar Kemal's book of memoirs, *Yaşar Kemal Kendini Anlatıyor. Alain Bosquet ile Görüşmeler* [Yaşar Kemal Talks About Himself: The Interview of Alain Bosquet with Yaşar Kemal] (1994)—the best source for his autobiographical details—with his novels, one can easily find out that "details from [his] personal life, including descriptions of places, events, and people ... are transformed into the settings and characters of his fictional world" (Tharaud, 1999: 293-94). This means many details in Yaşar Kemal's novels are based on his own memories. Among these memories, the most painful ones are those of the traumas he experienced in his childhood. As a child at the age of four Yaşar Kemal had a great trauma. His father Sadık Efendi loved Kemal so much that every year he sacrificed animals for him and gave feasts. On such an occasion, an accident occurred and he lost the sight of his right eye by the blow of a knife slipping out of the hand of a relative slaughtering an animal (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 35). One can find traces of this painful memory in Kemal's novels.

A year after this trauma, Kemal experienced the greatest trauma of his life: he witnessed the murder of his father at the village mosque during evening prayers and he cried loudly, "My heart is burning!" until the next morning (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 35). The murderer was his adopted brother Yusuf, who stabbed his father in the heart. After the murder, Kemal had a stammer until the age of twelve. The trauma of witnessing his father's murder left in him "deep traces [that] were never erased" and "first made him a fearful child and later a novelist whose main obsession was patricide" (Gürsel, 2000: 130). One can feel that the painful memory of his father's murder is always at the back of his mind and the shadow of death is always there in the backdrop of his novels. Likewise, the trauma his characters have experienced is always

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¹ The translations of all the quotes from the Turkish sources throughout this paper are mine.



in their mind and the memory of that trauma has a great impact on their behavior. Thus memory plays a crucial role in his characters' behavior.

This paper explores how Yaşar Kemal transforms his own memory into the memory of his main characters through literary creation. It demonstrates that trauma and a deep fear of death are central to Yaşar Kemal's work and are what essentially connect his memory and imagination to those of his traumatized heroes no matter what the cause of the trauma is. The paper examines several of Yaşar Kemal's important novels with a focus on trauma and fear of death and shows how he utilizes memory in his literary creation. Perhaps because Kemal experienced the most traumatic events in his life during his childhood, he tends to hide himself in the psyches of his characters as a child even if the characters may be adults. Perhaps that is why the narrators in his novels often have the consciousness of a child, and when Kemal opens a character's deep inner world to the reader, he often makes that character feel, think, and remember like a child, i.e., like Kemal the child.

1. Spiritual Elevation and Self-psychotherapy

Yaşar Kemal uses the concept of "spiritual elevation" to describe the state of individuals who confront fear and declares that "confronting fear is the greatest tenet of man" and "perhaps a [sort of] spiritual elevation" (Yaşar Kemal, 2012a: 72, 84). Interestingly, spiritual elevation is almost synonymous with psychotherapy in Kemal's fiction in which there are many things that cause spiritual elevation and function as a form of psychotherapy. For instance, creating, performing, or being exposed to all kinds of art, including epics, laments, legends, poems, tales, *türkü*s, paintings, *kilims*, etc., all elevate his characters to a higher spiritual level and help them recover from psychological problems. In a word, art is almost a sacred thing in Kemal's work and almost always functions like a sort of self-psychotherapy for his traumatized characters.

Moreover, dreaming, daydreaming, thinking deeply, watching creatures in nature such as ants, bees, snakes, beetles, hornets, and all other kinds of insects, looking at the world through the eyes of a child, reading, and writing all generally bring about spiritual elevation and relief. Evidently, all of these have a deep autobiographical dimension. Just as singing folk songs, reciting epics, and telling stories healed Kemal's stammer when he was a child, his writing has also apparently helped him recover from the traumas and other psychological problems he experienced in his childhood and his later life. For Kemal writing seems to be a matter of existence, a natural and indispensable need, a sort of perpetual spiritual elevation, and a therapy for his psyche. Perhaps that is why he has declared: "I don't write about issues, I don't write for an audience, I don't even write for myself. I just write" (Birch, 2008).

2. Trauma, Fear, and Memory: Yaşar Kemal the Child Disguised in His Characters

Yaşar Kemal's most famous novel, *İnce Memed* [Slim Memed], which grew into a tetralogy written over a period of more than 30 years, is about a deeply traumatized young man rebelling against injustice and oppression. Like Kemal himself, İnce Memed is a committed man who has become a mature and wise person after a childhood full of suffering and traumas. Again like Kemal, Memed is a fatherless boy² who "had learned to think very deeply" (Yaşar Kemal, 2008: 230). The whole tetralogy is silent about what had happened to Memed's father. The impact of memory on Memed's crucial decisions is remarkable. To illustrate, in an instance in the first volume of *İnce Memed*, Memed has deep thoughts about killing Abdi Ağa, whom he had previously wounded and whose nephew he had killed to defend himself and his sweetheart Hatçe. A voice in Memed tells him he should not kill a human being even if it be Abdi Ağa (Yaşar Kemal, 2008: 230-31). However, remembering the cruelties (i.e. the traumas) that Abdi Ağa inflicted on him and his mother in his hellish childhood, Memed repeats to himself, "Abdi has deserved death" (Yaşar Kemal, 2008: 231) - like the refrain of a *türkü* or lament - and he eventually kills him.

Kemal's characters who are at a high spiritual level usually have features of children and look at things in amazement with childlike eyes. İnce Memed, for instance, "even as a full-grown young man remains small of stature, 'slim' and almost childlike in appearance" (Hickman, 1980: 59). In many ways he is like Kemal the child, including the way he always watches the world in amazement. Constant watching in a fascinated manner is something that Kemal did very often in his childhood:

Fixing my eyes on something and watching it ceaselessly for days was a chief habit of my childhood. For instance, I remember watching a *kilim* at home for months without being tired of it at all. [...] And this watching business of mine lasted days as if I had come to the world to constantly watch it without doing anything else. (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 42)

² In fact, "the motif of the fatherless or orphaned male child" is a common one in Kemal's novels (Hickman 1980: 58).



In *İnce Memed 4*, Memed quits banditry and settles in a town on the Mediterranean coast with his wife Seyran, Hürü Ana, and Müslüm the child. However, after a while the worm of commitment in him begins to disturb him, and he gets bored with his life in this town. There are some glass paintings they have bought from a glass painter and put on the walls of their house. Both Memed and Hürü Ana love gazing at these paintings for hours and admire the glass painter as though he were a saint. Memed also visits the painter very often because watching him while he is painting is like a psychological cure for Memed. Memed's stream of consciousness reveals his feeling that the glass painter is a holy person "not from this world" but from heaven: "perhaps he had come out of heaven a short time ago, and now he would decorate the world with embellishments using his beautiful fingers and then go back to his heaven" (Yaşar Kemal, 2012b: 244). As previously mentioned, creating or being exposed to art elevates Kemal's characters to a higher spiritual level and helps them recover from psychological problems. Apparently, art helps them forget their trauma and fears.

Fear of death is an underlying theme in Kemal's novels, and in almost all of them there are characters who reflect on death deeply. For instance, in *İnce Memed 2* Memed, who has taken refuge in a village, thinks deeply on death in a dark room:

Was this village going to be his grave? If he were shot, in what part of his body would he be shot? How was his death going to be? How was death going to come? Was death a darkness? If so, what kind of darkness was it? Was it like sleep? Did the wound of death ache very much? (Yaşar Kemal, 2007a: 104)

Now compare Memed's thoughts about death with those of Salih, the child protagonist of the novel *Al Gözüm Seyreyle Salih [The Saga of a Seagull]*, who finds a dead bird on the beach and begins to reflect on death:

A small black coot lay dead on the sand, its head, its lovely tiny head dangling in the water, rippling to and fro with the gentle waves. It looked so sad.... Salih could not take his eyes off the lifeless bird. Death.... What was it? Where was it? How could this little coot be dead who only yesterday was diving and splashing gaily in the sea? What kind of thing was death? Where did it come from? Did it have a shape, a form? (Yaşar Kemal, 1981: 6)

Although it is not explicitly stated in the novel, Salih's seeing a dead bird at the beginning of the novel makes him fear death horrendously. Apparently, this fear of death is a source of trauma that constantly depresses him. Perhaps because of this, when he later finds a wounded seagull, he does all he can to cure the bird, and while his mind is busy with helping a being survive, he feels better, but when the seagull recovers and flies away, he again feels sad because "nothing, *nothing* happened" (Yaşar Kemal, 1981: 239). After all, death is still eternally in the world, and no one can ever kill death. Obviously, the way Salih feels is like the way all human beings may feel in the face of death because being conscious of one's mortality is the deepest and most essential feeling in the soul of man. Apparently, Yaşar Kemal has constructed this novel on the basis of this essential human feeling, which makes Salih take refuge in dreams. After all, creating "myths" and "dream worlds" against "the bitterness of death" and "tak[ing] shelter" in them is a foundation of Kemal's fiction (Yaşar Kemal, 2011c: 205; 1994: 192, 198).

Like Kemal the child, Salih is always lost in daydreams. In fact, there is a very interesting fictional architecture in this novel that progresses in the form of two intertwined tales. On the one hand, the narrator relates Salih's story; on the other hand, he simultaneously tells another story that develops in Salih's imagination through daydreams that are like a TV serial. The imaginary tale evolving in the inner world of Salih merges people from Salih's real life and fairy tale characters such as a snake prince and his father the snake king. In other words, Salih constructs stories by combining in his imagination things he saw in his environment and on TV, things he heard from his elders including bards, and all other things he experienced. Thus exactly like Kemal the child, Salih is a boy who loves daydreaming and who can imagine whatever he wants whenever he likes by his own will.³ This is similar to Jung's active imagination as a form of psychotherapy or to the active dreaming sessions psychiatrist Mustafa Merter – who combines Sufism and Jung's "Transpersonal Psychology" in his method of psychotherapy – uses in his psychotherapy to help his patients experience a kind of spiritual elevation, which cures them (Merter, 2007: 317, 330, 377). In this regard, by means of active fantasizing, Salih seems to be acting as his own psychologist, elevating himself to

³ Yaşar Kemal describes his love of daydreaming as follows:

[In my childhood] At night I used to fantasize till morning. My whole business was to daydream. And I would get lost in the dreams I had. My dream world was such a world of joy that it was very difficult for me to leave it. I don't remember exactly what I dreamed about or fantasized, but a new bee, a new species of ants, a new flower would take me away to some other place. (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 89)



a higher spiritual level, and healing himself. In fact, Kemal himself states that the novel *Al Gözüm Seyreyle Salih* [The Saga of a Seagull] describes “a child’s psychological healthiness” (Kabacalı, 1992: 78).

Hasan, the child protagonist of Kemal’s short novel *Yılanı Öldürseler* [To Crush the Serpent],⁴ is a deeply traumatized boy who eventually kills his mother because of the unbearable pressure of his relatives and fellow villagers. As in *Hamlet*, a murdered father comes back from the grave as a ghost and, appearing to the villagers, urges his son to take revenge on his mother. The psychological tension reaches its peak at the end of the novel when Hasan loses his mental health and murders his mother. The story has the feel of a Greek tragedy, complete with chorus and immutable fate as foretold by the chorus. Similar to Kemal the child, who witnessed the murder of his father at the age of five, Hasan witnesses the murder of his father at the age of seven, and the trauma both boys experience opens horrendous wounds in their psyche. The memory of his father’s murder is forever in Hasan’s mind, and he can never forget that bloody night, including even the scents, visions, and sounds of that night.

Textual evidence shows that *To Crush the Serpent* is a deep inner journey for Kemal. Presumably, having inner journeys may help an individual recover from psychological problems caused by traumatic experiences. Perhaps this means in every human being there is an inner psychologist that leads one to self-psychotherapy. In *To Crush the Serpent*, the perpetual pressure of Hasan’s relatives and fellow villagers does not allow him to have deep inner journeys that would activate his inner psychologist fully. The extremely painful psychological transformation he goes through is that of a child whose mental health is destroyed to the extent that he murders his mother after being exposed to constant humiliation, oppression, and pressure. Similarly, Yaşar Kemal was pressured to kill the murderer of his father primarily by his mother, whose single “passion” was to have Yusuf killed (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 94). This pressure, in the form of “playing upon his sense of filial piety and family honor,” lasted many years, and Kemal “refused repeatedly, to her great disappointment” (Hoffman, 2010: 26).

Compared with Hasan, how did Yaşar Kemal cope with his traumas? He was apparently able to activate his inner psychologist fully and to recover from his traumas. Apparently, Kemal has successfully functioned as his own psychologist throughout his life and cured himself by singing *türkü*s as an Anatolian bard in his childhood and by writing novels in his adult life. What if Kemal the child had not been able to recover from his trauma? This seems to be the crucial question Yaşar Kemal asks in *To Crush the Serpent*. Along with this question, Hasan can be considered as Yaşar Kemal’s alter ego and this entails another question: if like Hasan, Kemal as a child had not cured himself, would he have become a murderer like him? Kemal shows us that if a person is not given the chance and time to recover from his trauma, he will behave like Hasan. In other words, Kemal seems to conclude that if he had not been able to cure himself, he would have become a murderer like Hasan. Thus *To Crush the Serpent* is an inner psychological and spiritual journey for Kemal, who in effect is watching himself in the mirror of Hasan, his alter ego.

A significant scene based on an autobiographical detail from Yaşar Kemal’s childhood is when they bring the dead body of Abbas, the murderer of Hasan’s father, and throw it into the village square:

Hasan saw the green flies for the first time. Why had he never seen these green flies before? They were hovering over the blood of the dead body – strange, silent, bitter-green flies, sharp as a knife’s edge. Hasan was extremely scared of sharp knife edges. If ever he saw a razor’s edge, he could not look at it and would immediately become nauseous. Sharp knives – oh, how horrifying! (Yaşar Kemal, 2010d: 14).⁵

Why is Hasan so scared of sharp knives? Yaşar Kemal’s painful memories about knives seem to be behind this: as previously mentioned, he lost the sight of his right eye from an accidental blow of a knife at the age of four and his father was killed before his eyes with a dagger a year later (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 36). Accordingly, Kemal seems to have projected his own painful sensitivity to knives onto Hasan. Apparently, Kemal has disguised himself in Hasan in this manner by transforming his own memory into the memory of Hasan.

Kemal’s two-volumed novel *Akçasazın Ağaları* [The Lords of Akchasaz] (1974-1975), consisting of *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* [Murder in the Ironsmiths Market] (1974) and *Yusuçuk Yusuf* [Turtledove Yusuf] (1975), contains interesting details that connect Kemal’s imagination and memory to those of his characters. For instance, Derviş Bey was between 10 and 15 years old when his father was killed before his eyes, and he was tongue-tied for a year (Yaşar Kemal, 2010a: 114). Although he is a man past middle age now, he can

⁴ This novel is based on the real story of a young man Yaşar Kemal met in prison.

⁵ This is the full translation of a Turkish passage, a substantial part of which has been cut off in the English translation of the novel. The Turkish passage reads: “Hasan yeşil sinekleri gördü ilk olarak. Şimdiye kadar bu yeşil sinekleri neden hiç görmemişti. Ölüünün kanlarının üstünde dolaşıyorlardı. Bir hoş vızıltısız, yeşil, acı, keskin, bıçak ağzı gibi. Hasan bıçak ağzının keskininden çok ürkerdi. Bir ustura ağzı görse bakamaz kusacağı gelirdi. Keskin bıçaklar mı, uuuuuuuuy!” (Yaşar Kemal, 2010d: 14).



never forget the scene of his father's murder, which was the result of a long-lasting blood feud between his family and another Türkmen bey family. His enemy now is Mustafa Bey, the current head of the other family. Not long ago Derviş Bey had one of his men kill Mustafa Bey's brother, and now it is Mustafa Bey's turn to take his family's revenge. Every day Mustafa Bey's only occupation is to lie in ambush and make plans about how to kill Derviş Bey, who lives with fear of death day and night and takes extreme precautions to avoid a tragic end. Thus both families are leading a hellish life. Like Yaşar Kemal, both Derviş Bey and Mustafa Bey have experienced deep traumas in their childhood, and since the vendetta between their families has continued for generations, their subjection to trauma has never ended. Kemal portrays the deep psychology of both the beys in detail in his novel. In *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* [Murder in the Ironsmiths Market], an injured crane falls down in the courtyard of Derviş Bey's mansion. They bring it to Derviş Bey and the bird dies in his presence. He examines "every part of the dead bird" (Yaşar Kemal, 2010a: 71) and reflects on death as usual:

What if there were no death? What if there were no fear of death? It would be boring.... It's because there is death that we want to live a little more. If there were no death.... Do cranes have the passion for living a little more like us human beings? No one can escape death. Mine will occur early. My whole effort is to save a few more days. [...]

I will be nothing, I will be nothing. I will be nothing, nothing, nothing. And at this young age. Years, years, years will pass over me. Centuries, millions, millions of years will pass over me. I will experience nothingness. I will experience nothingness, nothingness.... I will never exist (Yaşar Kemal, 2010a: 72).

While waiting in ambush for Derviş Bey, Mustafa Bey watches ants. The narrator describes Mustafa Bey's observing and playing with ants for pages (Yaşar Kemal, 2010a: 296-97; 305-7; 416). At first, a tiny ant trying to carry a huge dead insect attracts his attention, and he watches it for days in admiration. One morning the tiny ant drops the insect into a pit, and then it becomes impossible for it to even move the insect. However, the ant never gives up, and Mustafa Bey keeps watching it with a never-ending curiosity. Then one day he catches ants and makes them fight each other. This gives him great pleasure. A myriad of ants kill each other and the scene turns into a bloody battlefield. When the ants do not fight, Mustafa Bey all day forces them to fight and beheads the "peaceful" ants that do not fight (Yaşar Kemal, 2010a: 307). Presumably, Mustafa Bey behaves like this because of the pressure of his mother and of his conscience that he must kill Derviş Bey. Perhaps Mustafa Bey takes refuge in watching and playing with ants as a defense mechanism against his mother's pressure and despising him. Of course, interacting with nature itself may elevate one spiritually, and probably this interaction makes Mustafa Bey feel better. The ant could be considered as representing Mustafa Bey, and the insect could be taken as standing for Derviş Bey. Watching and playing with ants was something that Yaşar Kemal himself did very often in his childhood (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 42). Apparently, Kemal has again disguised himself in one of his characters through an autobiographical detail and a childhood memory.

Kemal's tetralogy *Bir Ada Hikayesi* [The Story of an Island], which has not been translated into English yet, is also about deeply traumatized individuals trying to recover through self-psychotherapy. The cause of trauma this time is the First World War and the population exchange between Turkey and Greece after the war. The Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923 made all the Turkish Greeks - except those in İstanbul - and all the Greek Turks leave their original homeland and move to what they felt was their "place of exile." It was a horrible and tragic trauma for both the exchanged Turks and Greeks. They were plucked from their roots and transplanted in a foreign place where they never felt at home and constantly suffered. In this respect, Kemal's tetralogy deals with the deep psychology of individuals traumatized by war and displacement. The inner worlds of the characters are overwhelmingly preoccupied with painful memories of the past.

Survivors from war and displacement settle on an Aegean island near the Dardanelles to start a new life. The island previously belonged to the Greeks that had to immigrate to Greece because of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece after the Lausanne Treaty. Kemal shows us how these traumatized survivors recover and have a peaceful life by creating a multicultural community on the island like in the past. The first parts of the first volume *Fırat Suyu Kan Akıyor Baksana* [Look, the Euphrates River is Flowing Blood] depict how the Greek inhabitants of the island had to leave for Greece. They did not believe it at first, and later when it became clear that they had to leave their sweet home and immigrate to Greece, they resisted, but they could not do anything. Only Vasili, an inhabitant of the island, hid somewhere on the island when his fellow islanders left. Now he is all alone on the island.

Through Vasili's consciousness it is revealed that he was a soldier who served the Ottoman army in the Balkan Wars and in the battles of Sarikamış and Çanakkale during the First World War. Once, he speaks



to a cat on the island as if it were his friend and tells it about his painful experiences in those wars (Yaşar Kemal, 2010b: 117-18). He experienced such horrible things and suffered so much that he could never forget scenes from those days. Each time he remembers such scenes from the wars, he almost enters a trance and feels as if he were re-experiencing those horrors.

Like Vasili, the protagonist Poyraz Musa is a former officer who fought in the Ottoman army in the First World War. He grew up in a village in the Çukurova, but his family is originally Circassian. It seems Yaşar Kemal based Poyraz Musa on a real person he knew in his life. In his memoirs he relates that after starting middle school in Adana, he at the same time started working at a cotton gin factory whose director was Aslan Bey, "a former officer, originally a Circassian from the Caucasus" (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 39). Like Vasili, Poyraz also experienced horrible things in the war, and the atrocities he witnessed occupy his imagination and memory and destroy his psychological balance. One of the atrocities Poyraz saw was the massacre of *Yezidis* in a desert somewhere near southern Turkey. When he remembers how *Yezidis* were slaughtered and how *Yezidi* women's breasts were cut off and thrown on the desert sands, he becomes ill. Especially the scene of the breasts twitching on the desert sands and the women's being thrown into the Euphrates River devastates him, and because of this for a long time he cannot have a healthy relationship with Zehra, the girl he loves (Yaşar Kemal, 2010c: 81, 223-24). Things get much worse after he sees Zehra's breasts, and from then on he cannot even look her in the face (Yaşar Kemal, 2010c: 223).

In an atmosphere of love, Poyraz gradually gets better by spending plenty of time in nature and by gazing at *kilims* in fascination almost every day (Yaşar Kemal, 2010c: 322, 345, 411-14, 419, 438-39). Şerife Hatun, a woman who makes beautiful *kilims* like works of art, arrives on the island with her family and starts weaving *kilims* in her new house. Poyraz very often visits her and they together watch her *kilims* for long hours, "entranced" (Yaşar Kemal, 2010c: 414). Obviously, some of the things mentioned above and many of the details in the novel regarding Poyraz are part of Kemal's autobiographical details, and Poyraz's love of watching *kilims* in fascination is more explicitly autobiographical as Kemal relates in his memoirs (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 46).

Yaşar Kemal's *Kimsecik* [Little Nobody] trilogy, which is his most explicit autobiographical novel, focuses on the inner worlds of two horrified and traumatized children, Mustafa and Salman, who are the main characters of the novel. Kemal himself declares that *Kimsecik* is based on his own life along with that of his family (Çiftlikçi, 1997: 392-93; Andaç, 2002: 14). In fact the story in *Kimsecik* mostly matches and reflects the autobiographical and familial details that Yaşar Kemal himself has revealed in his memoirs and interviews, and almost all the important characters in the novel represent people from Yaşar Kemal's real life. For instance, the protagonist Mustafa is Kemal himself as a child; the second main character Salman stands for Yusuf, Kemal's adopted brother who killed his father; İsmail Ağa represents Kemal's father Sadık Efendi; Zero stands for Kemal's mother Nigâr Hanım; Hasan Ağa is Kemal's paternal uncle Tahir Ağa; and so on. Yaşar Kemal's family, originally from the village of Ernis (also called Günseli) on the shore of Lake Van in eastern Turkey, had to leave their village and migrate southward after the Russian army occupied Van during the First World War. They had a long journey from Van to the Çukurova in 1915-1917 and Yusuf was a young boy they found half-dead on the way in a forest of the Gâvur Mountains. Sadık Efendi and Nigâr Hanım adopted Yusuf and brought him up with great love and care as though he were their own child. The boy, nearly eleven, also loved his adoptive parents with boundless devotion, but when Kemal was born, things began to change. He increasingly grew jealous of Kemal and apparently felt a sort of emotional void.⁶

The character Salman represents Yusuf, but he is also based on another real person whose story Yaşar Kemal heard from a beggar. In his memoirs, Kemal tells us that one of the main sources of the details he relates about the First World War and the long journey of his family from Van to the Çukurova in 1915-1917 is a Kurdish blind beggar he met in 1938 in front of a mosque in Adana (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 22). This beggar, whose name was Kotey, turned out to be a boy from the village of Kemal's family. When in 1915 the whole village began to flee from the Russian army southward, Kotey was with them as an eight- or nine-year old boy. On the way, he was lost in a big fire (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 23-24). In Southern and Eastern Anatolia, there were many large groups of starving children who had lost their parents in the war along with large packs of dogs who had lost their owners and herds (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 21). The children and the dogs separately or together plundered villages and towns for food, and the starving Kotey had to join one of these groups of children.

⁶ Yaşar Kemal mentioned this in a talk I had with him at his house on 24 March 2012.



Armed horsemen killed many of these children and massacred many Yezidis (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 22). Kotey could never forget a scene he had seen. Arab horsemen had gathered hundreds of young and old Yezidis on a hill in the desert, drawn a circle around them, and left them alone. Kotey and his friends were watching them from behind a dune. None of the Yezidis on the hill attempted to cross the circle and flee because crossing a circle drawn around them was against their faith (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 22). After a while, the Arab horsemen arrived and began to massacre them with their swords. After the horsemen left at noon, Kotey and his friends heard the moans of a boy from the hill and ran toward the sound. When they arrived, they found a ten-year old boy moaning under the dead body of his mother. He was the only survivor of the massacre. They pulled him out and took him with them. On the way, they found some medicine to heal his wounds, and after the boy recovered, he became the leader of the band of children. Under his command were more than 500 boys who never disobeyed him (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 23). Textual evidence in *Kimsecik* clearly indicates that Yaşar Kemal has based Salman not only on Yusuf but also on this Yezidi boy.⁷ And in this way Kemal has established connections between Kotey's memory, his family's memory, and his own memory.

İsmail Ağa and all the members of his family, including his adopted son Salman, have experienced the horrible trauma of the First World War, and Kemal has constructed them as characters still suffering from the effects of this trauma. Mustafa, though born after the war, is directly traumatized by Salman, but indirectly by the horror and trauma the war has caused in Salman, İsmail Ağa, his family, and the people of Turkey. Salman's murdering his father at the end of *Yağmurcuk Kuşu* [*Salman the Solitary*] is, of course, another great trauma that turns life into hell for Mustafa, but much before that Mustafa has already become a boy suffering from deep fears and psychological problems. His subconscious is preoccupied with fear of death. Like Mustafa, Salman has deep fears as well. He constantly sees nightmares at night and has horrible flashbacks from his painful and traumatic past during the day. His psychological balance is extremely disrupted, and like Mustafa, he has a sharpened sense of fear: "For Salman the world was a place of fear. Everyone, every creature in the world felt fear, even the bees and birds and butterflies... The grasshoppers and ants, even the eagles on high..." (Yaşar Kemal, 1998: 116). In *Salman the Solitary*, somehow Salman cannot make a healthy inner journey and recover from the horrible traumas he experienced during World War I. Like Hasan of *To Crush the Serpent*, he cannot have enough time or opportunity to travel into the depths of his soul to establish his inner peace, and at the end of the novel he goes mad and kills his father, even as Hasan kills his mother.

The deep feeling that pervades the whole *Kimsecik* trilogy is fear. And the volume of the trilogy that examines fear most deeply and intensively is *Kale Kapısı* [The Castle Gate], which the critic Fethi Naci has described as "the novel of fear, the novel of Mustafa's fear" (Naci, 2008: 55). In fact, Yaşar Kemal himself states that this is a novel through which he has "most deeply [examined fear and] reached that human reality, that human psychology" (Çiftlikçi, 1997: 406). Salman's murdering İsmail Ağa is a horrible trauma for Mustafa, but the fear that Salman will at any time attempt to kill him as well is a greater and longer trauma that shatters Mustafa's psychology, turns his life into hell, and causes him to suffer from more severe psychological problems. Yaşar Kemal depicts this infernal trauma as a significant autobiographical detail and painful childhood memory:

After Yusuf killed my father, he stayed in the mountains for fifteen days [before he was arrested]. The villagers thought that he would come and kill Kemal any time during this period [...]... And such messages were coming from the mountains [i.e., from Yusuf]: "I wouldn't roam the mountains if I hadn't killed my father because of that child; I will kill him, too." Can you imagine the fear of a five-year-old child face to face with death? My mother and the villagers did not know where to hide me, and I had no idea where to hide...

That fifteen-day fear is expanded into three months in the novel. This was necessary for the novelist to reach that reality of fear very well. [...] This fear was not only mine; along with me all the children of the village were afraid, too. In those fifteen days the whole village had gone crazy. Everybody was waiting for his death. (Çiftlikçi, 1997: 406)

Like *Salman the Solitary*, *Kale Kapısı* [The Castle Gate] also includes some clues as to why Salman murdered İsmail Ağa. Yaşar Kemal himself states that *Kale Kapısı* is a novel that investigates the reason of Yusuf's murdering his father and adds:

Nobody could find out why he killed my father. And I think the truth has been found to a certain extent in this novel. I wish the man were alive and we could ask him, but even he himself did not know why

⁷ Incidentally, in the talk in 2012 Yaşar Kemal said that his adopted brother Yusuf was not a Yezidi.



he murdered my father. [...] We should not look at any event through only one perspective. Nothing in this universe is one-dimensional. Not even a murder. [...]

I do not know how to feel hatred. I did not feel hatred even for the man who killed my father. [...] This event was only a matter of curiosity for me during the process of writing. When I was alone by myself, I just wondered why this boy killed my father. And I know that boy's psychology after the murder. [...] My mother says, "He killed him because he was jealous of you." After Yusuf ran away, he all the time cried, "I killed my father." And he visited my father's grave three or four times. (Çiftlikçi, 1997: 392)

The "truth" Kemal mentions in this quote is psychological as he also gives us a clue by saying that he knew Yusuf's psychology after the murder. Evidently, the explanations one can find in *Kale Kapısı* and the whole *Kimsecik* trilogy for the murder are mostly psychological.

The first two chapters of *Kale Kapısı* are about the same event: İsmail Ağa's murder and its immediate aftermath. In Chapter 1, the murder and its immediate aftermath are narrated through Salman's perspective, and in Chapter 2, they are related through Mustafa's point of view. Thus the same event is told through two different perspectives, which enables the reader to see what the two brothers have experienced and felt at the moment and in the immediate aftermath of the murder. The remaining three chapters describe Mustafa's struggle against his growing fear and deteriorating psychological problems.

In Chapter 1 of the novel, Salman takes refuge in the mountain near the village after being chased by İsmail Ağa's guards. At the top of the mountain at midnight, he is lost in deep thought, most of which the narrator shares with the reader. Through his consciousness it is revealed that he is still under the effect of the traumatic murder he committed. The scene of the murder and the expression on İsmail Ağa's face are constantly on his mind:

The dagger was still in Salman's hand and was bleeding constantly and cracking when entering and exiting the soft flesh. İsmail Ağa's eyes were wide-open, bewildered, desperate, surrendered, anticipating and expecting such a thing... A pitying look passed through his eyes while he was looking at Salman in bewilderment, as though Salman were a shadow. (Yaşar Kemal, 2011b: 9)

In this stream-of-consciousness flashback, Salman recollects every detail of the murder vividly as though he were re-experiencing it. He sees the bleeding dagger in his hand and hears its cracking sound as he stabbed İsmail Ağa. Moreover, he recalls seeing in İsmail Ağa's eyes all the feelings he experienced. For instance, he remembers that at that moment "İsmail Ağa's eyes were wide-open, bewildered, desperate, surrendered, anticipating and expecting such a thing," and a bit later there was anger, confusion, fear, a teardrop, and a pitying look in his eyes. This pitying look in İsmail Ağa's eyes made Salman feel humiliated. Evidently, Salman wanted to be loved, not pitied. Thus through literary creation Yaşar Kemal describes his most painful childhood memory through the perspective of his father's murderer and implies that one of the causes of the murder might be humiliation.

In Chapter 2, the moment of the murder is related mostly through Mustafa's consciousness. When Mustafa sees Salman with blood running down the dagger in his bloody hand, he freezes with horror. After recovering his senses, he rushes to the spot where his father was killed. What he sees is horrifying. His father is lying on the ground, with his "right hand holding the collar of his jacket with all his strength," and "blood [is] spurting through his fingers" (Yaşar Kemal, 2011b: 25). He gazes at his father and begins to cry, "My heart is burning" like the refrain of a lament (Yaşar Kemal, 2011b: 25). Then he collapses beside his father's dead body and "fixes his eyes on the motionless face of his father" (Yaşar Kemal, 2011b: 25). Experiencing such a great trauma, Mustafa is offended with his father because he thinks that his father has left him by dying deliberately. When people are burying his father's dead body, like Kemal the child he keeps away from the graveyard and plays marbles with the children of the village (Çiftlikçi, 1997: 8). From then on, he almost never enters the cemetery and always changes his way when he has to pass near it.

Apart from being psychologically devastated, Mustafa also feels extremely ashamed because his father was killed. Being fatherless is a deep wound in his psyche. In Chapter 3, it is revealed through his closest friend Bird Memet's consciousness that what Mustafa fears most is that somebody will know his inner world and thoughts:

The boy did everything not to show his inner world. He had become a master at pretending to be a coward if he were brave, mad if he were clever, brave if he were a coward, and merciless if he were merciful. He would rather make up incredible stories than speak the truth. He would make up stories by himself and get lost in his own stories. And he was not aware of this at all. If he knew this habit of his, [...] he would do just the opposite of this in order to hide his habit from everybody and the world. (Yaşar Kemal, 2011b: 217-18)



Yaşar Kemal himself reveals in his memoirs that since his childhood he has always had a tendency to hide himself, and although many people are not aware of it, he is a very shy person who eventually became a master of hiding himself (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 178-79). This shows that being fatherless was a deep wound in Kemal the child's soul as well and that through literary creation Kemal has transformed his own memory into the memory of his protagonist Mustafa, who stands for Kemal the child.

Kanın Sesi [The Sound of Blood], the last and largest volume of the *Kimsecik* trilogy, is predominantly about defying fear. Throughout the novel the protagonist Mustafa's determination to defy his fears never wavers and he gradually overcomes his fears and recovers from his psychological problems. To illustrate, in Chapter 5, while he is wandering around the ancient castle near the village, he reflects on the Roman sarcophagi on the rocky slope of the castle. He recalls the day he saw five skulls in these sarcophagi while playing with the village children near the castle. It was on that day that for the first time he reflected on death very seriously and in great horror:

It was much before his father's death that Mustafa first met the idea of death, and that was when he saw these skulls. After seeing them, he had trembled from top to toe, run away home, and asked his parents, Bandit Sefer, Master Abbas, and whoever crossed his way, what death was, how people died, and where they went when they died, and in no way could he understand the nature of this issue. What was death? Where did people go when they died? Why did they never return from where they went? (Yaşar Kemal, 2009c: 181)⁸

After that day, Mustafa was afraid of these sarcophagi and he never approached them again. He thought that "Salman would kill him; his head would wither like these skulls, too; and his eyes would turn into such large dark holes" (Yaşar Kemal, 2009c: 181). However, now he goes near the sarcophagi fearlessly and fixes his eyes on a skull he finds in one of them. While gazing at the skull, he closes his eyes and has many daydreams through which his self-psychotherapy continues. In the end, as a person who has conquered his fears and experienced spiritual elevation through a long process of self-psychotherapy involving daydreams, art, *türküs*, nature, and attempts to defy fear, Mustafa leaves the village to reach his utopia, the heavenly Lake Van and its surroundings.

As in the first and second volumes of the *Kimsecik* trilogy, in *Kanın Sesi* [The Sound of Blood] Mustafa's paternal uncle Hasan Ağa continues singing *türküs* that express his unquenchable longing for his beautiful hometown on the shore of heavenly Lake Van. As usual, Mustafa and all the children of the village listen to his *türküs* in fascination for hours and feel extremely relieved and hopeful. They imagine the Lake Van in those *türküs* as a paradise and dream of it day and night. Apparently, Yaşar Kemal thinks that the utopia of Mustafa and his friends is everybody's utopia: "Human beings are always seeking. This trilogy is the novel of an unceasing quest" (Andaç, 2002: 19). Kemal reminisces about this dream world in his memoirs:

We constructed another dream world for ourselves and made all the village children believe in this new dream world of ours. That world was the paradise of Lake Van that my paternal uncle described in his *türküs*. As all the children of the village, both male and female, we decided to run away to that heaven. [...] In all our dreams there was Lake Van, and all the fairy tales took place there. In the end, one day we set out for Lake Van. True, we couldn't reach there, and we returned after walking in that direction for a few days... But Lake Van remained in our dreams with all its freshness. (Yaşar Kemal, 1994: 121)

As previously mentioned, the role of daydreaming in self-psychotherapy is remarkable in Yaşar Kemal's novels. An interesting daydream that deserves mentioning belongs to Salman, who with his companions has set off for the village to kill Mustafa:

Salman ran to Mustafa who was waiting by the side of the river. He fell down on his knees in front of the boy and said, "You have no guilt, Mustafa; I did everything. I tormented you; I made you hold a snake; I forced you to enter the cave full of bats; [...] I killed our father; I burned our mansion; I shot our horses; [...] I left you and myself fatherless; it was me who did all these things, my dear brother.... Speak Mustafa, pull your gun and kill me; kill me and save me." [...] Salman became silent and began to stare at Mustafa with begging eyes. [...] Mustafa stirred, bent down, and looked at him; Mustafa's eyes were filled

⁸ Hasan, a child character of *The Dağın Öte Yüzü* [The Other Face of the Mountain] trilogy, also sees a skull and has almost the same feelings about death in *Yer Demir Gök Bakır* [Iron Earth, Copper Sky], the second volume (Yaşar Kemal 2011a: 14). Seeing a skull shocks him and makes him feel "an inner helplessness and a terrifying nothingness" in the face of death. He reflects deeply on what happens to a dead body buried in the grave, on Doomsday, on the afterlife and heaven and hell. Because of his deep fear of death, he experiences "an anguish that destroys his previous carefree life that was filled with song [...] and replaces it with stress and aggression that find outlets in bed-wetting and the cruel treatment of his sister Ummahan" (Tharaud, 2017: 285).



with tears. He laid his hand on Salman's head and caressed his hair. Then he and Salman embraced each other. (Yaşar Kemal, 2009c: 302)

In his daydream Salman meets Mustafa and is reconciled with him. Yaşar Kemal shows us that like all human beings Salman is also trying to have spiritual elevation and self-psychotherapy. In this respect, Salman's confessions, even if in a daydream, ameliorate his psychology. Thus, though Salman has come to kill Mustafa, after having such a daydream, he gives up his evil plan. At least temporarily, a daydream seems to purify him of evil intentions. This daydream must be significant for Yaşar Kemal as well because through an imaginary daydream that he himself has created in a novel of his, Salman, who stands for his adopted brother and the murderer of his father, apologizes for all he has done and Mustafa, who stands for Kemal the child, forgives him. In other words, this is like an inner journey through which Kemal tries to empathize with his adopted brother and to reach inner peace.

As a matter of fact, throughout the whole *Kimsecik* trilogy Yaşar Kemal has deep inner journeys through which he tries to understand why his adopted brother killed his father. The following conversation between Salman and his companion Bandit Sünbül in *Kanun Sesi* is another example of such an inner journey:

"They made me kill my father. I made myself kill my father. It's very hard to live alone in this world."

"If only your father had killed you and you hadn't remained fatherless and alone in this world."

"Everyone in this world has relatives and friends. Every creature has relatives and friends; I don't. I am all alone. Everybody has someone whereas my father lies in the black earth." [...]

"How could he know? [...] How could İsmail Ağa know why you killed him?"

"Oh, if only he had known," said Salman, "if only he had known, I would have given my life for him. And indeed I gave my life for him." [...]

"I believe he knows. Dead people know everything." [...]

"Please bury my dead body beside my father's grave, Bandit Sünbül." (Yaşar Kemal, 2009c: 280-81)

Speaking like a child, Salman voices apparently naïve views such as "I made myself kill my father" and "if only he had known [why I killed him], I would have given my life for him." The mystery behind these innocent sentences is Salman's profound fear of losing the love of İsmail Ağa, his only friend in the world. Evidently, he killed his father because of his deep fear of being all alone, i.e., a little nobody. And one should remember that the title of the trilogy is *Kimsecik*, that is, "a little nobody." Although the sentence "If only your father had killed you and you hadn't remained fatherless and alone in this world" is uttered by Bandit Sünbül, textual evidence shows that it is Salman's wish that he repeatedly shared with his companions. In other words, Salman would prefer to be killed by his father rather than being fatherless and all alone in the world. He deeply regrets having killed his father, and like Mustafa, he wants to be buried beside his father's grave. His wish, "if only he had known [why I killed him]," reflects Salman's belief that if his father had known that losing his father's love is like his Doomsday, he would have kept his love for Salman intact. Thus this is a very significant answer Yaşar Kemal has given for the question why Yusuf killed his father.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, trauma and a deep fear of death are at the heart of Yaşar Kemal's work and are what essentially connect his memory and imagination to those of his main characters regardless of the cause of the trauma—which may be murder, war, displacement, oppression, weakness in old age, etc. Of course, trauma and memory are essentially inseparable. In other words, trauma means there are painful memories that occupy an important place in the memory and imagination of traumatized individuals. Almost all the dreams, daydreams, flashbacks, streams of consciousness, hallucinations, inner monologues, and psychological problems of the main characters in Yaşar Kemal's novels are directly or indirectly linked with their trauma and fears. The underlying source of trauma in Kemal's work is, of course, fear of death, which he himself first experienced at the age of five when he witnessed the murder of his father.

Like Yaşar Kemal, almost all the main characters in his novels are deeply traumatized and suffering individuals who try to have a sort of self-psychotherapy through deep inner journeys involving thinking deeply, daydreaming, defying fear, looking at the world through the eyes of a child, watching creatures in nature, singing and listening to *türküs*, weaving and watching *kilims*, gazing at paintings, etc. Thus the cause of the trauma of Kemal's characters may be the same as that of Kemal's trauma or it may be different, but the way his characters respond to their trauma is typical of Kemal the child. In other words, almost all of his



main characters endeavor to recover from their trauma using the ways that Kemal the child used in his self-psychotherapy. Among these ways, daydreaming seems to play a crucial role in self-psychotherapy, especially for the child protagonists in Kemal's novels. For instance, the self-psychotherapy of Salih of *Al Gözüm Seyreyle Salih* [The Saga of a Seagull] and Mustafa of *Kimsecik* through daydreaming continues gradually throughout the two novels until they fully recover in the end. On the other hand, although Salman of *Kimsecik* and Hasan of *To Crush the Serpent* try hard to have a self-psychotherapy like Kemal the child, they cannot have enough time or opportunity to make healthy inner journeys and recover from the horrible traumas they experienced. In the end, they both go mad and Salman kills his father while Hasan kills his mother.

Two inseparable foundations of Yaşar Kemal's work are psychological depth and autobiographical depth. In fact, Kemal himself reveals this when he answers a question about the cause of the attraction and popularity of his novels: "If you have written about yourself very deeply, that means you are deeply together with all humankind. And this is what it means to be a writer" (Yaşar Kemal, 2009b: 265). And memory is certainly a very important aspect of the psycho-autobiographical depth in Kemal's fiction. As this paper has shown, trauma and fear of death is an underlying theme of Kemal's work through which he has constructed his characters and their memory on the basis of a combination of primarily his own memory, his family's memory, the memory of some people he personally met, and the collective memory of the society. Of course, the memory that combines and shapes all these layers of memory is the author's memory that engenders literary creation. As Kemal himself states, "I have met many people in my life and taken many things from them to use in my novels, but *I myself* have created all my characters. I have done this deliberately" (Yaşar Kemal 1994: 86, italics added).

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