

## Shifting Baselines and Cognitive Estrangement in Yaşar Kemal's *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*

Matthew Chovanec\*

### Abstract

This article offers an ecocritical reading of Yaşar Kemal's *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* as a work which narrativizes generational shifts in attitudes towards non-human life and perceptions about species abundance and biodiversity. Recent efforts at cataloguing biodiversity in the Çukurova Delta have run into one of the normal difficulties of all environmental science, that of shifting baselines. Shifting baselines is the phenomenon by which each generation of scientists can only judge what is the normal or "baseline" for biodiversity and species abundance based on what they themselves observed in the beginning of their careers, which imperceptibly shrinks outside of the bounds of individual human cognition. While recent scientific studies have mapped areas of high diversity, it is almost impossible to say what a healthy environment would ideally be as the historical record is based on anecdotal historical accounts, many of which dismissed wetlands as pestilential swamps. It is in this light that Yaşar Kemal's *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* offers a fascinating fictional strategy as a way to grapple with this problem: cognitive estrangement. As a work of speculative fiction, Kemal is able to bring fresh eyes onto a recognizable world, and to challenge our assumptions about what constitutes normal biodiversity. But unlike a work of science fiction or magical realism which rely on technical or supernatural conceits, Kemal's narrativization of generational shifts in perception of the natural environment is created through a unique approach to lexicon. As environmen-

---

\* University of Texas at Austin, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Phd Candidate.  
mlundin@utexas.edu  
Article submission date: 15.11.2019. Article acceptance date: 28.01.2020.

tal science looks for ways to establish links with traditional forms of knowledge and find new paths to kinship with the non-human world, Kemal shows us the role that literature too can play.

**Key Words:** Yaşar Kemal, speculative fiction, shifting baselines, Çukurova Delta, ecosocialism

## Yaşar Kemal'in *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*'nde Değişen Taban Çizgileri ve Bilişsel Yabancılaşma

### Öz

Bu makale, ekokritik bir okuma üzerinden ilerleyerek Yaşar Kemal'in *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* romanının insan harici yaşamlara yönelik tutumlarda ve canlı türlerin bolluğu ve biyoçeşitlilik ile ilgili algılarda yaşanan kuşaklar arası değişimleri kurgulaştıran bir eser olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Son zamanlarda gerçekleştirilen Çukurova Deltası'ndaki biyoçeşitliliği kataloglama çabaları, çevre bilimin temel zorluklarından biri olan değişen taban çizgisi meselesiyle (shifting baselines) karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Değişen taban çizgileri her kuşaktan bilim insanının kariyerlerinin başında, kendi gözlemlerine dayanarak biyoçeşitlilik ve tür bolluğu için neyin normal veya "taban çizgisi" olarak görüleceğine karar vermek için kullandıkları bir fenomen olagelmıştır. Yakın zamandaki bilimsel çalışmalar yüksek türsel çeşitlilik alanlarının haritasını çıkarmış olsa da, tarihsel kayıtlar sulak arazileri sıtma yuvaları olarak değersizleştiren birçok anekdotal tarihsel anlatıya dayandığından ne tür sağlıklı bir çevrenin ideal olarak sunulabileceğini söylemek zordur. Bu çerçevede Yaşar Kemal'in *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* bu sorunla baş etmek için etkileyici bir kurgusal strateji sunar: Bilişsel yabancılaşma. Bu spekülatif kurgu çalışmasıyla Kemal, tanınmış bir dünyaya taze bir bakış getirmekte ve nelerin normal biyoçeşitliliği oluşturduğuna dair varsayımlarımıza da meydan okumaktadır. Ancak teknik ya da doğüstü aldatmacalara dayanan bilim kurgu ya da büyü gerçeççilik romanlarının aksine Kemal'in doğal çevrenin algılanmasındaki kuşaklar arası değişimleri kurgulaştırması alandaki yerleşik sözlüğe yönelik eşsiz bir yaklaşım sayesinde gerçekleşir. Çevre bilimi, geleneksel bilgi biçimleriyle bağlantı kurmak ve insan harici dünyaya var olan akrabalık bağlarına ulaşmak için yeni yollar bulmaya çalışırken, Kemal bize edebiyatın da bu noktada oynayabileceği bir rolü olduğunu gösterir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yaşar Kemal, spekülatif kurgu, değişen taban çizgileri, Çukurova Deltası, ekososyalizm

"I'm trying to imagine what it would be like going through life not knowing the names of the plants and animals around you...I think it would be a little scary and disorienting—like being lost in a foreign city where you can't read the street signs." Robin Wall Kimmerer

## Introduction

On a July day in 1993 a Landsat satellite took a single image of the Çukurova Delta. This complex picture, known as a Landsat Thematic Mapper (TM) image, was then compared against vegetation and bird census data to map out the spatial distribution of plant and bird biodiversity in this coastal wetland of Turkey (Berberoğlu, 2004, p.615). In doing so, researchers were able to identify areas of high species diversity, in particular the wetlands and salt marshes which proved to be the most biodiverse area of the entire region. And this was for a region already incredibly rich in non-human life. To give a few examples:

240 bird species were observed in the wetlands of Çukurova between 20 March–20 May 1987 by van der Have and van den Berk (1988). Additionally, it is one of the most important breeding areas of *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas*, endangered sea turtle species. The eastern part of Ceyhan Delta was declared a Nature Reserve, as it is a breeding ground for these marine turtle species and has natural Aleppo Pine forest, which is very rare in Turkey. (Berberoğlu, 2004, p.617)

It seems almost like science fiction to instantly capture such an enormous geography and also see the specific plants and animals that inhabit it. Not only the use of space-age technology, but because of the way that satellite imagery, like all good science fiction, acts as a way of revealing secrets of the familiar and estranging reality from normal ways of seeing. Science fiction isn't merely an exhibition of the fantastical, but a device for renewing one's own picture of reality. The Landsat imagery wasn't used to discover new fantastic worlds out in space, but focused on southern Turkey to identify new patterns of well-known birds and plants in a region that has been mapped for thousands of years. The satellite performed the role of what the literary theorist Darko Suvin (1979) called the *novum*—that con-

ceit in a work of science fiction which helps us to move from our implied norm of reality to a vision of the strange and new; a vision which, in turn, helps to bring a fresh perspective to one's own everyday reality. This return to one's own senses is referred to as "cognitive estrangement" (p.71).

But this is not the first time that a work of cognitive estrangement has offered a new perspective of the ecology of the Çukurova region. In his works of fiction, the author Yaşar Kemal stands as the foremost storyteller of the historical ecology of the Çukurova. Like the Landsat satellite, his work offers a simultaneously sweeping and granular vision of the region. Some of his most famous novels like *Ince Memed* (1955), *Ortadirek* (1960) and *Demirciler Çarşısı* Cınayeti (1974) tell grand narratives about multi-generational shifts in how humans relate to the natural environment while also offering countless, intimate vignettes showcasing individual species and habitats. In his recent dissertation on the historical ecology of Cilicia, Chris Gratien (2015) cites Kemal's dozens of novels as being "singularly influential" as a source. Other scholars have discussed the ways that Kemal's work functions as ecocriticism, with A. Clare Brandabur (2016) calling him "the most profoundly eco-conscious writer of our time" (p.140). While it might at first appear a *non sequitur* to jump from satellite imaging, to science fiction, to the work of one of Turkey's premier authors, the comparison is meant to highlight the specific way of seeing that Kemal's novels provide. Namely, he narrativizes a phenomenon that often confounds environmental science: historical changes to human perception itself.

The Landsat study was carried out in an effort to provide data for those hoping to prioritize conservation in a quickly developing region. With up to 90.2% accuracy, satellite imagery analysis showed a rapid rate of improper land use, with output images recording "that 4,896 [hectares] of dune area out of 17,644 has been invaded illegally for cultivation" (Berberoğlu, 2004, p.627). However, these rates of loss are only relative to the state of the natural environment in the late 1980s when the first direct scientific measurements and bird counts were taken. What might have seemed like a healthy biodiversity for 1993 or 1987 might in fact have represented an ecological disas-

ter when compared to the wetlands and estuaries that existed in the 1950s when widespread draining of the wetlands began. This could be doubly true of the vantage point of the 19th century, a time before modern settlement had even begun in the central Çukurova Delta.

A scientific study's precise empirical measurements cannot overcome one of the fundamental problems plaguing environmental studies: that of shifting baselines. First laid out by fishery studies expert Daniel Pauly, shifting baselines is the phenomenon by which each generation of scientists can only judge what is the normal or "baseline" for biodiversity and species abundance based on what they themselves happened to observe in the beginning of their careers, an abundance which imperceptibly shrinks outside of the bounds of individual human cognition. In an interview about the concept, Pauly explains the problem by stating:

If you want to fight the loss of memory and knowledge about the past, you have to rely on past information. But past information is viewed by many...scientists as anecdotal. There is no knowledge in the past, however secure, however sound, that they are willing to consider because it is not couched in the verbiage that is currently fashionable. (Guy, 2017).

It is exactly the elusive nature of historical ecological knowledge, and the untranslatability of archaic verbiage, that Yaşar Kemal addressed in his work, offering an estranging vision not possible even to hi-tech science. Rather than overcoming the problem of shifting baselines, he makes it a central feature of his fiction, with his novels acting as figural representations of historically contingent understandings of the natural world. In this article I will argue that Kemal uses narrative techniques, specifically those of cognitive estrangement, in order to address the problem of shifting baselines from an eco-Marxist perspective. Kemal's use of the "distancing effect" in the service of ecocriticism has been noted before, namely by Günil Özlem Ayaydın whose masters thesis (2003) explores how Kemal's oral literature techniques offer an ecocritical portrayal of the process of a character's alienation from the non-human world. Like Ayaydın, I am interested in explaining Kemal's particular narrative approach

to cognitive estrangement, and believe that it differs in important ways from those of other, more commonly known genres of speculative fiction such as science fiction or magical realism. Specifically, Kemal's most ecocentric works capture these generational shifts in how nature is understood through a distinctively literary technology: his lexicon and lyrical language. Looking to conversations about how naming things in nature represents "a path to kinship" as Robin Wall Kimmerer calls it, I stress the importance of lexicon in Kemal's work as the agent of cognitive estrangement because of the ways that it suggests a potential ecosocialist ethics of stewardship and care. This is an ethics not grounded in some "pristine myth" of a return to an unspoiled nature, but one which understands nature and human society as existing in a dialectic.

In particular, Kemal's novel *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* offers strange fusions of past and present, temporal and spatial hybridity which does not rely on the creation of some *other* world. Instead, the novel achieves a critical, speculative distance between the social reality of its readers and that of its fictional characters through estranged language. This article discusses how Yaşar Kemal's approach to narration, particularly his celebrated use of a vernacular, antiquated, and synonym-rich lexicon, helped create a distancing effect with ecocritical consequences. A close reading of *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* shows how Kemal can recreate a sense of shifting baselines between different generations—the ecological counterpoint to what Raymond Williams (1977) famously described as structures of feeling—by juxtaposing different uses of lexicon and bringing acute awareness to non-human life through his lyricism.

### **Tracing the Natural History of the Çukurova**

At the beginning of the 19th century, a large portion of the Çukurova Delta was made up of various types of wetlands. It was described dismissively at the time by Mübeccel Kıray as a "badly drained, fever-ridden, thinly populated piece of land" (Kıray, p.179). The area between the Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers, in particular, had remained virtually unused by humans throughout most of the Ot-

toman period (Toksöz, 2000, p.20). The two rivers were also prone to annual flooding, which made the soil fertile but the marshy conditions incompatible with permanent human settlement. While the region has been home to countless civilizations since classical times, its wetlands have largely been passed by, overlooked, or scorned in the historical record.

At the same time the wetlands must have long offered a paradise for a wide range of wildlife species, ranging from waterfowl to mammals, fish and insects. Wetlands are some of the most biodiverse habitats available, and recent studies of the Çukurova Delta and its surrounding water bodies have demonstrated their critical importance for biodiversity and abundance. While there have been recent attempts to accurately monitor population numbers of various species, these studies measure relative decline or resilience based on counts only taken as far back as the mid-1980s and 1990s. Scientific ornithology is an extremely recent development in Turkey, with the first comprehensive work, *Zur Kenntnis der Avifauna Kleinasiens*, published only in 1961. Studies nonetheless attest to vital biodiversity. For example, the highly threatened Nile Soft-shelled Turtle was observed 2-3km north of the mouth of the Ceyhan river in August 2000, with sand dunes along the river banks identified as a nesting area (Medasset, 2000, p.2). A survey in 1997 of Tuzla Gölü, also near the mouth of the Ceyhan river, reported thirty-four species of shorebird and the breeding sites of several species (Szekely, 1998, p.28). A study published in 2010 attempted to measure different insect populations in order to test which ones could offer themselves as good “indicator species” for habitat description (Aydın, 2010). Researchers found a sharp decline in both species and total population of insect species at five different sites throughout the delta just in the period between 2003-4, a fact attributed to habitat fragmentation. One can only dream of the range of insect life that existed before the enormous delta had ever been settled by humans.

It is precisely because the wetland areas of the Çukurova were largely uninhabited before the 20th century that one would be hard pressed to find extensive scientific evidence of bird and other animal populations in the historical record, much less empirical data. Beca-

use of widespread fears over malaria, more historical attention was given to the mosquito than to all other local species combined. In order to have a better sense of historic populations, environmental historians have to rely on anecdotes showing up in other accounts, some of which dismiss the region entirely. This would be especially true of the times preceding the 19th century, before economic opportunity would bring human and, by extension, scientific attention. Evliya Çelebi, to give just one example, describes the landscape back in 1671 as a place where “kuş uçmaz, kervan geçmez” (“birds don’t fly, caravans cannot pass” 1935, p.692). Accounts of the well-traveled routes between important medieval centers such as Tarsus and Mopsuestia often mention swamps only in passing. While it is safe to say that ancient inhabitants would have been more attuned to the natural world, unfortunately none of their observations have survived in written form, much less written “in the verbiage that is currently fashionable” as Daniel Pauly (Guy, 2017) puts it.

In the time after the American Civil War, the cotton industry would explode in the Çukurova, making it one of the most economically productive areas of the entire Eastern Mediterranean region. It would especially take off with mechanization in the mid-20th century. In recent years several excellent histories have detailed the massive economic and ecological transformations experienced during this time, including those by Chris Gratien (2015) and Meltem Toksöz (2000). The biggest ecological transformation came with the draining of wetlands to make way for cotton farming which began in earnest in the 1940s and 50s. This draining was devastating to a whole range of waterbirds and other species who made their home in marshy areas, not to mention the plant life of the marshes itself. Turkey is estimated to have lost at least 1.3 million hectares in the 20th century overall, and the Çukurova Delta was a major site of these losses (Perennou, 2012). Various antimalarial campaigns known as the Sıtma Mücadelesi or Savaşı would act as justification for massive draining campaigns of sitting water and, as settlement picked up, it would lead to an all-out war on nature. Chris Gratien explains the typical attitude towards non-human life in this period:

A growing number of facets of the natural world were presented as threats, adversaries to be fought and indeed conquered. Much of this discourse centered on pesky animals, from mosquitoes and locusts to pigs and dogs, and their extermination (Gratien, 2015, p.551).

By 1951, when an archeological survey was made of the Cilicia region by M.V. Seton-Williams, a map indicates only a few remaining wetlands in the entire region. One of them was a small patch just south of the Anavarza ruins between Ceyhan, Kadirli, and Kozan. This small residual patch of wetland, a mere fragment of its former glory, was the place which would be described in intimate detail by Yaşar Kemal in his novel *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*. Rather than celebrating the defeat of the swamps, his novel is a tribute to their biodiversity and beauty. Kemal's lyricism turns what was commonly perceived as a wasteland into a lost paradise.

This loving attention gives us one of our best historical accounts of the scale of the loss. Without objective empirical information, it is not possible to understand long-term trends in the history of the Çukurova, nor to possess an accurate baseline of biodiversity *before* human settlement from which environmental conservation work could proceed. But acknowledging this generational blindness is the first step, one that is crucial not only for environmental science, but for cultural history as well. As Jeremy B. C. Jackson and Karen E. Alexander (2011) claim in their essay about the importance of shifting baselines:

It is essential to adopt a truly interdisciplinary approach, using a wide variety of data to estimate past changes and understand those changes in a social and historical as well as scientific context (p.3)

There are challenges to incorporating a shifting baselines model into eco-conscious projects of all kinds. It “makes us uncomfortable because it places all of us squarely within nature and holds us accountable for both past destruction and shaping the future” (Jackson & Alexander, 2011, p.3). It is both more convenient and more customary to imagine the natural world as eternal, inexhaustible, and separate from human life. Up until very recently, the marshland of

the Çukurova was dismissed as a nearly endless expanse of pestilential swamp. Understanding how shifting baselines work as a cognitive impediment to comprehending habitat and biodiversity loss requires upsetting habitual patterns of thought. In the realm of science, this includes empirical data, whether it comes from a satellite or from painstaking fieldwork. In the social and historical context, on the other hand, it would need to come from narrative forms which push people out of their normal ways of seeing reality in order to see it with fresh eyes. This would be the work of speculative fiction, a broad range of fictional genres each containing specific supernatural, futuristic, or other fantastical elements, which act to reframe the reader's perception of their own realities. In the following section, I will reframe Kemal's well-known use of lexicon not merely as a lyrical or aesthetic technique, but as central to his goals of cognitive estrangement. In comparing his approach with two other well-known genres of speculative fiction, I aim to underline the importance of words and of naming specifically for confronting the challenge of shifting baselines.

### Yaşar Kemal's Lexicon and Cognitive Estrangement

The work of Yaşar Kemal throughout the 1960s and 70s can be characterized as a series of related experiments with the novel form which use lyrical language, steeped in local literary traditions, to create speculative narrative worlds. His early novels in the 1950s had combined lyrical descriptions, rural themes, and a mythic tone of narration to create novels which immerse readers in the feudalistic world of southern Turkey.<sup>1</sup> In each of his early novels, from *Ince Memed* (1955) to the *Dağın Öte Yüzü* Trilogy (1960-8), he experimented with different approaches to this arrangement. With the publication of his novel *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, he claimed to have taken one

---

<sup>1</sup> This article maintains Kemal's own use of the concept "feudal mode of production" while acknowledging that the history of feudalism in Anatolia has been greatly complicated if not refuted in the decades since the publishing of this novel. The article aspires an epochal analysis in line with Raymond Williams' understanding of cultural processes as a complex interplay of dominant, residual and emergent cultural forms, with feudalism being used as a general term for residual cultural forms in mid-century Çukurova. Thanks to Kenan Sharpe for the insight in regards to this point.

more step towards the kind of novel he wanted to write (Çiftlikçi, 1997, p.328). *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* is the first novel in what was meant as a trilogy, written by Kemal in 1972 and published in 1974. The novel takes place in and around the wetlands next to present-day Dilekkaya and the ruins of Anavarza during the rapid economic and environmental changes of the 1940s and 50s. Before this time, the area was considered to be a hostile frontier environment (Gratien, 2015, p.173). Only in the late 19th century did a few hearty newcomers attempt to settle the area. But after various drainage and anti-malarial projects were undertaken in the 1950s, the entire area would suddenly be transformed by mechanized agriculture and capitalist investment.

The novel centers around the ongoing blood feud between two feudal lords (*ağalar*), Dervish Bey and Mustafa Bey, who plot to kill one another based on a grudge whose origin is now lost to time. During the course of their struggle, the narrative slowly begins shifting focus to a group of young agricultural capitalists in town (presumably Kadırlı), who hope to buy up the lords' landholdings and use them towards profitable agricultural ventures. The intense interpersonal conflict between the feudal lords is shown to be an increasingly anachronistic distraction to the rapidly changing landscape of the region. While Dervish Bey, Mustafa Bey, and their ilk all speak in and are described with the mythologized language of their ancestors and traditions, the town landowners and others are quickly draining the swamp, buying up the land, and looking for ways to profit from the emerging capitalist agricultural sector. The increasing contrast between the seemingly timeless world of the feudal lords and the empirical (and marketized) geography of the Republican-era Çukurova creates two separate narrative approaches: folktale epic being increasingly overrun by a thoroughly empirical realism. This narrative disjunction has been described by İbrahim Oluklu (1987) as the slow intrusion of objective-historical time (p.11-2).<sup>2</sup> Early reviewers

---

<sup>2</sup> "Akçasazın Ağaları nesnel-tarihsel zaman, dikkatli bin okurca rahatlıkla görülebilecek kadar açıktır. Bu zaman feodal Türkmen beylerinin ortadan silinip yerlerini yeni yetme ağalar diye belirlenen kişilerin almaya başladığı ve onların kent yaşamına doğru yavaş yavaş uzanışlarının anlatıldığı bir zamandır."

were critical of the seeming disjunction between the various plotlines. But Kemal was clear that his intention was to design a novel that encapsulates these contradictory levels of figuration and perspective. There is a radical incompatibility between different modes of production and their different methods of figuration, which Kemal described as narrative rings (*daireler*). The disjunctions and cognitive estrangement that they create are exactly the readerly experience that Kemal is trying to produce.

The way that Kemal separates these two distinct realms is by means of a linguistic analogy: the plenitude of regional rural life is described in lush, idiosyncratic language while the matter of factness of modern town living is described through direct, unornamented language. Through this linguistic juxtaposition *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* achieves the effect of cognitive estrangement, bringing the reader's attention to those objects of—and attitudes towards—the physical world, which steadily fade into the background with the rise of modern development. The distancing effect works through the contrast by showing that the same world can be described with two radically different lexical registers. In the feudal scenes, Kemal showcases archaic and vernacular terms. Using a forgotten lexicon, Kemal brings back to life the epic world from which it comes. In an interview with Erden Kıral (1978) he claims “when the Ottoman language was removed, our Turkish literature was left in a bad state. Left without a lexicon, left without idioms. It was left stark naked. We said we can't make poetry with this language, we can't write literature” (p.34). For Kemal, language was stripped bare during the emergence of the modern world just like the natural world was. The modern sections of the novel, by contrast, contains constant references to people and concepts which peg the narrative to the modern world. Menderes, Hitler, American tractors, German Mercedes Benz, and the constant invocation of the central government in Ankara all serve to make the town scenes unmistakably grounded in the specific historical time and place of 1940-50s Turkey.

The timeless world is depicted in the first chapter of the novel in a section which the jury of the 1974 Madaralı literary prize called “a great language symphony” (Benk, 1982). As Fethi Naci claims, Ya-

şar Kemal natural descriptions cue in all five senses like an antenna: colors, sounds, smells (Sarıbaş, 2013). In this opening chapter, through the constant downpour of a “yellow rain,” a wounded horseman arrives at the residence of Derviş Bey having been pursued by Sultan Ağa's men. Over thirty three pages the rider slowly heals from his injuries as the bad weather persists and riders from the opposite tribe besiege the estate. During the entire drawn-out scene, intense focus is given to describing the weather and the natural environment, often redescribing or reframing descriptions of the same objects over and over again. It is as though Kemal is practicing to test the limits of synonyms offered by the enriched language of Anatolia. In describing the rain, he gives the following descriptions:

Hışım gibi bir yağmur yağıyordu. Yağan yağmur sapsarıydı. Ne bir gök gürültüsü, ne bir şimşek ışığı, durmadan, bozulmadan biteviye yukardan aşağı düşen, kesintisiz sular, aydınlık, koygun sarı yağmur.

(It was raining angrily. The rain was pale yellow. No thunder, no lightning, uninterrupted water, constantly falling from top to bottom, uninterrupted waters, bright, pale yellow rain, p.7)

İnceden başladı yağmur. Sarı, kehribar gibi, azıcık da ışıltılı. Damla damla düşmüyor, sağılıyordu. İplik gibi. Işıktan iplikler gibi.

(The rain started lightly. Yellow, like amber, and slightly glittering. The raindrops were not falling, they were being unraveled. Like yarn. Like threads of light, p.11)

Yağmur dinmiş, sarı, pırıltılı bir toz tabaka tabaka ince havada uçuyordu.

(A rainy, yellow, glittering layer of powder was flying through the thin air, p.33)

This attempt to narrate using as rich a lexicon as possible was tied to Yaşar Kemal's own beliefs about the Turkish language. In an interview with the leftist author Erdal Öz (2000), he lamented “Today you can't write a novel with Istanbul Turkish. You can't write poetry. You can't write anything. Istanbul Turkish is a language with a vocabulary of three hundred or five hundred words. Ottoman was like that too. It is removed from life, a frozen language” (p.313). Kemal believed that only the vernacular language of a place could accurately explain its specific history and its ecology:

When one creates a novel, they must first create a language. This language is not that of the people, neither is it the language of myths, fairy tales or poetry. Written narrative is completely different... I realized this as I wrote. While writing a long novel I realized something else, the structure of language shapes the novel and its content. (Naci, 1993)

He drew on his own experiences growing up in the Çukurova as well as his study of regional folklore traditions and lexical fieldwork in order to create a repository of endemic words which, when used in his texts, would do a great deal of work in recreating a historical world. Kemal's close attention to lexicon has been catalogued by the Turkish lexicographer and poet Ali Püsküllüoğlu who in 1974 published a compendium to Yaşar Kemal's work entitled the "Yaşar Kemal Dictionary." The dictionary carefully collects all of those words which are not found in standard Turkish dictionaries such as *Türkçe Sözlük*, *Büyük Türk Sözlüğü*, *Meydan Larousse Büyük Lügat ve Ansiklopedi* (p.17). According to him:

Yaşar Kemal took elements of vernacular language and made them part of the standard language... because when a standard language writer like Yaşar Kemal uses these vernacular words in all of his works they should be considered to have become part of the standard language. On the other hand, these words are at present found exclusively in the work of Yaşar Kemal and so they still have the effect of being regionalisms.<sup>3</sup>

Püsküllüoğlu's dictionary is organized alphabetically and includes both vernacular words as well as regional idioms, along with a definition and an example from the novel in which it appeared. For *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, Püsküllüoğlu records 20 remarkable lexical examples including the following:

---

<sup>3</sup> Ali Püsküllüoğlu Quoted by Uyguner, M. (1975) Yaşar Kemal Sözlüğü. *Türk Dili*, Şubat. It is worth noting that much of Kemal's lexicon could in fact be derived from other regional languages such as Armenian, Greek, or Kurdish. That Püsküllüoğlu does not mention this possibility in his dictionary, referring to them only as "local Turkish" (yöresel Türkçe), is an indication of the ideologically charged nature of lexicography. I will return to the ways that Kemal points to these silences in the ethnocentric history of Anatolia at the end of the article.

**çivgin** (a.) Rüzgar dolayısıyla eğik yağan yağmur.

“Sarı yağmur çivgina varmış, eğri, uçuşarak yağıyordu.”

(**çivgin** (noun) a rain that is angled because of the wind. “The yellow rain came çivgin, raining slanted, flying”, p.40)

**İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir** (atasözü) Kavgacı bir kimseyle takışmaktansa takışmayacak bir yol aramak daha iyidir.

“Vazgel arkadaş... İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir.”

(**İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir** (proverb) It is better to seek a way that does not conflict with a belligerent person. “Forget about it friend... İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir.” p.60)

**kürnek** (a.) Otlatılıp doyurulmuş olan sürünün ikinci otlama vaktine değin topluca bulunduruldukları genellikle su kıyısı yer.

“Bir de sığırınan, koyunların kürnekleri kaldı.”

(**kürnek** (noun) A waterside location where animals will remain after having grazed to their fill until the time of a second grazing. “The cattle and the sheep remained in the kürneks,” p.68)

In each of the examples, one can see how Kemal regularly used his rare words in such a way as to include an adjoined synonym or another form of contextualization to help out the unfamiliar reader. The “çivgin rain” is immediately described as “slanted, flying rain” and the idiom “it’s better to beat through the bush than to take on the dog” is understood as advice appropriate to the similar situation being faced by the characters in the book. Idioms and proverbs like these are colorful and regionally specific, and help to root Kemal’s characters and descriptions in a specific region. Much of the vocabulary is for elements from nature or specific to traditional agricultural techniques. Püsküllüoğlu’s dictionary does not even mention the large number of endemic plant and animal species which Kemal described with careful detail throughout the novel, as I will show.

It is remarkable the extent to which these unusual words do the heavy lifting in creating the epic or mythological mood of Kemal’s work. Sometimes, the only thing making a landscape seem remote, timeless, or fantastical is the words used to describe it. They are not merely mundane rural areas, the middle of nowhere, or places in which some committed nationalists seek out an authentic Anatolia. Kemal instead paints them as the vibrant center of the universe, rife with action and drama, the center of its own world. Merely attending to the rich detail of the physical world and allowing characters

to speak through their own idiom makes this landscape not merely the Turkish heartland, but “the next valley” of fantastic and utopian fiction.

But how might one compare this strategy of estrangement to other subgenres of “speculative fiction”? I use the term speculative fiction in order to help arrange the border between various genres and narrative approaches such as fantasy, myth, utopianism and political allegory. While science fiction has already been mentioned as an example, Kemal’s work has often been characterized as magical realism although Kemal himself did not approve of the label. Both genres are similar to Kemal’s work in that they use of certain elements that do not exist in the real world. Neither of these two genres precisely capture what exactly these speculative elements are. Looking at how the different subgenres fail to define *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* helps explain what makes the novel’s particular narratological approach so crucial for confronting the phenomenon of shifting baselines.

In his famous work on Science Fiction, Suvin (1979) claims that traditional works of fantastic and utopian fiction function as “voyages imaginaires” into “the next valley” whereby an author shows a wholly separate realm inhabited by different creatures who nonetheless provide a satisfying covariant mirror to our own reality. The *estrangement* element in this arrangement is provided by the uncanny sensation through which this other world is nevertheless recognizable as an alternative of our own. It is through the very fact of its discernable parallels that we are able to use it to step out of our normal understanding of circumstances and phenomena, and to perceive them freshly. Estrangement functions within the work of art as the famous dramaturg of cognitive estrangement Bertold Brecht (1964) said, “to serve the great social task of mastering life” (p.16) As for the *cognitive* aspect, it refers to the ability for even the fantastical world to be understood empirically. Unlike in myth or fantasy, where the world is seen as timeless or built from archetypal truths, there is still an expectation in science fiction that the world can be measured, delineated, and understood. The specificity of time is a vital aspect in this reckoning, as the world in question, in

order to be subject to a *cognitive view*, must necessarily be unique and changeable. Suvin uses the concept of a “novum” to describe any strange or new object or element in a work of science fiction which changes the coordinates of an otherwise empirically legible world. Whether it be a time machine or an undead monster, the novum is something that is scientifically plausible but nonetheless occasions the genre's special type of speculative and fictional thinking. Science fiction, then, means the factual reporting of fictions brought on by the introduction of a novum. Yaşar Kemal, however, does not use a technological novum of science fiction in his work. Although he was very much interested in setting up a cognitive view of a recognizable world free from mythic abstractions of time or place, the catalyst for his cognitive estrangement was not a technological intervention in the world of his narratives. Nor is his brand of empiricism physical or scientific as much as historical and social. His narration seems to offer the reversal of the equation for science fiction: a fictional reporting of facts.

Another possible way to categorize Kemal's novels is as works of magical realism. Like science fiction, there is an empirical world which contains certain “magical” elements which cannot be explained. But unlike in science fiction, where even the novum can be considered subject to the rules of physics, in magical realism this conceit cannot be subsumed into the logic of the rational world. It exists instead as a phenomenon from another realm somehow intruding into the empirical, resulting in an empirical and fantastical universe existing in a state of near-merging (p.172). According to Lois Zarmora and Wendy Faris (1995), it is precisely this subversive in-betweenness and all-at-onceness which provided a useful genre for postcolonial writers seeking to resist monologic political and cultural structures (p.6). There is still a solid reference to actual histories but in such a way that they are not privileged above or separate from the magical and fantastical events portrayed in the novel. Fredric Jameson (1986) says of the genre that it is “not a realism to be transfigured by the ‘supplement’ of a magical perspective but a reality which is in and of itself magical or fantastic” (p.311) With his propensity towards epic and mythic modes of narrative,

it would be easy enough to assume that Kemal's efforts at worlding were more or less in line with the contemporaneous trend of magical realism. But he himself explicitly rejected the label, saying that he and the Latin American writers are merely following the example set by everyone from Gogol to Gilgamesh (Hızlan, 2002, para.1). Kemal skillfully skirts around the fantastical in his novels, allowing him to explain away any seemingly unreal elements as the effect of individual psychological perceptions or the metaphorical expressions of folkloric language. Franziska Stürmer (2014) summarizes this well by saying in some of his texts, social realism and myth are presented as alternate, hierarchical modes of perception, unreal elements being identified as dreams, visions etc. In others, they are presented as indistinguishable from each other (regarding their reality status), or become so in the course of the story. (p.121)

Despite its epic tone, *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* contains no supernatural elements. Any of its seemingly other-worldly phenomena are those of the natural world, closely examined in extended vignettes throughout the novel. However, the biggest reason why it would be a mistake to categorize Kemal's work and *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* in particular as magical realism is that the aspect of "realism" in "magical realism" refers to the narrative's close attention to real life detail and "a strong presence of the phenomenal world" (Faris, 1995). In magical realism a series of events or elements appear in the text, which cannot be reconciled with the empirical and factual authority established by the style of narration, thereby undermining it. In *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, on the other hand, the narrative technique itself is that which is conspicuous or irreconcilable. Kemal's words are chosen to describe the phenomenal world, but seem to come from another.

How would one then characterize Kemal's procedure—based on a specific employment of lexicon—to create cognitive distancing in his work? Returning to one of the original theoreticians of the estrangement effect, one can think of Kemal's use of language as similar to that of a kind of "Brechtian nominalism." With nominalism being the exposure of universals or general ideas as nothing more than names and words, Brechtian nominalism would be the use of

literature as a way to estrange our own vocabularies. For example, Jameson writes:

If we decide to identify the V-effect [alienation effect], for example, with a nominalism that some have positioned at the very emergence of modernity itself, then this strategy confronts a situation in which the artificial categories of the various universals--so many words or names--serve to classify a host of radically distinct existents, and to obscure or occult their differentiation. To remove the names thus becomes a form of philosophical therapy which promises to lead us back to the freshness of raw experience itself (Jameson, 2000, p.42).

This is a much more satisfying definition of the strategy of estrangement at work in Kemal's novels. All of the care put into cultivating such a rich and novel lexicon is not merely for literary bravado, but works as a kind of therapy, helping break down the emotional and cognitive barriers built up by modernity in order to approach the natural world as it was once seen, to allow the reader to learn how to understand verbiage that is no longer currently fashionable. The type of speculative fiction that Kemal uses in his works is this kind of basic nominalism, a reinvigoration of experience through a reinvigoration of words. This approach brings with it a special freshness of experience when its sights are set on the natural world, one which we inhabit but to which most of us have grown indifferent.

### **The Lost Environment and Extinct Words**

In his novels, Kemal often explored the theme of the "lost paradise," drawn from local folklore, especially those myths told by the former nomadic tribes of Eastern Anatolia (Gürsel, 2000, p.41). Kemal claimed that the forced settling of Turkoman tribes in the 1860s, including those members whose descendents would populate his native village, created an unconscious longing for the earlier ages of free migration, a longing which he used as inspiration for *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* and other works. His attitude towards the "lost paradise" is reflected in his language because he believed, in accordance with Marx's concept of historical materialism, that cultural forms

were a reflection of changes in the mode of production exemplified by the statement “when the marshland is drained, so those legends told about the marsh also change “Bataklık kurutulduğu vakit, o bataklığın üzerine söylenen esfaneler de değişiyor” (Gürsel, 2000, p.130). He wanted to show that the traditions and narratives of Anatolia are grounded in a specific physical environment and economy, meaning that their disappearance also spelt doom for their unique forms of knowledge and storytelling, including those about the natural world itself. *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* is a reenactment, in miniature, of this dynamic. For much of the beginning of the novel, a vernacular form of narrative marked especially by a rich tapestry of local words and idioms tells a story about a Çukurova which, if only separated by a few decades, appears to belong to a distinct world.

Kemal looks to the power of rare and anachronistic words to describe things that are extinct, to bring attention to their absence in the modern world as the things that these words are invoking have literally gone extinct. Kemal’s lexical worlding differentiates him from other village novelists at the time because of this focus on the natural world (Armağan, 2015, p.357). He was explicit about using his novels as a way to recreate physical environments which had disappeared, recalling the natural abundance at the edge of his own generational consciousness as an act of ecocritical witnessing. He had experience during the course of his own life the ways in which the development of the Çukurova had led to the widespread destruction of natural habitats:

What nature went through was worse than those terrible experiences of warring men. This age did not see the tears in nature’s eyes; it viciously attacked it. Seventeen swamps were dried out in the Çukurova, and hundreds of bird species died. People will no longer be able to see those birds; they are no longer alive. (Andaç, 2003).

This is in sharp contrast to the natural world of Kemal’s childhood to which he pays tribute in his novels. As Aziz Şeker (2019) has catalogued in his article on eco-sociology in Yaşar Kemal’s work, almost every novel set in the Çukurova is filled with the names of its biological richness. While most historical accounts of the Çukurova

wetlands dismissed them as mere swampland, Kemal takes pains to show their great biomic diversity—ranging from marine habitats, surface running waters, marshes, reed-beds, bogs, fens, and seasonally inundated mesic grasslands. As modern environmental studies show, these various ecosystems each have their own share of unique species and interrelationships. All one has to do is pay attention, which is exactly what Kemal does. In the *Ince Memed* series, for example, the wetlands are filled with

Bulut rengi balıkçılar, gurruk kuşları, divlik kuşu, balıklar, yeşil kurbağalar, sarıca arılar, kırmızı eşek arıları, boncuklu arılar, mavi yoz arıları ekosistemin içindedir. Yine karaçalı, karamuk ağacı, kars ağacı, su püreni çiçeği, mavi yarpuz çiçeği, sakız ağacı, çiriş çiçekleri, sarı çiğdem, menekşe, salep çiçeği, keditaşağı, kekik, sığırkuyruğu çiçeği, kıyılarda ılıgın ağaçları, hayıtlar, söğütler, zıncarlar, böğürtlenler, kaya çiçekleri, sarmaşıklar, mine çiçekli kevenler, yaban gülleri, nilüferler, bedriler, kamışlar, kara yılanlar, su yılanları, kırmızı kuyruklu tilkiler, çakallar, su kuşları ve envai türde ağacıyla bir orman betimlenir. (Cloud-colored egrets, bee-eaters, divlik birds, fish, green frogs, yellow bees, red wasps, beaded bees, and blue yoz bees are in the ecosystem. Also, blackthorn, barberry tree, snow tree, water purlin flower, blue watermelon flower, gum tree, grin flowers, yellow crocus, violet, Aleppo flower, cattle, thyme, mullein flower, tamarisk trees on the coasts, chaste tree, willows, pincers, blackberries, rock flowers, vines, enamel flowering kevens, wild roses, water lilies, bedri, reeds, black snakes, water snakes, red-tailed foxes, coyotes, waterfowl, and a forest made of various species of trees are depicted, (Şeker, 2019, p.165)

The wetlands are also, consequently, an ornithologist's dream:

Akçasaz'ın bataklığı, leyleklere, göçmen kuşlara, balıkçılara, ibibikle-re... Bu durum romanda adete bir kuş cenneti gibi işlenir. (The wetlands of the Akçasaz were home to storks, migratory birds, herons, hoopoe... This situation is treated like a bird paradise in the novel.) (Şeker, 2019, p. 165)

In interviews, Kemal explains how these invocations of biodiversity were based in his own lived experience, and how much of their loss he himself had witnessed. Beyond his leftist political alignments, he was conscientious of how his fiction could work to further the cause of environmental awareness. The mere invocation of spe-

cific animal and plant names helps to bring about an attention and awareness to the natural world of the Çukurova which throughout history was so often described in generic or disparaging ways.

One way to think of how lexicon functions in the novel to bring awareness to the natural world is through a process of analogy: rare words are like rare species, and an enriched lexicon is a metaphor for biodiversity. By using such a rich and unfamiliar vocabulary, Kemal is stylistically recreating the feeling of an unknown habitat, tuning in to the variety and color of the natural world. Another way is more simply and literally in how his lexicon names things: invoking the names of plants and animal species first and foremost brings the species existence to the reader's attention. In modern times, science has often played this role of identifying and naming elements of the natural world. But it often turns out that local names already existed for them, but have been forgotten. There is in fact an important relationship between language and naming, science, and nature as the ecological scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) explains in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi nation, Kimmerer is in a special position to understand how science can use observation to recreate types of knowledge that native people were once able to express through expressive language:

Potawatomi stories remember that all the plants and animals, including humans, used to speak the same language. We could share with one another what our lives were like. But that gift is going and we are poorer for it. Because we can't speak the same language, our work as scientists is to piece the story together as best we can... we measure and record and analyze in ways that might seem lifeless but to us are the conduits to understanding the inscrutable lives of species not our own...Science can be a way of forming intimacy and respect with other species that is rivaled only by the observations of traditional knowledge holders. It can be a path to kinship. (Kimmerer, 2013, p.251-2)

If humans' relationship to the natural world is shaped by each generation's own verbiage, then the ways that each connects to non-human life, and whether they do so at all, is profoundly shaped by language. Kemal was deeply aware of this fact, and was clear about how he had tried to capture it: "While writing this novel I drew se-

veral circles. I put the events within them. Side by side, four or five circles. This one is psychology, this one nature, human relationships etc. If we must create in order to understand the world, we must create a language as well" (Benk, 1982, p.22) Kemal's use of language allows him to both represent shifting baselines, the ways that different generations have perceived or ignored nature, as well as envision a relationship to nature that could emerge if the right language was trained upon it. With Kimmerer's insights in mind, one can see how the goals of speculative fiction and environmental science are actually not so different. Both look for ways to break past normal ways of seeing into a new relationship with the world. Both also have the potential to overcome the limitations of generational perspectives by being aware of the limitations and pitfalls of anecdotal knowledge.

### **Shifting Baselines and Structures of Feeling**

In the novel, the natural world appears in and around the two contrasting human plots through a series of vignettes which focus on the animal life of the wetlands, briar patches, and other ecosystems of the area. As the contrasting emotional stances and narrative styles play back and forth, these nature vignettes allow Kemal to narrativize the gradual withdrawal of awareness from the natural world. The process is not even or clear-cut, with animal vignettes popping up all over the book rather than merely receding. It is rather the way that these vignettes become increasingly detached from the narrative about human characters, with the capitalist landowners showing themselves to be completely oblivious to the drama of the natural world. Because of this, the reader begins to lose sense of the context in which animal scenes are taking place. Whereas in the beginning of the novel the descriptions of animals and the marshes are in step with the mood and style of writing, and even play a role in the unfolding of the plot itself, over the course of the book they become increasingly incongruous to the plot as the marsh turns from a land invested with powerful emotional meaning to just another undeveloped piece of land. This process works as a fascinating representation of the phenomenon of shifting baselines. One can see throughout

the course of the book how the relationship between the human and natural world is as much epistemological and affective as it is empirical or economic.

In the feudal lord scenes, these nature vignettes are often either cued in by human perception, or take place in the context of human action. In one scene, two characters named Yel Veli and Kara Hüseyin are walking out in the heat into the seemingly deserted marsh, trying to find a place to hide (Kemal, 2018, p.119). They look out for signs of their pursuers, mistaking dark figures for human forms. The heat is unbearable and Yel Veli laments that they have fallen into an oven of death. Rather than a refuge from attack, the marsh quickly becomes more hostile than the attackers themselves. As the two stand in the middle of the marsh suffocating, the narrator assumes their perspective.

Ortalıkta hiçbir canlı yoktu. Onları görünce, kamışların dibinden bataklığa dökülüveren su kaplumbağalarından başka. Bir de sinekler... Bir tür lüsü, arı kadar büyüğü... selsisi sessizi...  
Berdiler, sazlar, bodur, kalın yapraklı ağaçlar. Bütün bataklık bitkilerinde bir ağzına kadar doymuşluk, şişmişlik vardır.  
(There were no living things around. Other than the turtles which dove into to the base of the reeds in the swamp upon seeing them. And the flies... A species, as big as a bee...noisy ones quiet ones...  
Cattail, reeds, squat, thick-leaved trees. All swamp plants are saturated, swelling up to the brim, Kemal, 2018, p.123).

In this passage the narrating continuously corrects itself, first modifying the statement that there was no living thing to say that there are in fact turtles, but then also to point out the flies living there as well. And given a moment to think about it, the narrating voice can recall all of the diversity and variety of fly species. This seemingly then extends to non-animal life, until the entire scene is animated, saturated, swollen. Even the infamous mosquitos of the pestilential swamp, upon closer examination, open up into a great diversity of life. The key, again, is Kemal's richness of words. He forms intimacy with the environment he is describing through the act of naming. To name the individual plant species of the wetland, cattails, reeds, the scrub, and the wide-leafed trees, is to fight against the tendency

throughout history to see it all as an undifferentiated, pestilential swamp.

Even more attention is given to the swamp when the novel focuses on two characters who are lying in wait to ambush Derviş Bey. In the moments when they are not discussing their plans, the narrator assumes their gaze looking out onto the wetland. With the patience and perceptiveness of two men with nothing else to do than listen for the approach of their victim, the narrating voice describes the swamp.

Akçasaz bataklığından sesler geliyordu. Uzun boyunlu, uzun bacaklı, kanatlı, uzun gövdeli, som mavide, güneşte, gölgede, ıhırcık karanlıkta, yıldız ışığında mavisi bin türlü maviye dönüşen kuşları, iri, kırmızı, yanardöner mavi, sarı, başparmak büyüklüğünde kuyruklarını savurarak, binlerce, saydam, ışık damarlı kanatlarıyla uçuldayarak uçuşan arıları, kepezlerinden teller dökülen göçmen kuşları, pembe balıklar, iri, güneşte genişleyen kanatlarıyla, binbir renkte, benekte titreyen gözleriyle kelebekleri, çakalları, kurbağaları, yabandomuzları, okyılanları, kaplumbağalarıyla bataklar fokurduyordu.

(Noises were coming from the Akçasaz swamp. Long-necked, long-legged, winged, long-bodied, solid blue, in the sun, in the shade, in the gloaming darkness, the blue turning into thousands of blues in the starlight, enormous, red, iridescent blue, yellow, waving thumb sized tails, thousands, transparent, bees flying by buzzing with their light-veined wings, migratory birds with strings streaming from their crests, pink egrets, enormous, spreading their wings in the sun, a thousand and one colors, butterflies with eyes with trembling spots, jacks, frogs, wild boars, whip snakes, and turtles seethe in the swamps (Kemal, 2018, p.213).

The gradual tuning in to a symphony of insect and animal life results from the boredom of the ambushing men. In a moment's pause from their endless speculations about when Derviş Bey will finally fall into their trap, they start to pay attention to the natural world, which unfurls for them in great poetic detail. Their attention is narrated by Kemal's lyricism.

Another inhospitable environment which receives this treatment in the book is a blackthorn thicket. The first paragraph of chapter 15 dismisses it just like the swampland, as extensive and impassable, so thick that a snake couldn't enter inside (Kemal, 2018, p.144). However, in the following few paragraphs the thicket is ope-

ned up with attention and description. In the springtime, the thicket becomes a beautiful, bright yellow garden filled with sun-colored flowers. While no birds can find a clear branch to perch on, the thicket fills with all of the bees of the Çukurova, whose mass humming is deafening. But at this point in the novel, the landscape still serves a function within the human drama. It is into the thorn filled thicket that Derviş Bey drives his enemy Kamil, violently flogging him from behind on horseback. Derviş Bey uses the thicket as a way to further torture Kamil, as all of his clothes are torn from him by the combination of thorns and whip, and his whole body becomes a bloody pulp. In these three previous scenes in the novel, the harshness of the natural environment plays a role in the violent plot of the blood feud.

Some critics have argued that the narrator's perspective in the novel, especially when contemplating nature, is not that of the individual characters. Mehmet Kaplan (1976) asks

In Yaşar Kemal's novel, who is it looking at nature?.. The person looking at nature is the author himself. From the viewpoint of social positions no characters in the novels look at nature in the way that Yaşar Kemal describes them here. This is Yaşar Kemal, that's how he looks (p.186).

While certain nature vignettes are not directly narrated by the characters themselves, their juxtaposition is clearly meant to associate the two in feeling and mood. They can be better thought of as a recreation on Kemal's part of the perspective available to older generations and ways of life. As Kemal himself explains about his approach to the Akçasaz series of novels:

In the two books, I showed how that the classes determined the mark on nature. Nature takes the form of the class that lives in it. It depends on the nature of the class. Nature for the feudal order is different, and nature for the capitalist order is different (quoted by Çiftlikçi, 1975, p.5)

Through his nature vignettes, Kemal is trying to represent the sensibility, attentiveness, and language of a particular political-economic order, namely that of the feudal system. The perspective is

that of those “affective elements of consciousness and relationships” which make up the specific structure of feeling experienced by the Aghas and their followers (Williams, 1977, p.132). The attendant animal vignettes are a reproduction of the way the author imagines that humans once related to the natural world in this area, their baseline for understanding nature.

This attentiveness to nature is in sharp contrast to the indifference of the townspeople, a stark example of shifting baselines. The general division in the novel between the world of the feudal lords on one hand, and various spaces in the town where the new agricultural capitalists meet on the other, interfaces with the animal vignettes by emphasizing the townspeople's estrangement from the natural world. Take, for example, the jarring transition from the nature scenes in chapters 40 and 41 followed up by the dealings and bluster made at Derviş Bey's estate in chapter 42.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 40 speaking about an old village inhabited by kestrel nests and oak trees, whose roots sometimes reveal tile mosaics from ancient times. Chapter 41 dramatically details the life and death struggle between an eagle and a gazelle, not involving human characters at all. It begins:

Ağınağaçları daha çiçek açmamışlardı. Çakıltaşlı çayın kıyısına sıralanmışlar, kıpkırmızı tomurcukları açtı açacak. Uzun boyunlu mavi devedikenleri çiçeğe durmuşlardı. Otlar, yoncalar diz boyuydu. Akçasazın kıyılarında büyük kara gözlü nergisler, Alıçlı koyakta kayaların arasına sıkışmış alıç ağaçları çiçeklerini sere serpe bahar güneşine açmışlardı.

The oleander haven't blossomed yet. They are lined up on the banks of the pebbled streamlet, their crimson buds are just about to open. Long-necked blue thistles had turned to flowers. Herbs and clovers were knee-deep. Big black-eyed daffodils on the shores of the Akçasaz, Hawthorn trees squeezed between the rocks in the Hawthorn valley spread open their flowers to the spring sun (Kemal, 2018, p.445).

---

<sup>4</sup> It is true that one of the main representatives of the feudal order, Derviş Bey, has extended dealings with the young landlords. In fact, he seems to straddle the two worlds, speaking differently and being described in vastly different terms depending on the scene. Rather than the feudal structure of feeling being tied to his consciousness and perspective, Kemal narrates him as caught between the two. Like many aspects of the novel, there are no hard and fast rules as to where one perspective ends and the other begins, we had instead subtle transitions and jolting juxtapositions.

Here Kemal identifies a number of plants by using their regional names such as the Ağınağacı (*Nerium oleander*) and the Devedikenî (*Carduus hamulosus*), a common practice which Metin Sarıbaş (2013) has catalogued in detail in over twenty four of Kemal's novels. What's more, these plants are the subject of these sentences, with the author describing their placement and anticipating their blossoming with narrative suspense. There is also the frequent use of the past perfect tense and an abstract time reference to the season, which makes for an indeterminate timespan of action. This intense narrative and descriptive focus on the natural world centers it as both autonomous but isolated from human drama.

In contrast to the contemplative, pastoral descriptions of these two nature-focused chapters, the beginning of Chapter 42 comes roaring in with a Mercedes Benz automobile, described with curt ugliness:

Ala Temirin Mercedes otomobili Derviş Beyin konağının avlu kapısında durduğunda gün kuşluk oluyordu. Siyah otomobili toz örtmüş, tozdan otomobilin rengi belli olmuyordu. Tepeden turnağa boz bir ağartı. When Ala Temir's Mercedes car stopped at the courtyard door of Derviş Bey's mansion, it was mid-morning. The black car was covered in the dust; the color couldn't be made out because of the dust. Pale gray from head to foot. (Kemal, 2018, p.452).

Not only is the sight of an automobile intruding into the narrative a sign of objective-historical time, that it is a Mercedes references the new system of capitalist values centered on conspicuous consumption. Immediately after this brief visual introduction, the chapter leads into the action of characters and their appearance, offering a number of details which cue into issues of power, prestige, intrigue, and conflict. Rather than a slowly built up depiction of the physical world, Kemal matches the hurried and shorthanded accounting of fast paced drama between scheming entrepreneurs. These two starkly different narrative approaches continue to switch back and forth in the book, with more of the objective-historical timed chapters coming later in the book. The contrast makes the otherworldliness of the pastoral chapters even more conspicuous.

The effect of all of this is that the natural world slowly fades from the center of narrative attention. Whenever it is seen, it is as though through the eyes of some other generation which lack the continuity from the feudal era. While one might take the presence of an eagle in chapter 41 as evidence of the continuity of birdlife in the region, there is no way to measure it against their relative abundance from any reference earlier in the novel. The eagle could in fact be one of the few remaining individuals of its kind, desperately pursuing a gazelle as all the other forms of sustenance have been exterminated in the valley. Without generational continuity, it's impossible to say. And in fact, this is similar to what actually happened to the eagle population of the Çukurova. In his lengthy series of interviews with Alain Bosquet (1999), Kemal recounted how he came back to his home village as an adult and himself noticed their absence:

When I returned to the village [Gökçedam] in the spring of 1960, there was not a single eagle — neither in the mountain nor in the village. When I asked the people what happened, they said, “It was the fault of the horse plague.” What’s the connection between the horse plague and eagles?” I asked. “Whenever the horses died from the plague, they would spray them with disinfectant,” the peasants told me. “One morning we woke up and saw our fields littered with dead eagles. Even in the mountains you couldn’t take a step without tripping over a dead eagle (Bosquet, 1999, p.19).

Once a species has been wiped out, its rare appearance might be mistaken as a glad tidings or an interesting sighting by the next generation. The animals in the uncontextualized animal vignettes of the novel might even seem like signs of the endurance of wildlife into modern times if not for Kemal’s work to bridge two temporal-cultural orders for the reader. Although subtle, these dwindling scenes cannot but unsettle the reader who somehow remembers the natural world playing a larger role at other places in the book.

## Conclusion

In speaking of the problem of shifting baselines, Daniel Pauly argues that “we have lost sight of nature because we ignore historical

change and accept the present as natural.” (Jackson, 2011, p.3) In order to overcome our ignorance of nature, it is necessary to identify blind spots in the historical record as well as to unsettle our normal ways of seeing nature in the present moment. Understanding historical change is crucial to developing an environmental ethics which is honest and up to the task of holding ourselves accountable for both past destruction and shaping the future. Works of fiction have a role to play in this along with science because of their ability to break us out of normal ways of seeing.<sup>5</sup> Kemal was compelled by both his Marxist commitments and his environmental ethics to search for ways to narrativize how structures of feeling shift imperceptibly from one historical age to another. But beyond using speculative fiction as a way to better understand recorded history, Kemal also uses its narrative strategies to contemplate what lies beyond history: looking forward towards structures of feeling which have yet to come about, and back at those which are lost to time.

While Kemal himself lived firmly within the capitalist system, his eco-poetic sensibility towards nature belonged to a system that had yet to be brought into existence: a potential ecosocialist practice of stewardship and care. I believe this ethics is best exemplified by those vignettes in the novel which caused Mehmet Kaplan to ask who was there to witness them. Rather than considering them to merely be told from Kemal's perspective, these scenes can be thought of as Kemal's attempt to grapple with his own historical embeddedness, and to try to imagine a relationship to nature based on something other than instrumental reason and human interests. While the capitalist landowners in the novel might be oblivious of the nature vignettes, we the readers are still present for a fully non-human narrative, briefly exploring an environment with an emergent ethos of environmental care. This is almost a utopian vision of a world which could be, with equal attention and care to all non-human life without

---

<sup>5</sup> And in fact, scholars such as Phillip R. Polefrone have identified an emerging field of speculative environmental fiction, which he defines as “speculative fiction for which the physical environment is more than a passive backdrop to human action, for which understanding or transforming the more-than-human world is central to the narrative.” <https://twitter.com/polefrone/status/1186781480342695943>

a sense of priority or benefit.<sup>6</sup> Given that for so much of human history it has been derided as only a “pestilential swamp,” Kemal invites us to contemplate what the complete opposite attitude towards the wetlands would be. Although an economic system has yet to come about that looks upon the wetland with as much sensitivity and attentiveness as Kemal’s empathetic nature vignettes, Kemal’s fiction allows the reader to briefly imagine how its structures would feel.

This approach to narration may seem like it goes against Kemal’s Marxist project of embedding all affective and cognitive perceptions of the environment within specific modes of production. However, even as Kemal experiments with ways to represent the non-human, independent of the endorsement of human perception, he also gives quiet acknowledgement that nature is never fully independent from humans. Just as the shifting baselines model places human society squarely within nature, it also shows much of nature is situated within human structures. This is hinted at by the looming presence of the rock field and ruins of Anavarza throughout the novel. They appear at several points in the novel, in both moments of human and animal drama. At the beginning of chapter 45, they are depicted as a buzzing microcosm (Kemal, 2018, p.503). Amongst the detailed description of frenetic animal and plant life, there is one passing reference to the fact that the ruins were once themselves a human habitat. Anazarbus (Ἀναζαρβός) as it was known in ancient Greek was an ancient settlement first founded by the Assyrians, and served as a provincial capital in the late Roman Empire. The city flourished and was fought over, playing an important role in the Islamic Conquests and the Christian Crusades, before finally being destroyed by the Mamluks in 1374. But if Anazarba was once a major city, the land-

---

<sup>6</sup> Recent scholarship in the field of animal studies emphasizes the diverse forms that storytelling takes to show us ‘what it’s like’ for nonhuman others. Rather than requiring the thread of a single autonomous mind, narratives can be created out of an assembly of material and phenomenological elements. In his work on narratology beyond the human, David Herman (2011) uses the concept of “umwelt exploration” to describe those narratives which are less interested in translating animal experiences into human ones than in recreating the phenomenal worlds of nonhuman animals themselves. These experiences, in turn, can help us to reshape and deepen our own experience and relationship to the physical world.

scape surrounding it must have also been transformed by humans, and in fact archaeological research has found that the city benefited from systems of hydraulic engineering. The land before the widespread drainage of the wetlands in the 1950s wasn't an edenic paradise, unspoiled and pristine, but was in fact the result of complex interactions between humans and the environment going back millennia, but lost to popular consciousness.

Rather than assuming the ecological pre-history of the area to have always been marshland, to appeal to some sort of naive "pristine myth," Kemal uses the ruins as a way to gesture towards a longer symbiotic history between nature and different human systems of production, a wholly different kind of lost paradise. Rather than lamenting the irreversible destruction of the wetlands he describes in such loving detail, Kemal understood how human and natural worlds are co-constitutive. He neither takes for granted his own view of the present nor the past. The ruins act as a tacit acknowledgement that even Kemal's own historically informed account of shifting baselines itself runs into its own generational blindness, histories that might have been told in Greek villages, Armenian kingdoms, or Roman provinces. This confronting of the illusions of an eternal, unchanging past are precisely what historical materialism is all about.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andaç, F. (2003). Yaşar Kemal'in Sözlerinde Yaşamak. *Adam Sanat Dergisi*, 197, Yaşar Kemal Özel Sayısı. 6-23.

Armağan, Y. (2015). Kıyamete Kadar Yaşar Kemal'i Okumak. *Moment Dergi*, 2(1), 347-362.

Ayaydın, G. Ö. (2003). *Yaşar Kemal'in İstanbul'una Çevreci Bir Yolculuk* (Masters thesis, Bilkent University).

Aydın, G. and Kazak, C. (2010). Selecting indicator species habitat description and sustainable land utilization: a case study in a Mediterranean delta. *International Journal of Agriculture and Biology*, 12(6), 931-934.

- Bosquet, A., Kemal, Y. (1999). *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University.
- Benk, A. (1982). Yaşar Kemal'le Kapalı Oturum. *Çağdaş Eleştiri*, 1.
- Berberoğlu, S., Yılmaz, K. T. and Özkan, C. (2004). Mapping and monitoring of coastal wetlands of Cukurova Delta in the Eastern Mediterranean region. *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 13(3), 615-633.
- Brandabur, A. C., & Tharaud, B. (2016). *Time's Fool: Essays in Context*. Newcastle upon Tyne: UK Cambridge Scholars.
- Willett, J. (Ed.) (1964). *Brecht on Theatre*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Çiftlikçi, R. (1997). *Yaşar Kemal: Yazar, Eser, Üslup*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Faris W. (1995), Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Post-modern Fiction, in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Evliya Çelebi, (1935). *Seyahatname*, Volume 9, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi.
- Gratien, C. (2015). *The Mountains are Ours: Ecology and Settlement in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Cilicia, 1856-1956* (Doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University).
- Gürsel, N. (2000). *Yaşar Kemal: Bir Geçiş Dönemi Romancısı*. Istanbul: Everest.
- Guy, A. (2017, August 14). Daniel Pauly and George Monbiot in conversation about "shifting baselines syndrome". Retrieved November 12, 2019, from <https://oceana.org/blog/daniel-pauly-and-george-monbiot-conversation-about-shifting-baselines-syndrome>.
- Hızlan, D. (2002, September 21). Lozan Konferansı'ndan sonra tarihin en büyük göçü yaşandı. Retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/lozan-konferansindan-sonra-tarihin-en-buyuk-gocu-yasandi-38415143>.
- Jackson, J., Sala, E., Alexander, K. (2011). *Shifting Baselines: The Past and the Future of Ocean Fisheries*. Netherlands: Island.
- Jameson, F. (2000). *Brecht and Method*. London: Verso.

Jameson, F. (1986). On magic realism in film. *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (2), 301-325.

Kaplan, M. (1976). *Nesin Vakfı Edebiyat Yıllığı*. İstanbul: Tekin.

Karadeniz, N., Tırıl, A. and Baylan, E. (2009). Wetland management in Turkey: Problems, achievements and perspectives. *African Journal of Agricultural Research*, 4 (11), 1106-1119.

Kemal, Y. (2018) *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi.

Kıral, E. (1978). YK: Halk Yalanı, Yalansız Dolansız, Uydurma Olmayan Anlar, Sever, Benimsen, Yeni Güney, 3-4, 34-6.

Kıray M. (1974). *Social Change in Çukurova: A Comparison of Four Villages*. In P. Benedict, Tümertekin E. et. al (ed.) Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives. Brill. Leiden. 179-203.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.

Medasset, C. (2000). An assessment in the Çukurova Delta With Recommendations for Conservation Management. <https://www.medasset.org/el/technical-reports/status-of-the-nile-soft-shelled-turtle-trionyx-triunguis-in-turkey-an-assessment-in-the-cukurova-delta-with-recommendations-for-conservation-management/>

Naci, F. (1993). Yaşar Kemal'le Edebiyat ve Politika. *Aydınlık*, 1-2 Mayıs. <http://www.yasarkemal.net/soylesi/docs/fethinaci.html>

Oluklu, I. (1987). Akçasazın Ağalar Dizisinde Zaman, *Karşı Edebiyat*, 11-12, 15-20.

Öz, E. (2000). Yaşar Kemal'le Yaratıcılığının Kaynakları Üzerine Söyleşi. *Ağacın Çürüğü*.

Perennou, C., Beltrame, C., Guelmami, A., Tomas Vives, P., & Caestecker, P. (2012). Existing areas and past changes of wetland extent in the Mediterranean region: an overview. *ecologia mediterranea*, 38(2), 53-66.

Püsküllüoğlu, A. (1974). *Yaşar Kemal Sözlüğü*. İstanbul: Cem.

Sarıbaş, M. (2013). Yaşar Kemal'in Bitkileri *Orman ve Av Dergisi*, Mart – Nisan 2.

Şeker, A. (2019). Yaşar Kemal'in Romanlarında Ekososyoloji. *Türko-  
loji Dergisi*, 23(1), 158-176.

Székely, T. (1998). The Significance of Tuzla Gölü, Çukurova Delta for Shorebirds: A Concise Progress Report. *Turna-Journal of Turkish  
Ornithological Council*, 1, 28-30.

Stürmer, F. (2014). Magical Realism and Trauma in Yaşar Kemal's  
The Pomegranate on the Knoll'. *Interférences littéraires/Littéraire in-  
terferenties*, (14), 115-128.

Suvin, D. (1979) *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics  
and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Toksöz, M. (2000). *The Cukuruova: from nomadic life to commerci-  
al agriculture, 1800-1908*. (Doctoral dissertation, State University of  
New York at Binghamton, History Department) Williams, R. (1977).  
*Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University.

Zamora, L. and Faris, W. (1995) Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and  
Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Commu-  
nity*. Durham: Duke UP.