

**Beyond Terrestrial Approach in Turkish
Literature: Queer Adaptation, Mediterranean, and
Spatiality**

by

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Beyond Terrestrial Approach in Turkish Literature: Queer Adaptation, Mediterranean, and Spatiality

Koç University

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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[After I wrote my first draft, which underwent lots of editing and turned into this thesis you are about to read, the twin earthquakes of February 6 happened in Kahramanmaraş, hitting Turkey and Syria. At some point, excavating instances of imagined Utopias and writing about the future seemed almost impossible. However, with the support I had from my friends, family, and professors, I managed to finish my thesis.

Therefore, I dedicate it,

first, to my mother, who has the courage to rebuild herself a home over and over again,

to my father, the first utopianist I came to know,

to my sister, who has the willpower to make herself a house from scratch,

to my grandmother, who has the resilience to survive in a very feudal and patriarchal household,

to my cat companion Patik, making everywhere we go into a home for me,

and to the people of Antioch

with a hope that one day, we will build our utopia above the shores of the Mediterranean.]

ABSTRACT

Beyond Terrestrial Approach in Turkish Literature: Queer Adaptation, Mediterranean, and Spatiality

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This thesis interrogates the relationship between queer spatiality and the location of Turkish literature as world literature concerning literary and cinematic adaptations. Drawing upon key concepts of critical Mediterranean Studies, such as transcontinentalism and regional specificity, it aims to show that collaboration between disciplines of literature, queer, Mediterranean, and adaptation studies could offer a methodology unbounded by terrestrial boundaries. In the first chapter, by discussing Mehmet Bilâl's novel *Osmanlı'da Bir Vampir Béla* and Hülya Serap Doğaner's *Leyla ile Şirin*, I question Istanbul's location as a center for Turkish literature. I show that while the city's spaces of exclusion for queer people also reflect upon literature, tracing traveling and hybrid texts could propose new queer horizons to world literature. In the second chapter, I focus on Atıf Yılmaz's movie adaptations *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezgileri* to discuss whether Mediterranean space could offer potentialities for queer futurities that could shape literary imaginations.

Keywords: Turkish Literature, World Literature, Queer Futurity, Adaptation, Mediterranean Studies, Queer, Turkish Cinema, Queer Utopia, Istanbul, spatiality

ÖZETÇE

**Türk Edebiyatında Karasal Yaklaşımın Ötesinde: Kuir Uyarlamalar, Akdeniz
ve Mekânsallık**

İmran Gökçe Şahin

Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat, Yüksek Lisans

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Bu tez, edebi ve sinematik uyarlamalar üzerinden kuir mekânsallık ile Türk edebiyatının dünya edebiyatı olarak konumlandırılması arasındaki ilişkiyi sorgulamaktadır. Eleştirel Akdeniz Çalışmaları'nın önemli kavramlarından olan kıtalar-arasılık ve bölgesel özgünlük gibi anahtar kavramlardan yararlanarak, edebiyat, kuir, Akdeniz ve uyarlama çalışmaları disiplinleri arasındaki iş birliğinin karasal sınırları aşan bir edebiyat metodolojisi sunabileceğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlk bölümde, Mehmet Bilâl'in *Osmanlı'da Bir Vampir* Béla adlı romanını ve Hülya Serap Doğaner'in *Leyla ile Şirin* adlı eserini ele alarak, İstanbul'un Türk edebiyatı için bir merkez olarak konumunu sorguluyorum. Kuir bireyler için dışlanma alanlarının şehirdeki edebiyata da yansıdığını gösterirken, Akdeniz coğrafyasında sınırlar arası seyahat eden metinleri izleyerek dünya edebiyatına yeni kuir ufuklar önerilebileceğini gösteriyorum. İkinci bölümde ise Atıf Yılmaz'ın film uyarlamaları *Dul Bir Kadın* ve *Düş Gezgileri*'ne odaklanarak, Akdeniz mekânının edebi hayal gücünü şekillendirebilecek kuir gelecek potansiyellerini sunup sunamayacağını tartışıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Edebiyatı, Dünya Edebiyatı, Kuir Gelecek, Uyarlama, Akdeniz Çalışmaları, Kuir, Türkiye Sineması, Kuir Ütopya, İstanbul, mekânsallık

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Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

“You remember that definition of a fishnet as holes held together by string,”¹ asks Jeanette Winterson in the introduction of *Sexing the Cherry* and continues: “I am interested in the holes. The string is the narrative, but the spaces are what matters.”² Suppose that fishnet is the same one as what Claudio Fogu defines as “the fishnet matrix of Mediterranean connectivity,” then, the string is what we discuss, define, or construct as the Mediterranean that is also a narrative of connectivity between cultures, times, languages, literatures, and civilizations.³ Consequently, this thesis is interested in the holes of that fishnet, the spaces that hold onto each other by the Mediterranean's string, or even streams. Those holes do not only represent the individuality and locality of the Mediterranean literatures and cultures, but for the sake of this thesis, they are also what has been persecuted, banned, overlooked, prohibited, and deemed misfit, queer, and even insignificant to read between the dusty shelves of the books that are not yet read by the grand concepts of world literature as well as national literature.

Finding such works is a kind of excavation between shelves, archives, and internet websites selling rare books. However, comparative literature and social sciences are generally evolving towards a digital approach under the influence of digital humanities studies and expanding the concept of “distant reading,” which coined by Franco Moretti to solve the problem of piles of unread literary works and collections that are impossible to reach by reading texts closely, using computational literary

¹ Jeanette Winterson, “Introduction,” in *Sexing the Cherry* (London, UK, 2021), vii.

² Winterson, *Sexing*, vii – viii.

³ Claudio Fogu, “We Have Made the Mediterranean; Now We Must Make Mediterraneans,” in *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis*, ed. yasser elhariry, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 181-197, 194.

analysis to examine large corpus of literary works using coding, patterns and relationships between texts.⁴ There are now international projects and literary labs, such as Stanford Literary Lab and Computer Assisted Text Markup and Analysis (CATMA), located in the United States and other Western European countries, mainly Germany and Sweden, using computational tools, data analysis, and quantitative research to make connections between literary tropes, themes, and movements.⁵ David Damrosch also uses a similar scientific approach supported by charts and statistics when discussing his three-tiered world literary system in which world literature also means literary works and authors which could travel across their national borders.⁶ When distant reading and Damrosch's definition of the world literature combined, regional and local characteristic of literatures are facing the danger of being erased, especially the ones excluded from their national literary scenes. Such debate also highlights the terrestrial aspect of literature because even world literature is a concept that is depended on the borders of the land. Therefore, working with queer literary adaptations in Turkish creates an opportunity to see the exclusion of queer spaces in the urban structure of Istanbul reflected in literature, in the city of comparative literature's birth city.

Damrosch's three-tiered world literary system requires more contemplation on its implications considering non-Western literatures such as Turkish literature. According to him, once what was considered significant authors of the West has now become *hypercanon* as these prominent authors reinforced their authority in literary studies because the corpus of research on their relationship with the subaltern or minor literatures, hence, the *countercanon* grows.⁷ Within this perspective, Damrosch claims

⁴ Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London, Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2013), 43 – 63.

⁵ Franco Moretti is also affiliated with Stanford.

⁶ David Damrosch, "World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (John Hopkins U.P., 2006), 43 – 53.

⁷ Damrosch, "World Literature," 45.

that the minor authors (mainly from the Western languages) produce a *shadowcanon*, as they are now even more obscured.⁸ However, the way he extends the configuration of world literature to the “works that are read and discussed beyond home-country and area-specialist audiences” means that what he has defined as *countercanon* consists of the non-Western works that have been translated or discussed beyond their national borders concerning the *hypercanon*.⁹ While pointing out the inequalities between which works get selected for translation and which ones do not, Burcu Alkan and Çimen Günay-Erkol discuss that within national literatures, market value and politics determine in which works the publishing houses invest.¹⁰ While both Alkan and Günay-Erkol emphasize that the publishing houses tend to translate works with more “local colors,” which reinforces homogeneity, they also point out that this narrative must be diverted to recognize Turkish literature as “a well-established and heterogeneous tradition with its unique forms and aesthetics.”¹¹

In a literary world system where the minor authors of the Western canon stay in the shadows, what happens to the subalterns of the non-Western literatures under the influence of the *hypercanon*? Which novels or authors prevail over others within those unique forms and aesthetics? After all, it is the same literary system in which Leyla Erbil, the first female author of Turkey nominated for the Nobel Prize, got translated into English only last year in 2022, although her novel *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* (A Strange Woman) was first published in 1971. Besides a few books that could create a market for themselves to be translated, maybe thirty-seven years later, such as Sevgi Soysal’s *Şafak* (Dawn), one should wonder what happens to ‘the others’ of Turkey that have been

⁸ Damrosch, “World,” 45 – 46.

⁹ Damrosch, “World,” 48.

¹⁰ Burcu Alkan and Çimen Günay-Erkol, “Introduction: ‘Turkish Literature as World literature’? What Is in a Preposition?” in *Turkish Literature as World Literature* ed. Burcu Alkan and Çimen Günay-Erkol (New York & London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), pp. 1 – 17; 3.

¹¹ Alkan, Günay-Erkol, “Introduction,” 8.

shunned by both West-oriented and patriarchal literary market? For instance, what happens to queer literature? While posing this question, one should note that discussions around literary canon in Turkish literature should address political and state interventions in the literary sphere, such as curricula in public schools and universities or banned books; however, I want to direct this question toward spatiality. If the publishing houses are more interested in “local colors,” how does this manifest in Istanbul’s literary representation as the cultural and literary capital or center of Turkey? Defining world literature according to Damrosch’s definition, then, would represent limited perspectives or facets of Istanbul in the global market, which are transferred through translation. However, queers of literature often cannot even find a place within the national borders or literary market.

In this thesis, looking into queer adaptations such as *Leyla ile Şirin* and *Osmanlı’da Bir Vampir Béla* contributes to the framework of Istanbul in comparative literature’s accumulation of knowledge about the city. In “Global *Translatio*,” Emily Apter points out that although Erich Auerbach coins the keystones of the book that theorizes comparative literature, *Mimesis*, Istanbul becomes an absent referent as Auerbach overlooks the city where he wrote his discipline-building book.¹² She favors Leo Spitzer as another key figure of comparative literature and someone willing to understand the language of the Other, in this case, Turkish language as the Other’s language.¹³ However, learning the language is not enough to do comparative literature. To move forward, Alkan and Günay-Erkol also discuss that “doing world literature has to be a collaborative affair,” and they do not propose a collaboration between Western cultures but rather a “pro-periphery” collaboration which dives deep into the literatures

¹² Emily Apter, “Global *Translatio*: The “Invention” of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933” in *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Winter 2003): 253 – 281.

¹³ Apter, “Global,” 258.

that are stigmatized as peripheral beyond a few infamous authors.¹⁴ This thesis is also motivated by a collaborative approach that searches for a spatial perspective of comparative literature without being stuck inside national borders. Although the works I examine could be gathered within the same language, I pursue different ways of collaboration or partnership, such as bringing different mediums of literature and cinema together, or aiming for collaboration between queer, adaptation, and Mediterranean studies. Such partnership is helpful to fill in the blanks left behind by Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Motivated by the mixture of these disciplines, I concentrate on hybridity and fluidity in literature.

Therefore, in this thesis, Istanbul appears as a borderland between bodies, sexualities, cultures, and literatures. Gloria E. Anzaldúa defines borders as the places that define the difference between safe and unsafe and a borderland as: "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants."¹⁵ A terrestrial focus on Istanbul might emphasize the boundary between the I and the Other, as the I connotes the national identity, hence, Turkishness in this context. However, following its Mediterranean nature, Istanbul becomes a mesh of identities, bodies, cultures, and languages. Both in *Leyla ile Şirin* and in *Béla*, Istanbul is inhabited by the hybridity of different literary myths and tropes. In *Béla*, the classical heritage, including *hammams* and *meyhanes* as Ottoman places, and the vampire myth, not only as a Western creature but also as an Anatolian one, comes together. In *Leyla ile Şirin*, on the other hand, Doğaner takes traditional folk tales that are not only well-known in Ottoman but also within the cultures of the Middle East and both rewrites and queers it in the

¹⁴ Alkan and Günay-Erkol, "Introduction," 5.

¹⁵ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "The Homeland, Aztlán" in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), 3.

setting of a near-futuristic Istanbul. Against the shrinking boundaries of the terrestrial spaces like *hammams*, *meyhanes*, and apartment rooms, which also appear as spaces of exclusion, the narratives expand and blur the division between texts as they become hybrid as they are reformulated in Istanbul.

Queer adaptations set in the Mediterranean become a useful research ground. To better illustrate, my use of queer adaptation refers to *Queer/Adaptation* edited by Pamela Demory, and she proposes “a queer perspective on adaptation [that] can be a way of resisting normative ideologies and of revealing the fissures, absences, or silences of canonical texts.”¹⁶ Demory also categorizes queer adaptations into three: “adaptations that deliberately queer their source texts,” “push against boundaries of various kinds – time and space, texts and bodies, genres, and formats,” and “proliferate in promiscuous multiplicity, when one text generates multiple adaptations, or when one text adapts multiple sources.”¹⁷ All texts in this thesis could also be seen as queer adaptations based on these three categories. All of them queers their source material by using queer desire. In *Béla*, for instance, classical heritage push boundaries between bodies. While using multiple source materials such as references to vampire myth and Sufi love, the text also moves between different temporal logics as Béla writes everything with a gaze fixed on the ‘now,’ looking back with instant comebacks to ‘now.’ Again, *Leyla ile Şirin* uses multiple folk tales as source material, re-writes them as a queer love story, and changes its temporality to future while referencing the source several times throughout the novel. Atıf Yılmaz’s movies, on the other hand, force the boundaries of genres by adapting a screenplay and a short story and adding queer desire as an element. The Mediterranean expands these texts when combined with the possibilities of queer adaptation as a

¹⁶ Pamela Demory, “Queer/Adaptation: An Introduction,” in *Queer/Adaptation*, ed. Pamela Demory (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1 – 17, 4.

¹⁷ Pamela Demory, “Queer,” 9-10.

connection point of texts, cultures, and languages. Not only in the sense that Bodrum and Bergama specifically enable queer Utopias but with the effect of traveling texts and myths between lands that relate to a sea; characters, adapted texts, and genres also become hybrid, mixed, and queer. In both movies, then, though Bodrum and Bergama still appear as places that are outside of Istanbul, offering an escape from the normativity of the city, rather than being stagnant, Mediterranean *taşra* has a palimpsest-like structure and is unique in its connection to the sea.

Comparing Hülya Serap Doğaner's *Leyla ile Şirin* and Mehmet Bilâl's *Osmanlı'da Bir Vampir Béla* novels shows that spaces of exclusion create an opportunity for transgression in terms of non-normative desires to arise. However, they also construct borderlands for queer desires and existences, excluding them from the heteronormative public sphere. In the first chapter, examining Mehmet Bilâl's novel *Béla* shows that the exclusion of queerness manifests as the protagonist's nocturnal nature stemming from him being a vampire, and that compulsion also creates a possibility of him becoming a *köçek* dancer, a traditional dance performed by primarily young men and boys. However, this new profession goes against the teaching of his master, Beybaba, and endangers him with the exposure of being a vampire. Searching for his janissary love, he finds himself entangled with the Ottoman politics of Mahmud II's era when janissaries were attacked, and their guilds were shut down. Béla's transgressions stem from his hybrid nature as a foreigner vampire from Romania, his contradiction as a *köçek* dancer with his vampiric nature that demands seclusion and hiding, and finally, his political transgressions result in punishment. In the end, he does not only lose his best friend, Paşa, and his master in a fire conducted by the government officials, but he also finds himself in a situation where he must bite Güneş, his janissary love, and contaminate him with his curse of being a night creature. Meanwhile, Istanbul

only appears through Béla's perspective as he narrates the novel. Therefore, it is an Istanbul that is relatively masculine, belonging to the nighttime experienced by the city's misfits such as the young bachelor men, boys, criminals, and prostitutes, the ones who cannot find themselves a place in the city's daytime. Istanbul mostly appears through confined spaces such as *hammams* and *meyhanes* since these places are where Béla could exist without being noticed. As a result, *Béla* calls for a detailed examination of the terrestrial nature of literature because as the spaces become smaller and smaller, the border between heteronormative public sites and queer spaces of exclusion also appears more prominently.

On the other hand, in the second chapter, Doğaner's *Leyla ile Şirin* mainly presents Istanbul from the windows of confined spaces. However, this time we see a more apparent clash within the cityscape that depends not only on heteronormativity but also on an Istanbul divided between the wealthy and the poor, as *Yeni Kent* (New Town) and *Eski Kent* (Old Town). *Leyla ile Şirin* focuses on the love relationship between two women named after the famous traditional folk tales of *Leyla ile Mecnun* and *Ferhat ile Şirin*. In both tales, the lovers meet impossible obstacles and cannot be together. Although the novel also ends up with a failure of the sapphic relationship between Leyla and Şirin, it also re-writes and adapts the imagery of lovers unable to be together due to societal and familial obstacles. Due to the sapphic façade of the novel, Istanbul appears as it is experienced by two women, creating a complementary to the masculine side of *Béla*. However, unlike Mehmet Bilâl's novel, *Leyla ile Şirin* presents an Istanbul narrated in the near future, an Istanbul swiped with neoliberalism and lost its historical decorum. Correspondingly, just like in *Béla*, the spaces get smaller and smaller throughout the novel until there is no room in Leyla's apartment in a skyscraper. Concerning the ripening of the sapphic love and desire in the novel, the space around

Leyla starts shrinking, finally entrapping her into an apartment as she battles agoraphobia. The other half of this relationship, Şirin, on the other hand, finds a utopic neighborhood called *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* out of the city. That way, the novel opens a possibility of a utopia where queer desires do not have to be trapped or encapsulated within Istanbul's spaces of exclusion.

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz theorize the concept of "Queer Utopia" as a form of radical idealism that prioritizes the community building set for a future not bounded by the straight passing of time.¹⁸ Doğaner's vision of *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* also creates a community of acceptance that is not bound by the normativities of the city and straight passing of time. As the inhabitants of this neighborhood suggests, the neighborhood stops its progress towards an ambitious neoliberal future Istanbul is heading towards, and they exist rather out of space and out of time. Therefore, Doğaner explores the terrestrial aspect of literature in the setting of Istanbul but also imagines a queer space of inclusion with a stance of "art-directing the real"¹⁹ because it proposes another way of futurity that is not going in the direction that divides Istanbul into the extreme binaries of the rich and the poor and accepts queer desires and their power to disturb the normativity.

In the third chapter, following upon my analysis of *Leyla ile Şirin* and the concept of queer Utopia, I question whether it could already exist in the Mediterranean as an imaginary place outside of the center and the city by focusing on Atıf Yılmaz's two film adaptations. Both movies are adapted from literary works; however, Atıf Yılmaz uses Mediterranean space as a place of expansion for the characters. *Dul Bir Kadın* is a movie adapted from Necati Cumalı's theatre play *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan*,

¹⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), pp. 19 – 33; 22-23.

¹⁹ Muñoz, "Just Like Heaven: Queer Utopian Art and the Aesthetic Dimension," pp. 131 – 147; 126.

and it follows a widowed woman's search for a sense of self in a relationship with a young man. The most apparent difference between the movie and the play is their ending. In *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan*, Suna ends up marrying one of her ex-husband's rich and old friends, and the scene ends with her leaving the house to be captured for the sake of her daughter's future. However, in the movie, through a trip to Bodrum (a famous summer residency for vacations that is built upon the ancient Greek city Halicarnassus in Mediterranean Turkey), she first defies her limits by enjoying the excitement of new love with a young photographer, later with the help of her friend Ayla and their friendship, Suna notices she does not need a man to feel valuable and together with Ayla and her daughter, they form a queer family dynamic. The movie ends with the three of them playing and running around in a park whereas in the play Suna is last seen under the framework of a door that traps her.

Through the emphasis of Bodrum as a place where everything is possible, the Mediterranean first becomes a site of self-exploration and desire and then a pathway towards a possibility of a queer Utopia where two women could form a family through a platonic friendship. In *Düş Gezginleri*, on the other hand, the Mediterranean becomes a setting where queer love between two women finds a way to exist. The movie's source material is a short story by Osman Çallı with the same name. However, while love between two lead female characters is only mentioned in the short story as a childhood memory, the movie's central point is an exploration of sapphic love. The Mediterranean again becomes a setting for Havva and Nilgün's love to emerge as Nilgün moves to İzmir as a doctor. However, Bergama (also known as the Pergamon Ancient City in Ancient Mediterranean) reveals as a critical point in the plot as a place Nilgün and Havva run to hide from others where they imagine a future together, and a queer Utopia where nobody knows them. In other words, in these movies, while the use of the

Mediterranean differentiates the source material from the adaptation, it also offers an area of expansion for the characters where an excess of desire appears, leading to an imagination of queer Utopia.

The search for a queer Utopia in the Mediterranean is also a thin line because it also exists as a border-sea, and just like every border, violence is an essential component of the Mediterranean. For instance, in 2015, Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee, was found dead on the coast of Bodrum. His family was fleeing the war with the hopes of reaching Europe. The image of Alan's body spread in social media and news globally as an image of 'the refugee crisis.'²⁰ Again, in 2015, refugees were living in the streets and outdoors of Bodrum, waiting to find a boat to reach the coasts of Greece, and according to local business owners, that was unacceptable for a tourism town like Bodrum.²¹ This year, more than 300 Pakistanis were killed in a sinking fishing boat in June. Some people on the boat were rescued and brought to Kalamata, Greece; however, the media raised this incident as a humanitarian crisis.²² In February, twin earthquakes happened in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey wrecked Hatay also known as Antioch, one of the oldest cities of the Mediterranean. The Turkish state stopped the death toll at 50, 500.²³ The earthquake left Ancient Antioch in ruins, and city's historic fabric is under threat of destruction.²⁴

²⁰ "Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy Show tragic plight of refugees," The Guardian, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees>.

²¹ "Syrians live outdoors in Turk's resort town of Bodrum," Hürriyet Daily News, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/syrians-live-outdoors-in-turkeys-resort-town-of-bodrum--84372>.

²² "Hundreds of Pakistanis dead in Mediterranean migrant boat disaster, official says," CNN, last modified June 19, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/18/asia/pakistan-deaths-migrant-boat-disaster-greece-intl-hnk/index.html>.

²³ For a detailed information about the earthquakes and their aftermath please see N. İrem Az's article. "Our dead are looking at us – February 6 Twin Earthquakes and the Disaster of Erdoğan's New Turkey," Jadaliyya, last modified June 29, 2023, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45167>.

²⁴ "Quakes Leave Ancient Turkish City of Antioch in Ruins," Balkan Insight, last modified February 15, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/15/quakes-leave-ancient-turkish-city-of-antioch-in-ruins/>.

By gathering all these events, I want to emphasize that the Mediterranean is not only a place of connection, hybridity, and fluidity; in that fluidity, there is also destruction, pain, and death, whether political or natural. I wrote this thesis while keeping the other side of the coin in mind. Not only for humans but for every habitant of our environment, the Mediterranean must be dealt with an attitude considering complex meanings of the region, living beings such as animals, floral dynamics of the region, or ancient cities. Serenella Iovino, in her article, explains it as:

Devoid of romanticizations, Mediterranean history becomes instead a repository (“a vast archive,” to quote Matvejević) of agencies and narratives, of elements and people, of natural materialities and political forces, steadily co-evolving into an open aggregate of landscapes and imagination.²⁵

Hence, in this thesis, I try to put the Mediterranean forward as a queer archive that features queer landscapes and imaginations without falling into the trap of Mediterranean romanticism. Just as Muñoz says that “[t]he cultural maker is interested in art-directing the real,”²⁶ I am also interested in queer adaptations that could lead the reality towards more egalitarian and queer futurity and show queer Utopia as a place we could imagine here on earth.

²⁵ Serenella Iovino, “Mediterranean Ecocriticism,” in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24.2 (Spring 2017), pp. 325 – 340, 333.

²⁶ Muñoz, “Just Like Heaven: Queer Utopian Art and the Aesthetic Dimension,” pp. 131 – 147; 126.

Chapter 2:

QUEER IN THE DARK, TRAPPED IN CITY

The geopolitical position of Istanbul turns the city into a bridge between Asia Minor and Europe, hence, between the West and the East. Such a position consequently affects Turkish literature, and its place within the global context since Istanbul also functions as the cultural capital of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Ayşegül Turan discusses that one of the features of this bridge image is the metaphorical meaning attributed to Turkish literature “as the meeting point of civilizations and cultures” within the broader perspective of world literature.²⁷ The multifaceted history of Istanbul requires a cross-regional and cross-national reading of Turkish literature and the city's landscape, as it was once the capital city of both the Byzantine and Ottoman empires and is still the cultural capital of the Republic of Turkey. Istanbul was even selected as the European Capital of Culture in 2010.²⁸ To remunerate the meanings that Istanbul could bear in terms of literature and history, Jeremy Walton offers a methodology:

Istanbul demands description by way of a series of contrasts that both invite and defy reconciliation: palimpsest of historical strata *and* kaleidoscope of the contemporary; text to be interpreted *and* object that frustrates analysis; brand commodity *and* site of silenced memories; consumerist utopia *and* dystopian urban noir; target of political-economic projects *and* uneven topography of powers; mundane life world *and* myth.²⁹

²⁷ Ayşegül Turan, “Representations of Istanbul at the Intersection of Modern Turkish Literature and World Literature,” *Neohelicon* 50, no. 1 (2023): 83–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-022-00679-1>, 84.

²⁸ All about Turkey. Accessed October 7, 2023. <https://www.allaboutturkey.com/istanbul2010.html>.

²⁹ Jeremy F. Walton, “Silhouettes and Submersions: Istanbul's Past from Above and Below,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 8, no. 1 (2021): 11-22. muse.jhu.edu/article/845944, 12.

Alkan and Günay-Erkol, on the other hand, suggest seeing Istanbul as “a geographical and cultural threshold, a transit-space both literally and metaphorically” within the sphere of world literature.³⁰ However, considering Damrosch’s description of world literature, that threshold is not a utopia where every literary work, tradition, or even national literature travel equally.³¹ Interrogating which works can move between the two sides of the bridge or beyond the threshold could protect the heterogeneity within or beyond national literature and pluralism of world literature. Through a perspective that sees Istanbul as “the geographical and cultural threshold that embodies the plurality and complexity that can transcend the national literary space,” Istanbul’s true significance for the world literature, as the space in which the East and the West intersect, can come to the light.³² One of those who cannot move beyond the threshold are queers of Turkish literature since they only have an opportunity to exist as a subculture. Therefore, in this chapter, I propose that Mehmet Bilâl’s *Osmanlı’da Bir Vampir Béla* and Hülya Serap Doğaner’s *Leyla ile Şirin* requires a reading focusing on Istanbul’s regional specificity, and both transgressive and transcontinental bodies of literature as they provide a wide range of motion in between time and space to excavate the relation between Istanbul’s queer politics and literary spatiality.

Focusing on queer spatiality, especially concerning Istanbul as the cultural and literary capital, could excavate queers of Turkish literature. Through the relationship between queer writing in Turkish literature and Istanbul, queers of literature do not only connect to the traveling myths, texts, and adapted stories; excavating these marginalized texts also democratizes the world literary system at the intersection of the

³⁰ Burcu Alkan and Çimen Günay-Erkol, “Introduction ‘Turkish Literature as World Literature’? What Is in a Preposition?” Introduction, in *Turkish Literature as World Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2022), 1–17, 1.

³¹ Hülya Yıldız, “The Making of World Literature: Turkish Fiction as a Case Study,” *Neohelicon* 46, no. 2 (2019): 411–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-019-00502-4>, 429–430.

³² Turan, “Representations,” 4.

Mediterranean and the Middle East by putting queer texts forward. However, to assume that finding and introducing neglected literary texts could change the power dynamics within the world literary system would be a naïve answer to the problems of hierarchy between the so-called literary centers and peripheries. While doing such an excavation, implementing the methodology of critical Mediterranean studies is needed to challenge and disrupt the hierarchical sphere of Pascal Casanova's world literary space centering around Paris as the literary capital.³³ Implementing the idea of "the fishnet matrix of Mediterranean connectivity" into the world literary system creates an opportunity to see world literature as a combination of different literary capitals, breaking the power hierarchy between Istanbul, Western literary capitals and the whole Mediterranean sphere.³⁴ When criticizing the reception of Istanbul as the capital city of Comparative Literature, Anca Parvulescu, for instance, suggests that neither Auerbach nor Spitzer contemplates the city's imperial past and offers Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul as the space of *hüzün* which is felt in Pamuk's novels for the loss of symbolic capital of the once imperial center, after it becomes "a peripheral, isolated, quasi-provincial city" in-between "modernization and its haunting imperial past."³⁵ Neither Auerbach's disregard for the cultures and languages of Istanbul nor Spitzer's effort to learn Turkish and publish polyglot journals are not enough to comprehend Istanbul's spatial importance for the world literatures in the intersection of Europe, Balkans, Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

³³ Pascale Casanova, "World Literary Space," in *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 82 – 126.

³⁴ Claudio Fogu, "We Have Made the Mediterranean; Now We Must Make Mediterraneans," in *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis*, ed. yasser elhariry, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 181-197, 194.

³⁵ Anca Parvulescu, "Istanbul: Capital of Comparative Literature," *MLN* 135, no. 5 (December, 2020): 1242-1243.

To truly comprehend what meanings Turkish literature, hold for world literature, and to include the outcasted voices into the equation, Mediterranean perspective offers a path to multiplicity and pluralism. For instance, İlay Örs' research on the Mediterranean coffeehouses in Istanbul is an exemplary work because Örs dismantles Western-oriented understanding of modernism by highlighting the multiplicity of Mediterranean meanings and modernisms depending on Ottoman coffeehouses and their lingual pluralisms.³⁶ The most influential part of Örs' article for my study is that although Istanbul is coded as the peripheral meeting point for the marginalized entities such as "Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium, Orthodoxy, Ottoman Empire, Islam, Orient, Middle East, Near East, Eastern Mediterranean, all of which have taken part in the definition of the modern European self in the form of negation," Istanbul's local materials and their reflection on a more confined and liminal space, coffeehouses in this context, with its cosmopolitanism, multilingualism, and multiculturalism show that modernities beyond the Western/European context are possible in the Mediterranean.³⁷ Moreover, in regard to my research's spatial aspect considering queer literature in Turkish, İpek Şahinler makes a correlation between being in the peripheries and queerness since it is both deemed as secondary by Western modernization; however, she also emphasizes that it does not mean "the existence of a peripheral queer theory, but it highlights the core aspects of the periphery with which we can spot its queerness."³⁸ The conclusion I dissected from the intersection of these researches is that a combination of archeological and comparatist work based on queer texts can demonstrate the true potential of queer writing in Turkish literature.

³⁶ İlay Örs, "Coffeehouses, Cosmopolitanism, and Pluralizing Modernities in Istanbul," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 12, no.1 (2002): 119 – 145.

³⁷ In terms of literary modernities, Nergis Ertürk's book *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* focuses on alphabet reform and literary modernity in Turkish literature.

³⁸ İpek Şahinler, "Queer Writing and Peripheral Literatures" (M.A. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2017), 16.

Akin to the relationship between queer and Turkish literature, queer spaces are also subcultural compared to the city landscape of Istanbul. Beyoğlu district has been a site of difference from the empire's dominant Muslim culture because, following the 19th century, it was the capital of the modernization projects in the late Ottoman era.³⁹ After the republic's foundation, it was clear that Beyoğlu's cosmopolitanism, which brings subjects of the Ottoman Empire with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds together, was not compatible with the nationalist ideals of the new regime.⁴⁰ However, despite the Turkification policies of the republic, Beyoğlu is still "a hybrid and negotiated place" with its drag and transexual culture as the queers become the others of contemporary Istanbul.⁴¹ While examining a club called Alaaddin's Lamp, which appears as a confined and liminal space, Özlem Sandıkçı shows a connection between Istanbul's queerness and the transgressive structure of the club culture where the queerness of drag queens and transsexuals is heavily controlled because even the amount of money drag queens earn is dependent on the beauty standards imposed on them and how much they pass as a cisgendered woman.⁴² Sandıkçı states that although Beyoğlu has become an area where heteronormativity is transgressed, it is still under the control of the government's conservative, transphobic, and homophobic policies such as banning pride marches or encoding globalization, and queer movement as a part of cosmopolitanism, "as a force threatening the moral-spiritual composition of the country and aimed to construct a 'just order' based on Islamic principles."⁴³ Also, Pınar Selek's research on Ülker Sokak in Beyoğlu shows although before the police intervention trans

³⁹ Arus Yumul, "A Prostitute Lodging in the Bosom of Turkishness: Istanbul's Pera and its Representation," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no. 1 (2009): 58.

⁴⁰ Emin Özgür Özakin, "Identity of Beyoğlu" (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2011), 45.

⁴¹ Özlem Sandıkçı, "Strolling Through Istanbul's Beyoğlu: In-Between Difference and Containment," *Space and Culture* 18, no.2 (2013): 199.

⁴² Sandıkçı, "Strolling," 199.

⁴³ Sandıkçı, "Strolling," 207.

sex workers inhabited Ülker Sokak, and provided their security web creating their own subculture, it was still a confined area where they were excluded from the city, even by their neighbors.⁴⁴ However, trans women of the street had to move to different parts of the city, where they lost the solidarity and communal life, they built in Ülker Sokak.⁴⁵ Compared to the transphobic case in Avcılar's Meis Housing Estate where trans women live, and since 2012, they face attacks by other inhabitants in which trans women are killed and beaten up brutally, Beyoğlu is still more flexible in creating queer spaces.⁴⁶ In both events, trans people face violence from the police, government, and ordinary citizens when they start to inhabit places and take up space persistently beyond liminality because with persistence comes self-governance or regulation.

Similarly, Emin Özgür Özakin's research claims that the police brutality in Ülker Sokak and the purification projects of Beyoğlu stem from the fact that for the sake of the Turkish identity formation, Beyoğlu but especially Ülker Sokak and Tarlabası are seen as the abject of the city.⁴⁷ In this study, Özakin analyzes literary works from a range of Turkish authors, such as Adalet Ağaoğlu, Orhan Pamuk, and Ahmet Ümit, to show that in all of their works, Beyoğlu is described as abject.⁴⁸ Özakin's assessment depends on Julia Kristeva's terminology in which the formation of the subject I that requires an abject correlation to signify the negative emotions such as disgust and hate excluded from the process of subject formation.⁴⁹ Depending on that

⁴⁴ Pınar Selek, "Ülker Sokak: Eski Bir Alt Kültür Mekânı," in *Maskeler Süvariler Gacılar, Ülker Sokak: Bir Alt Kültürün Dışlanma Mekânı*, (Ankara: Ayizi Kitap, 2014), 111 – 129.

⁴⁵ Selek, "Ülker," 111-129.

⁴⁶ "Meis Sitesi Davası'nın 7. Duruşması Cuma Günü Görülecek - Pembe Hayat LGBTİ+ Dayanışma Derneği," Pembe Hayat LGBTİ+ Dayanışma Derneği, December 8, 2015, <https://www.pembehayat.org/haberler/meis-sitesi-davasi-nin-7-durusmasi-cuma-gunu-gorulecek-941>.

⁴⁷ Emin Özgür Özakin, "Identity of Beyoğlu" (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2011), 94 – 112.

⁴⁸ Özakin, "Identity," 94 - 112.

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of horror: an essay on abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press 1982), 91. Cited in Emin Özgür Özakin, "Identity of Beyoğlu" (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2011), 94 – 112.

correlation, Özakın interprets Ülker Street events as constructing the transgender body as the perfected abject because it does not conform to “the normative matrix,” and “causes fear, anxiety, and disgust.”⁵⁰ While naming transgendered body as the “perfected abject,” Özakın refers to Beyoğlu’s multifaceted meanings because: “Beyoğlu could also be read as a transgendered space; its imperial non-Muslim space attempted to be translated into a space of pure Turkishness. [...] Similar to the transgendered subjects, it lacked the sacred capacity to bear a healthy child, in other words, Turkishness.”⁵¹ However, making such a link between abject and transgender bodies of Ülker Street does not reach beyond the formation of the I in the Turkification process or subverts its construction. The studies on Beyoğlu’s queerness in this research focus more on the experiences after the police brutality or reflect an outsider gaze. For that reason, I think that studying the relationship between queer writing and Istanbul’s spatial logic as a queer space fills a gap in the literature by giving us an insight look while defying the national boundaries of Turkish literature’s literary space.

Therefore, a comparative reading between Mehmet Bilâl’s *Osmanlı’da Bir Vampir Béla* and Hülya Serap Doğaner’s *Leyla ile Şirin* contributes to filling the gap in the research conducted on the relationship between queer spatiality, Istanbul, and contemporary Turkish literature. It also contributes to understanding Istanbul’s place through a queer perspective within the scope of comparative literature because while publicly seen as ‘queers of literature,’ these novels are among the ones that fall short of traveling between languages and borders in terms of translation. There are two main reasons for comparing these novels. First, comparing them makes moving between different timelines possible because while *Béla* sets in 19th-century Istanbul, *Leyla ile*

⁵⁰ Özakın, “Identity,” 107.

⁵¹ Özakın, “Identity,” 109.

Şirin depicts a near-futuristic Istanbul written in 1992. Secondly, both novels connect different literary traditions relating to traveling myths, stories, and folk tales. For instance, Béla is a vampire who moves from Romania to Istanbul and wants to be a *köçek* dancer,⁵² which correlates with the vampire myth since the inspiration for the famous Dracula comes from Vlad the Impaler, Voivode of Wallachia, Romania. Even Mehmet Bilâl connects them in an interview by saying: “What I wanted to write was first a vampire story. It should have been a different vampire from its predecessors. It should have been from my perspective[.]” and adds: “If I were to write a vampire, it should have contributed to the genre also.”⁵³ *Leyla ile Şirin*, on the other hand, uses the tales of *Leyla ile Mecnun* and *Ferhat ile Şirin* which tell the stories of young heterosexual couples who fail to come together. Doğaner’s novel rewrites them as a relationship between two women falling in love with each other in the slightly futuristic scenery of Istanbul with references to the source material of the novel several times. While *Béla* connects with the Balkan world because of its Romanian roots, *Leyla ile Şirin* relates to the Oriental world since these tales also travel around Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, though these novels are not translated into other languages, and they do not physically travel beyond borders, they are placed in Istanbul, where myths, stories, and tales from different geographies have the potential to come together and create hybrid bodies of adaptation, especially in these novels from a queering perspective.

⁵² *Köçek* means a branch of traditional dances in Ottoman where the dance is performed by a male dancer.

⁵³ Ayfer Feriha Nujen, “Mehmet Bilâl Dede: Ölüm Çok Eski Bir Gerçeklik Olmasına Rağmen Her İnsana Yeni Görünür,” T24, May 23, 2021, <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/ayfer-feriha-nujen/mehmet-bilal-dede-olum-cok-eski-bir-gerceklik-olmasina-ragmen-her-insana-yeni-gorunur,31086>.

2.1 *Spaces of Resistance, Liminality and Subcultural Lives in Osmanlı'da Bir Vampir Béla*

In *Béla*, the spatial narrative progresses mainly through three elements: Istanbul, *Karagün meyhanesi*, where Béla dances as a *köçek* dancer, and a hammam that Paşa and Béla visit before his career and new life as a male dancer. The novel first starts in Béla's hometown Köstence, and after his transition into a vampire, he moves to Istanbul with the force of his creator Beybaba. Here, *Béla* starts learning the perks and disadvantages of being a vampire, and he also gets accustomed to the nightlife in Istanbul with the help of Paşa, a local dwarf⁵⁴ who is knowledgeable about almost every aspect of Ottoman cultural life, including myths about night creatures like vampires. As the two outcasts of society (as a young man left alone by his mother and whose father is unknown, Béla also spends a life alone, far from society even before his transition), they become good friends, and Paşa starts to protect Béla against the odds. Under the influence of their first night together in Istanbul, seeing young *köçek* boys dancing in a *meyhane*, Béla decides to become one with the help of his new friend. After persuading the owner of *Karagün meyhanesi* with his new abilities as a vampire, he visits a hammam with Paşa before becoming a *köçek*. Following the narrative path, I will also move from Istanbul towards *Karagün meyhanesi* and the *hammam* as both liminal and queer spaces.

Istanbul appears several times in the novel, through Béla's perspective, as he learns the ways of the city. The novel is fictionalized through the narration of Béla as an almost autobiographical piece, with self-conscious writing moving between the 1800s and 2012, as the last page notes the end date as December 20, 2012. During his first

⁵⁴ I use the word dwarf here because in the novel Paşa is described as 'cüce.' So, I use the same terminology with the novel.

encounter with Istanbul, Béla depicts: “Sizin şimdi Pierre Loti Kahvesi diye bildiğiniz ama benim henüz adının Rabia Kadın Kahvehanesi olduğunu bile bilmediğim alanda, derin uçurumun kenarında durup Haliç’i, kıyısındaki kayıkları ve balıkçı kulübelerini seyrederken elimde bir çayım veya kahvem, bir de tütünüm eksikti!”⁵⁵ Even without seeing the end page, this sentence highlights that the time of the narration is in the future, and Istanbul’s landscape is everchanging over the years. It is also an indicator that Béla, as the narrator, shapes and chooses what he will tell and talks directly to an imagined reader, trying to manipulate the reader’s gaze through his perspective. Therefore, while following a narrowing path from Istanbul to its *meyhanes* and *hammams* in the dark alleys, for an extensive spatial reading, what Béla intertextually mentions while depicting the places or telling different stories around Istanbul holds importance.

That is why how he depicts Istanbul in the chapter called “Geceyi fethetmek! (Conquering the Night!)” is one of the most critical parts of the spatial aspect of this novel. Here, the narrator, Béla, references to Reşad Ekrem Koçu before narrating Istanbul with his own words: “Bir yüzyıl sonra o günlerin İstanbul’unu büyük bir lezzetle yazan, tarih âşığı Reşad Ekrem Koçu haklı, bir insan deryasıydı İstanbul... Müslüman’ı, Rum’u, Yahudi’si ve Ermeni’siyle... Türk’ü, Kürt’ü, Laz’ı, Arnavut’u, Çerkez’i, Çingene’siyle...”⁵⁶ What is mentioned here is actually Koçu’s *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, which also includes information about the homosexual and homoerotic life in Istanbul. In his comprehensive article on Koçu’s collection, Joseph Allen Boone

⁵⁵ Mehmet Bilâl, *Béla: Osmanlı’da Bir Vampir* (İstanbul: Nar Kitap, 2013), 39; “In the place that you now known as Pierre Loti Coffeehouse, but I didn’t even know its name as Rabia Women’s Coffeehouse then, standing on the edge of a cliff where I watch the Golden Horn, the boats on its shore and its fishermen huts, I was only missing a tea or a coffee in my hands, and tobacco!”

⁵⁶ Bilâl, *Béla*, 99; “As a lover of history who wrote the İstanbul of those days with a great taste after a century, Reşad Ekrem Koçu was right, İstanbul is a sea of people... With its Muslims, Greeks, Jews, and Armenians, or with its Laz, Albanian, Circassian, Gypsy and Turks, and Kurds.”

claims that although Koçu's work gives encyclopedic information about Istanbul alphabetically, it exists as a queer archive.⁵⁷ Queer archives, according to Ann Cvetkovich, are different from their official counterparts because they offer archives of queer feelings with perseverance to contain passionate desires.⁵⁸ Hence, Boone argues that this collection not only contains Koçu's homoerotic desires directed towards young male bodies, mainly embodied by the drawings in the encyclopedia, but it also contains queer desires of Istanbulites stemming from the many anecdotes and life stories or love notes written to the patrons by the male youth.⁵⁹

Right before mentioning Koçu's name, in the previous chapter, Béla also talks about their hammam journey by giving details on the customs of the hammam, including how he saw private sections [*halvet*] where men with money purchase 'private services' from young boys by describing a naked massage scene. At the end of the chapter, a *dellak* also washes Béla in an intimate way:

Bilerek veya bilmeyerek, isteyerek veya istemeyerek, belki de sadece yoklama çeker gibi bir insanın ancak kendisinin veya yavuklusunun dokunacağı bölgelere sinsice uzanıyor, tepkimi ölçüyor, sonra yine doğal olmasına özen gösterdiği el maharetleriyle daha makul alanlarda geziniyordu.⁶⁰

As this chapter is situated towards the half of the book, it functions similarly to how Koçu uses hammam and *dellaks* as subtext for eroticism but with a slight difference. As Boone details Koçu's documenting of hammam and hammam boys (*dellaks*) as an essential part of Istanbul, he also states that "*dellaks* become a key strategy in

⁵⁷ Joseph Allen Boone, "Creating A Queer Archive in the Public Eye: The Case of Reşad Ekrem Koçu," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 23 no.1 (2017): 54.

⁵⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2003), 253.

⁵⁹ Boone, "Creating," 52 – 81.

⁶⁰ Bilâl, *Béla*, 96; "Knowingly or unknowingly, willingly, or unwillingly, as if he was just taking a roll call, he was sneaking up on the areas that only touched by a person himself or by a lover while measuring my reaction. Then, he was navigating back to more reasonable areas with his dexterity which he orchestrated as natural."

disseminating [encyclopedia's] homoerotic subtexts.”⁶¹ For the novel, hammam is also the first space homosexual relationship between men openly described. However, at the end of the chapter, Béla also shows his discomfort against the non-consensual touches and offers of sex. Then, one may ask: why is there a whole chapter on this subject? Rather than answering the reader's questions about Béla gender and sexuality, these instances function as deliberate strategies to eroticize Istanbul.

3.1.1. Hammam

Besides being an essential part of homoeroticism and homosocial life of Ottoman culture, the regular visitors, and hammam boys were also a part of the urban subculture that the empire acknowledged and tried to regulate simultaneously.⁶² Especially after the 18th century, hammams became a source of anxiety for the Ottoman government because they embodied a potential for creating rebellion by connecting different power dynamics through homoerotic desires between men.⁶³ The description of the hammam in the novel also presents a hybrid construction that reflects the same potential. Early in the chapter, Paşa explains that government officials usually collect adrift and stray young males and drop them into the basements of hammams where the fireplace stands. When Béla sees a hammam for the first time, it amazes him, but also, he cannot understand the importance of hammam culture at first sight. Paşa, then, states: “Hamamlar sırf yıkanıp çıkılan yerler değil, toplanıp muhabbet etme yerleri aynı zamanda. Memleket ahvalinden konuşursun, siyasi dedikoduları duyarsın, şiir dinlersin, âşıklar gibi atışır, istersen dostluk edersin...”⁶⁴ Later, Béla asks about the private

⁶¹ Joseph Allen Boone, “Creating,” 61.

⁶² Ezgi Sarıtaş, “Erkek Homoerotizminin Marjinalleşme Süreci,” in *Cinsel Normalliğin Kuruluşu: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Heteronormatiflik ve İstikrarsızlıkları* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları 2020), 108.

⁶³ Sarıtaş, “Erkek,” 109.

⁶⁴ Bilâl, *Béla*, 95; “Hammams are not only for bathing. You also gather in hammams to converse. You talk about the country's current situation, hear the gossips about the politics, listen to poetry, or recite poetry just like âşıks [singers], or you become friends with people if you want.”

sections, and Paşa explains that these sections for the respected and wealthy are called ‘*halvet*,’ which means being alone and secluded by cutting yourself off from your environment.⁶⁵ Here in the novel, the hammam appears as a complex part of the socio-cultural life of Istanbul, where desire, politics, and regulation become intermingled. Part of its charm results from its hybrid structure, where men from different classes could come together and have an opportunity to be politically active while satisfying their homosexual desires. Hence, unregulated hammams also mean unregulated homosexuality and the potential for resistance, in similar to what Sarıtaş discusses.⁶⁶

Moreover, hammam functions as a transition point for Béla, preparing him for the nightlife of Istanbul as a *köçek* dancer because the owner of the *meyhane* orders him to get clean. It is also a transitional point for the readers, preparing them for the upcoming pages where queer spaces of Istanbul appear. However, such a representation of the hammam space seems quite different from the dominant media around them. Burkay Pasin, while examining both Orientalist works of European painters and reconceptualization of hammams to the contemporary context, claims that hammams are displayed as female-only spaces most of the time and homoeroticism, or homosexuality is tolerated “as long as they visually satisfy the Western eye while conforming to the traditional gender roles of an Eastern society.”⁶⁷ Compared to Pasin’s assessment, both Koçu’s and Mehmet Bilâl’s representation of the hammam space is quite different. First, their hammam is mainly a male-dominated sphere, and second, they do not claim to satisfy the Western eye by conforming to the binary between feminine and masculine in homosexual relations that potentially occur in hammams.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kubbealti Lugati, s.v. “Halvet,” accessed October 5, 2023, <http://lugatim.com/s/halvet>.

⁶⁶ Sarıtaş, “Erkek,” 109.

⁶⁷ Burkay Pasin “A Critical Reading of the Ottoman-Turkish Hammam as a Representational Space of Sexuality,” *METU JFA* 33, no.2 (2016): 135.

⁶⁸ Boone, 52 – 81.

“The excess of homoerotic significations,” says Boone, is a way for Koçu to preserve a “less tangible history of affective desires and understood affinities, stuck in an increasingly conservative mid-twentieth-century world caught between Eastern and Western sexual norms.”⁶⁹ Then, the fictive autobiographical aspect of the *Béla* creates a similar potential to retrieve and resurface a forgotten side of Istanbul and Ottoman cultural life. In that sense, Béla writing his own life story as a memoir is an act of creating his queer archive of “affective desires” of Istanbul. Although the hammam functions as a transitional space for both Béla and the Ottoman society in its historical context; for Ottomans, the hammam serves as a regulatory place for heterosexism while Béla’s transition to a *köçek* dancer creates a transgression.

The hammam is a social sphere for eroticism and sex between men, but rather than unifying the different components of the empire; it fortifies the boundaries by contributing to the separation of the sexes, as well as, dividing non-Muslims from the Muslim folk.⁷⁰ Stemming from Islam’s emphasis on purity demanding being clean as a religious necessity, Ralph J. Poole asserts that “the hammam is the place that provides the necessary connection between sexual pleasure and religious devotion,” because the act of getting clean after the potential homosexual intercourse shows that transgression stemming from the desire between men is controlled with the religious undertone; hence, desire is still controlled.⁷¹ For the sake of perseverance of heterosexual marriage, in the hammam, boundaries between public and private get blurred, and men get a chance to satisfy their homosexual desires while purifying themselves with the ritual of bathing before returning to the heteronormative organizations such as the

⁶⁹ Boone, “Creating,” 57.

⁷⁰ Ralph J. Poole, “Architecture of Seduction, or: What (Really) Goes on in the Hammam?” in *Queer Turkey: Transnational Poetics of Desire* (Bielefeld: transcript 2022), 92.

⁷¹ Poole, “Architecture,” 93.

family.⁷² *Béla*, on the other hand, defies the traditional structure of hammam culture. First, the novel's version of a hammam is more heterogenous because there is no division between Béla and the others, as opposition to what is stated in Poole's article. It seems like nobody in the hammam cares for Béla's ethnic or religious background, rather *tellak* even says: "Bunlarda da çok kir çıkar."⁷³ His reaction shows that he is used to work for non-Muslim customers which depicts the fictive place of the hammam in the novel as different from its historical counterparts. Secondly, Béla subverts the ritual of purification. Although Paşa takes him to the hammam to remove the dirt inside of him, the hammam boy (*tellak*) fails to achieve that because no dirt comes off from Béla's body. The chapter also ends with Béla saying, "Yeter!!! (Enough!!!)" to the hammam boy who is offering sex. This response appears as a rejection of the purification process serving heteronormativity because Béla fails to complete the hammam experience with a satisfaction of homosexual desires in order to be able to continue living in the heteronormative matrix.

Rather than being a space for melting the homosexual desire in the pot of heterosexual marriage, the hammam becomes a transit for Béla to turn into a *köçek* working in a *meyhane* in the next chapter. Béla does not complete the process of purification and the integration of the homosexual desire into regulation fails because of his rejection, and because his vampire body which does not produce dirt. That way, the hammam appears as a queer space that subverts the traditional context through Béla's own body. Here, I do not use the term to describe a place creating a possibility for homosexuality to discuss visibilities. By using the term 'queer space,' I refer to the

⁷²Koray Ali Günay, "Homosexualität in der Türkei und unter Türkeistämmigen in Deutschland. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede," in *Homosexualität und Islam: Koran, Islamische Länder, Situation in Deutschland*, ed. Michael Bochow and Rainer Marbach (Hamburg: MännerschwarmSkript, 2003) 116-139. Cited in Poole, "Architecture," 95.

⁷³ Bilâl, *Béla*, 96; "A lot of dirt comes out of these ones."

hammam in the novel as a space standing “in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction.”⁷⁴ Hammam as a queer space does not confine homosexual desires inside its walls secluded from heteronormative matrix, instead for Béla, it creates an excess of queer existence because right after hammam, Béla goes back to the *meyhane* and transforms into a *köçek* dancer. As a result, though there are similarities between Koçu’s effort to preserve queer desire through an archival work in *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Mehmet Bilâl’s use of hammam as a queer space articulates resistance against normativity because queer existence overflows from the hammam’s boundaries and disrupts the heteronormative matrix of the novel.

3.1.2. *Meyhane*

Another important queer space in the novel is the *meyhane*, specifically *Karagün meyhanesi*, where Béla starts his career as a *köçek* dancer and falls in love with a fugitive janissary whom he calls Güneş. *Meyhane* is not only an important place for the novel’s homoerotic plot, but it is also central to the homosocial life of Ottoman men. Mainly dominated by men, it was a space for erotic encounters in different forms, such as drinking wine by the hands of cupbearer [*saki*] boys and watching *köçek* dancers and prostitution, usually in the rooms upstairs.⁷⁵ Following the 18th century, *meyhane* became a central part of the organization of social revolt because janissaries used *meyhanes* as cover-up places to gather and to hide from government officials.⁷⁶ *Karagün meyhanesi*, indeed, conforms to that definition. Although there is no mention of any rooms upstairs, there is an instance the *köçek* dancers of the *meyhane* wait for the customers after shows, and some of them compete and they even steal each other’s customers. In the novel, being a *köçek* dancer is depicted as something liminal outside

⁷⁴ Jack Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies,” in *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York and London: New York University Press 2005), 17.

⁷⁵ Sarıtaş, “Erkek,” 94.

⁷⁶ Sarıtaş, “Erkek,” 95.

of gender-binary as an in-between state. According to Atilla Barutçu, our contemporary understanding of gender based on the binary system is insufficient to understand being a *köçek*, and what we attribute to the concepts of femininity and masculinity may not be the same as what Ottomans understood from these terms because *köçeklik* is a liminal state outside of its before and outside, and different from the performance of masculinity.⁷⁷ Such relationship between *köçeklik* and *meyhane* seems relevant to the novel. Béla describes the other dancers in detail by saying: “Kimi gözlerine sürme çekiyor kimi saçını kabartıyor, kâküllerini alnına düşürüyor, bellerine kuşak bağlıyordu[.]”⁷⁸ Putting make-up, and dressing up could seem like in contrast with the performance of masculinity in the gender binary system; however, Barutçu emphasizes that “dresses and dances are seen as inherent to the *köçek* culture, independent from the categories of ‘femininity’ or ‘masculinity.’”⁷⁹

Similar, in the novel, *köçeklik* is perceived as an in-between state of being. For instance, as Béla introduces the dancers in the *meyhane*, a woman walks into the backstage room, and she retracts from saying “Destur!”⁸⁰ at the last moment upon seeing that Paşa is a dwarf. Béla, then, interprets that reaction as saying: “Belli ki köçekleri de erkekten saymıyordu.”⁸¹ Later, Béla reveals that the same woman is the mother of one of the youngest boys in the backstage who makes his own make-up in a professional manner. That may seem as progressive from a gaze towards the past from today’s point of view; however, it is showed that the mother only accepts this situation as an in-between state because she cautions her son: “Sen benim taze civanımsın oğlum.

⁷⁷ Atilla Barutçu, “Eşikte Dans, Performatif İnşa ve Yıkıcı-Aracı Bir Kimlik Olarak Köçeklik,” *Journal of Sociological Research* 24, no.2 (April, 2021), 75.

⁷⁸ Bilâl, *Béla*, 101; “Some of them were putting kohl on their eyes, or making their hair fluffy, and dropping their bangs on their foreheads while wearing colorful belts.”

⁷⁹ Barutçu, “Eşikte,” 77.

⁸⁰ ‘Destur,’ is a phrase men shout if there is a woman in the room, or when a woman walks into a room full of men (in Ottoman).

⁸¹ Bilâl, *Béla*, 102; “It was obvious that she wasn’t considering *köçeks* as men.”

Bu iş bugün var yarın yok oğlum.”⁸² Indeed, Koçu also mentions that *köçeklik* is only a temporary state because most of the time young boys are educated to be dancers from very young age and once, they start growing beards or proceeds towards the end of puberty, their career ends and some of them even manages to move on to other affiliations.⁸³ Being a *köçek*, then, seen only as a temporary state and its temporariness is the key to regulate queer existence in the heteronormative matrix. In relation to *köçek*’s body, as a result, *meyhane* becomes the container of *köçek*’s queer body, and divides it from the social structure of the life outside. Comparing *meyhane* and hammam as queer spaces show that the liminality of these spaces are the key feature turning them spaces of exclusion because thanks to their temporariness, they do not disturb norms of the society.

What makes *Karagün meyhanesi* a queer space is the relation between Béla’s performance as a *köçek* that acts as queer world-making. Fiona Buckland explains “queer world-making” as:

[q]ueer lifeworlds embodied utopic imagination and power whereby queerness occupied the center, in which the heterosexual couple was no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture. They existed within and drew some energy from not always oppositional relationships to the hegemonic field power that attempted repeatedly and contingently to normalize heteroorthodoxy.⁸⁴

In that sense, *köçeklik* could be seen as a way of queer world-making, and the physical space to actualize that would be *meyhanes*. However, the ‘utopic imagination’ part only obtains a sense through Béla because he gets recruited as a dancer thanks to his vampiric abilities to read minds and persuade people, not because he is professional or trained. By the time of his first performance, Béla still has new powers yet to

⁸² Bilâl, *Béla*, 102; “You are my beloved young boy. This job exists today but there is no guarantee for tomorrow.”

⁸³ Boone, “Creating,” 62-63.

⁸⁴ Fiona Buckland, “Introduction: Impossible Dance,” in *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press 2022), 6.

discover, and he can barely control them. As a result, he fails to impress people with his first dance. Nevertheless, he sees a candle burning and starts to imitate the flame's movement. Immersed himself in the dance, he accidentally flies above people watching him. The audience in the *meyhane* perceives Béla's dance as 'queer' and frightening. Here, I am using the word queer to translate the word *tuhaf*. Since Béla is a foreigner to Istanbul and a vampire, he ends up in situations where he subverts traditional concepts. Later in the novel, Béla also improves his technique by adding non-conventional movements to his dancing, and out of necessity (because other dancers steal his clothes), he changes the traditional costume of the *köçek* dance. Béla's experiments shock the audience, though eventually, they grow fond of it, and he becomes the most popular dancer of that *meyhane*. In Judith Butler's use of the word "queer" as a verb meaning "to queer something" to define an act of subversion against normative structures.⁸⁵ Although what we understood from the gender-binary is different from the Ottoman context, Béla manages to queer normalization of *köçek* with his own body and him being as a vampire. That way, the shock that audiences feel when first faced with this performance is a reaction against the rupture in the repetitive codes of gender performance in their own time. In a way, *Béla* reintroduces *köçeklik* as odd, queer, and strange. From the relationship between Béla's body, performance, and space, *Karagün meyhanesi*, then, emerges as a queer space that resists seclusion and confinement.

3.1.3. Nocturnal Queers of Istanbul

Harking back to Béla's description of Istanbul, right after mentioning Koçu, shows that queer spaces and the nocturnal life of Istanbul are connected through vampirism in the novel. Béla states that his own version of Istanbul is: "asıl olarak gecesiyle, geceyi

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 223-242, 229.

kullanlanlarıyla bir insan deryasıydı.”⁸⁶ Among these nocturnal creatures, he considers perverts and deviants, misfits, and outcasts of the city, including young boys, janissaries, dancers, and musicians.⁸⁷ Of course, here, Istanbul, as “the sea of people,” only refers to men. Immediately, a sense of association between him being a vampire and the nighttime population of the city (primarily men) appears. Scrutinizing how the vampire myth is adapted with a historical consciousness not only helps to dissect the love story of Béla and Güneş (the janissary he met in the *meyhane*), but it also shows the allegorical construction of the dynamic between Béla and Beybaba while queering Istanbul at the same time. Returning to the origins of the vampire myth shows that Mehmet Bilâl uses the myth of Vlad the Impaler and Dracula as reference points.⁸⁸ According to Sariyannis, although the documented incident of vampirism mainly comes from Balkan sources, there are also registers of ‘*oburs*’ or ‘*oburças*’ (which refers to the vampires) from different parts of the empire.⁸⁹ The prominent repetition in these stories is that they often mention the dead's returns to drink the blood of people, and they are ill-mentioned most of the time, but they are not necessarily afraid of the sun.⁹⁰ Also, there are conflicted documents and *fetvas* about how to deal with vampires, though the primary approach seems like staking the tomb or decapitating the body.⁹¹ Similarly, when Paşa and Béla first meet, Paşa understand that he is a vampire from the folk tales about *oburs* that he remembers.

⁸⁶ Bilâl, *Béla*, 99; “But for me Istanbul was a sea of nocturnal people that belongs to the night.”

⁸⁷ Bilâl, *Béla*, 100.

⁸⁸ For further information on the relationship between Dracula and Vlad the Impaler, please see: Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, *Dracula: A Biography of Vlad the Impaler, 1431 – 1476* (New York: Hawthorne Book, 1973).

⁸⁹ Marinos Sariyannis, “Of Ottoman Ghosts, Vampires and Sorcerers: An Old Discussion Disinterred” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30 (2013): 197 – 199.

⁹⁰ Sariyannis, “Of Ottoman,” 195 - 220.

⁹¹ Sariyannis, “Of Ottoman,” 195.

Béla brings two different vampire myths together creating a hybrid text: Dracula and Anatolian *oburças*. Although Paşa finds out that Béla is a vampire through his familiarity with *oburs* as he also mentions in the novel, Beybaba character may be read as an adaptation of Dracula. As a vampire, he cannot walk under the sun and must drink blood to sustain his life; however, he is affected by silver which is not mentioned in Sariyannis' article.⁹² Just like Dracula, Beybaba also lives in a mansion far away from the public, associating with their feudal roots. However, the most interesting fact about Beybaba is that he needs Béla to integrate himself with the new era (because he is hundreds of years old); otherwise, he is doomed to get even older and eventually die. In other words, Beybaba relies on Béla to integrate himself with the current times. Beybaba provides Béla unlimited amount of money, and money becomes the key for Béla to integrate in the night life of Istanbul. In that way, Beybaba and Béla's relationship and its economical dimension resembles Dracula and Jonathan Harker's. Franco Moretti reads Dracula as an anxiety towards capitalism because as a landlord aristocrat Dracula's accumulation of wealth only finds an opportunity to enter the market through Jonathan Harker; he is, in fact, "is a rational entrepreneur who invests his gold to expand his dominion: to conquer the City of London."⁹³ Dracula is a foreign character because as the monopolist he "threatens the freedom of the individual," and Stoker puts characters with British nationalist undertones to fight that threat.⁹⁴ Though Bram Stoker's Dracula does not show a kinship to Vlad the Impaler, first adaptation of Dracula into Turkish literature by Ali Rıza Seyfi under the name *Kazıklı Voyvoda* (Vlad

⁹² Sariyannis, 195 – 220.

⁹³ Franco Moretti "The Dialectic of Fear," *New Left Review* 136 (November-December 1982): 68. <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/moretti.html>

⁹⁴ Moretti, "The Dialectic," 74.

the Impaler) in 1928, and it also bears nationalist features.⁹⁵ In Seyfi's novel, Dracula is imagined as a foreigner enemy against the Turkish identity because of "Vlad the Impaler's cruel deeds against Turks, thus serving as a precursor of the events follow: [...] Dracula is identified with the nation's enemies."⁹⁶ That way, Seyfi adapts a non-national text and turns it into a work of national literature.⁹⁷ After eighty-five years later, Mehmet Bilâl's novel creates a dialogue with Stoker's Dracula and its first adaptation into Turkish by recalling the Romanian ancestry of the vampire myth. This time, however, rather than glorification of nationalist identity, the novel creates a hybrid body of text by mentioning different origin sources within adapted historical scene of Mahmud the Second's period.

A close analysis of Béla and Beybaba's relationship shows that the novel's historical consciousness is presented through Béla's personal narrative, and such reading makes it possible to see his nocturnal nature as a metaphor of being a closeted queer. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, in *Blood Read*, discusses that different manifestations of the vampire myth tells us that the vampire is "a creature who can take on the allegorical weight of changing times and collective psyches."⁹⁸ In that case, Beybaba's choice to turn Béla into a vampire to catch up with the modern times shows their vampirism symbolizes two different things. Beybaba lives in his mansion, alienated from society, hiding that he is, in fact, a vampire. On the other hand, in a short amount of time after his transition, Béla adapts to the nightlife of Istanbul. Rather than hiding his nature, he uses new powers to perfect his dancing abilities. The major clash

⁹⁵ Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar, "Adding towards a nationalist text: On a Turkish translation of Dracula," *Target* 13, no. 1 (2001): 125 – 127.

⁹⁶ Gürçağlar, "Adding," 140.

⁹⁷ Gürçağlar, "Adding," 145.

⁹⁸ Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, "Introduction: The Shape of Vampires," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 4.

between them occurs after Beybaba notices that Béla is dancing in *Karagün meyhanesi*. One night he pays a visit there to watch Béla and leaves in fury. Here, Beybaba shows that he is in fact against Béla's lifestyle: "Sana gençliğini yaşa dediysek bizi rezilliğinle âleme teşhir et demedik. [...] Senin için uykumuzu, rahatımızı terk edeceğimizi, elimizi üstünden çekmeyeceğimizi söylerken canını kast ettik. Kaybedecek bir şeyin yokmuş gibi sergilediğin aşağılık arzularının teminatı olacağımızı değil!"⁹⁹ These lines are evidence that Béla being a *köçek* dancer is not only disgraceful but also dangerous for both of their existence. His effort to be a part of the city, culture, and politics can be read as coming out of the closet as he no longer wants to hide himself, and his queerness not only in terms of sexuality but also his queer existence against the norms set in front of him. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the politics of being in the closet, hiding one's queerness, as the defining tool of gay oppression, and highlights that coming out is not a sole act that is fixated; instead, the oppressive boundaries forcing people to hide themselves might change depending on the context, and coming out is a never-ending process.¹⁰⁰ Sedgwick's theorization of the closet offers a useful tool to read Beybaba as, a manifestation of homosexuality integrated with Ottoman cultural life under the guise of the chaotic nightlife of Istanbul. Although being a nocturnal creature gives Béla a space to transgress social norms, despite his effort to come out of the closet as a vampire, he still thinks that he is immortalized with his body and says: "bense yaşamakla cezalandırıldım."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Bilâl, *Béla*, 141; "When we told you to live your youth, we didn't mean for you to expose us to the world with your disgrace. [...] When we said we would give up our sleep and comfort for you, that we wouldn't take our hands off you, we meant your well-being. We didn't mean we would guarantee your inferior desires that you flaunt as if you have nothing to lose!"

¹⁰⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 67-91.

¹⁰¹ Bilâl, *Béla*, 28; "I am punished with living."

His transgression of the limits that comes with being a *köçek* makes him susceptible to the danger of being found out. According to Beybaba, he must hide that he is a vampire, he must also hide being a *köçek* from Beybaba because that is something shameful just as heteronormative societies and families accepting being gay or queer as something shameful, disgraceful. The rejection coming from Beybaba, then, also becomes a reaction against Béla's attempts to coming out of the closet, as a vampire, as a *köçek* and as a queer creature of the night. Nina Auerbach discusses that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a reference to the trial of Oscar Wilde as he is condemned by the English public with the accusation of sodomy and corrupting the youth. Hitherto, *Dracula* as the Other is a metaphor for the homosexual.¹⁰² Although the intersection of vampirism and homosexual desire is overtly reflected in *Béla*, I read Beybaba's vampirism as a metaphor for pederasty, which differs from Béla's desire for Güneş. Though there is a clear rejection from Beybaba, stating that he has no feelings of exploiting Béla, he also admits that he chooses Béla because he resembles his son. In Turkish, the root for the word pederasty, *oğlancılık*, is *oğul* also meaning the son. Moreover, in the scene where Beybaba catches Béla as a *köçek* dancer, Béla likens himself to a hostess caught by her lover in the pavilion.¹⁰³ In Walter G. Andrews' and Mehmet Kalpaklı's comprehensive research on love and the beloved, *The Age of Beloveds*, they show that in *şehrengiz*, a literary genre about the beauties of a city written in the form of poetry, boy love is depicted overtly and these young boys are mainly from the laborer class of the city.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Beybaba offers Béla a lifestyle in which they act like a father and son while managing an artisan shop together:

¹⁰² Nina Auerbach, "Dracula: A Vampire of Our Own," in *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 83-84.

¹⁰³ Bilâl, *Béla*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, "Beloved Boys (and Girls)," in *The Age of Beloveds* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 32-59.

“Romanya’dan göç eden, çanak çömlek, seramik ve porselen ticareti yapan eksik bir aileyiz. Eş yok, anne yok. Geceleri işleyen bir atölyemiz ve gündüz açık bir dükkânımız var. Sen de bizim evlatlığımızsın.”¹⁰⁵ Towards the end of the novel, Beybaba loses his memory and mistakes Béla for his *oğlan* by saying: “Bre oğlancık, tiz şu banyoyu hazırlayıver!”¹⁰⁶ All of these incidents shows that Beybaba does not only demands Béla to hide his vampiric nature, but also his queerness because Beybaba, in fact, represents pederasty presented as a relationship between a patron and a bot under the mask of teaching artisanship.

In the novel, there is a repeated analogy between Béla’s love for Güneş and one of the most used metaphors of Divan literature: the moth and the flame. Béla finds a unique way of dancing as he mimics a candle’s light, just like the moths flying around the flame in Divan literature: “O anda boş bir sofrada kendi kendine yanan bir mum ilişti gözüme. İçin için, usul usul yanarken en ufak bir esintide titreyip dalgalanan mum alevi ilham vermişti bana. [...] Ellerimi havaya kaldırdım, küçük, narin kımıldılarla tıpkı mum alevi gibi hareket etmeye, belimi, kalçamı telaşsızca oynatmaya başladım.”¹⁰⁷ As Béla finds himself immersed in the dance he accidentally flies from the ground. In front of the candle, when combined with the costumes he wears and his flying abilities, Béla resembles a moth. According to İskender Pala, this famous metaphor of the love between the moth and the flame was used to narrate the divine love of God because the moth revolves around the candle’s flame as it slowly and quietly burns itself, representing the dervish on the path of unity, and melting their earthly attachments in

¹⁰⁵ Bilâl, *Béla*, 77; “We are a Romanian migrant family engaged in pottery, ceramics, and porcelain trade. We lack a spouse; we lack a mother. We have a workshop that operates at night and a shop open during the day, and you are also our adopted child.”

¹⁰⁶ Bilâl, *Béla*, 147; “Hey *oğlancık*, quickly prepare the bath!”

¹⁰⁷ Bilâl, *Béla*, 104; “At that moment, a candle burning on an empty table caught my eye, flickering and swaying ever so slightly in the slightest breeze while it burned slowly from within. [...] I raised my hands in the air, started moving with small, delicate gestures, just like the flame of a candle, I swayed my waist and hips calmly.”

the fire of divine love.¹⁰⁸ In the Islamic cultural framework of literature, to refrain from using women as the love object, especially in Ottoman poetry, male love was used to depict religious devotion or to scrutinize authoritarian morality.¹⁰⁹ In other words, homoeroticism is allowed in Ottoman poetry to refrain from desires aroused by women. However, from the late 18th century, Sufism was stigmatized as shameful and radical because “homoerotic sex was understood as a transgenerational experience” among Sufis.¹¹⁰ Love and sex with young boys were mainly seen as a threat to the religion from that point onward.¹¹¹ Like the abolition of the janissaries and pederastic practices, the 19th century ended Sufism, especially as an essential element of religion.¹¹²

Through hybridizing vampire myth and the traditional metaphor of the moth and the candle, Mehmet Bilâl transforms the transcendental divine love into a tangible queer desire between Güneş and Béla. As a fugitive janissary, and because of the analogy between him and the flame, Güneş becomes an embodiment of references to eroticism of Sufism and janissaries. The text never reveals the actual name of the janissary because Güneş is a nickname meaning the Sun that Béla comes up with. He chooses to name him Güneş since the sun represents everything that he is deprived of as a vampire, and he says: “Benim için güneş, tıpkı aşk gibi hayat değil, ölüm demekti, yanmak demekti.”¹¹³ Here, it is emphasized that the effect that Güneş had over Béla similar the flame burning the moth. However, in contrast to the hierarchy between the dervish and God, though it has its dangers to both sides, Güneş and Béla’s love is built upon equal grounds. For instance, in the first scene Béla and Güneş meet, Béla first sees him while

¹⁰⁸ İskender Pala, “Pervâne,” in *Ansiklopedik Divan Şiiri Sözlüğü*, ed. Emine Eroğlu, 9th ed., (İstanbul: L&M Yayınları, 2002), 382.

¹⁰⁹ Dror Ze’evi, “Introduction: Sex as Script” in *Producing Desire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 7-8.

¹¹⁰ Ze’evi, “Morality Wars, Orthodoxy, Sufism, and Beardless Youth,” 93.

¹¹¹ Ze’evi, “Morality Wars,” 93.

¹¹² Ze’evi, “Morality Wars,” 96-97.

¹¹³ Bilâl, *Béla*, 123; “For me, the sun, just like love, meant not life but death, it meant burning.”

dancing and dances towards Güneş after noticing that people in *meyhane* are scheming against him. While handing him a dagger, he puts off the candle burning before Güneş. It foreshadows the novel's end because not only Güneş is a danger for Béla as his obsession with Güneş pulls him towards political turmoil of Ottoman during Mahmud the Second's reign, and risks him being outed, but by turning Güneş into a vampire at the end, Béla deprives Güneş from Sun, and the mortal life condemning him with the punishment of living forever.

The novel ends with punishment, not only for Béla but also for Güneş. After Béla starts to organize shows against the Sultan and intervenes in the political struggles with the janissaries, government officials find his home. Returning to Mehmet Bilâl's interview saying that he deliberately chose Sultan Mahmud the Second's timeline shows that Mehmet Bilâl's adaptation of the Sufism, vampire myth, and the historical consciousness of the era within the fictive world of the novel becomes a queer resistance against the re-written normative codes of gender and sexuality in the 19th century Ottoman Empire that even hinders through the republican era.¹¹⁴ Hence, Istanbul becomes a place not only preserves queer desire through its hammams, *meyhanes*, and nightlife but also creates a ground for queer transgressions. Mehmet Bilâl also fictionalizes it as a queer resistance against the regime and against the normativism of the gender binary that infiltrated into the Ottoman cultural life with the modernization period in the 19th century. As a result of these transgressions, not only do they kill Beybaba, but also, Paşa burns in the fire they set up expressly for the mansion they all live in. Béla states that the government strictly organizes the fire's boundary to burn the house and the ones inside. The emphasis on the boundaries reveals

¹¹⁴ Ayfer Feriha Nujen, "Mehmet Bilâl Dede: Ölüm Çok Eski Bir Gerçeklik Olmasına Rağmen Her İnsana Yeni Görünür," T24, May 23, 2021, <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/ayfer-feriha-nujen/mehmet-bilal-dede-olum-cok-eski-bir-gerceklik-olmasina-ragmen-her-insana-yeni-gorunur,31086>.

that Béla is being punished because of the transgressions he creates. His search for Güneş because his reason to involve in politics and in the end, his queer desire and transgressions are answered with fire. Again, just like the candle and the flame, while searching, or in other words flying towards, Güneş; Béla literally finds himself in fire. Devastated from the loss of Paşa, Béla focuses more on his search for Güneş; however, he finds him on the edge of death. The novel ends with Béla's decision to turn Güneş into a vampire. Considering the meaning of Güneş as the embodiment of the divine love's transformation into queer desire and him as the symbol of every deprivation of Béla, including being under the sun, hence, being out, the boundaries of the closet return more enhanced and empowered. Harking back to the limits of exclusion in terms of Ülker Sokak and Istanbul's queer spaces as the keeper of those boundaries demonstrates that queer potentialities and desires are only allowed if they know their space, if they continue to stay in the closet, in the dark.

Chapter 3:
“SOMEWHERE NOT LIKE HERE”:
THE RIGHT TO LITERATURE AND TO THE CITY IN *LEYLA İLE*
ŞİRİN

Compared to the male-dominated sphere of Istanbul’s nightlife that creates an opportunity for male homoerotic desire in *Béla*, Hülya Serap Doğaner’s novel *Leyla ile Şirin* follows the desire between two women, exploring the possibility of sapphic love in a dystopian Istanbul separated as *Yeni Kent* (New Town) where wealthy Istanbulites live, and as *Eski Kent* (Old Town) where poor and working class inhabit though the novel was written in 1992. As the reader sees Istanbul through the perspective of two female characters, city’s spatial politics of queer desire are not only presented by Leyla and Şirin’s sapphic relationship, but also by using intertextuality, the novel also drops hints of analogies by queering the traditional heteronormative love stories of *mesnevis* such as *Leyla ile Mecnun* or *Ferhat ile Şirin* and by queering the dichotomy between the male painter’s agency, and the passivity of his portrait’s subject. While the first is an intertextuality based on Middle Eastern writing tradition as it uses the propositions of Divan poetry and folk stories, the latter references Balthus and plays with the relationship between a Western male painter and its female subject. Therefore, the queer desire between Leyla and Şirin does three things: first, it queers the source materials referenced in the novel, and second, in Istanbul, divided between the two extremes of the rich and the poor, it imagines queer Utopia outside of the city. Lastly, it shows in a city, spaces of exclusion for queer people are not only based on discrimination against sexuality and gender, but they also often operate in a capitalist matrix.

3.1 Humiliation of Heteronormativity in *Leyla ile Şirin*

Consisting of three chapters called “*Tanışma*,” “*Paylaşma*” and “*Kaçınılmaz Son*,” *Leyla ile Şirin* is a romance novel with a thesis that follows a love story between Leyla, who is a middle-aged and newly divorced art teacher, and Şirin, a secretariat having an affair with a married man named Mahir –and he claims that his middle name is also Ferhat.¹¹⁵ These chapter names not only find their meaning through the plot but also in deciphering the novel’s thesis, which manifests itself through Leyla’s inner voice given as free indirect speech. One example is when Leyla sees Şirin for the first time at an event organized for the teachers by Leyla’s school as Mahir invites Şirin for dinner at the same place to celebrate her birthday. Upon going back home, she meditates on the nature of love:

Bir başkasının bedeni her zaman yabancı bir bedendi. Aşk bir yanılsama, iki insanın birleşmesi ise olanaksız bir düştü. Yarım yarım varlıkların, öbür yarılarına kavuşmak için çılgınca ve umutsuzca çiftleştiklerini, oysa çiftleşmenin birleşmek anlamına gelmediğini düşündü Leyla. Yarımlar, ortak ve anlamlı bir bütün oluşturmak yerine, öbür yarımı ele geçirip kendilerine katmak çabasıydılar çoğu kez. Bu yüzden en çetin savaşlar yatakta verililiyordu.¹¹⁶

True to its name, “*Ressam Yitirdiği Yüzü Arıyor*” (The Painter Searches for the Face that She Lost), the chapter’s central theme is longing in two senses: first, an emotional longing for the other half, and second, Leyla’s longing for Şirin as she fails to recollect the details of her face and to create a complete figure of her portrait. As a solution, she decides to put an ad in the newspaper. Eventually, their relationship turns romantic. Şirin breaks up with Mahir and moves in with Leyla. However, their love

¹¹⁵ I find it meaningful to translate the names of these three chapters as follows: “Encounter,” “Communion,” and “Doom.”

¹¹⁶ Hülya Serap Doğaner, *Leyla ile Şirin* (İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1992), 29; “Another’s body was always a strange one. Love is an illusion, and the union of two people was an impossible dream. The halves, in desperation and madness, were coupling to commune with the other halves. Though Leyla thought coupling is not being one with the other. Rather than creating mutual and meaningful in wholeness, the halves are trying to conquer other halves and absorb them most of the time. Thus, most difficult battles happen in the bed.”

story ends tragically as Leyla becomes obsessed with drawing Şirin. She resigns from her job and starts spending her days without going out. In the end, Leyla finds the perfect figure that she has been searching in her mind the whole time, but that becomes the end of their relationship because Şirin could not handle her jealousy and judgmental behavior. In parallel to Leyla's thoughts on love and the end of their relationship, Leyla longs for a soulmate and contemplates whether there is a man created just for her who is afraid that if he fails to find Leyla, he will go mad and fall into the desert in search of her. However, Leyla also answers her own questioning:

Bir mucizeyle birbirimize ulaşabilsek ne güzel bir gece olurdu bu! Sonra başka geceleri ve günleri paylaştık. Belki bir süre sonra aynı evi ve yatağı paylaşmaya karar verirdik. Çok geçmeden de birbirimize kan kusturmaya başlardık. En iyisi neredeyse orda kal. Sensizlikten gebereyim daha iyi.¹¹⁷

Considering the third person narrator often focuses on Leyla's inner monologues and thoughts shows that the novel builds its three chapters upon Leyla's thesis on love, which states love means two halves searching for each other; however, upon finding, they lose themselves into the other rather than becoming equals.

A combination of the novel's thesis and chapter titles creates an opportunity to read *Leyla ile Şirin* as experimentation on that thesis through a sapphic narration which can be read as reactionary because Hülya Serap Doğaner writes back to a heteronormative and male-dominated literary tradition. In the erotica tradition within the early novels of the *Tanzimat* era, lesbian relationships among women are utilized to legitimize heterosexuality and prove the power of the penis – and these could be

¹¹⁷ Doğaner, "Leyla," 26-27; "It would be such a beautiful night if we could reach out to each other by a miracle. Then, we would share other nights and days. Maybe we would decide to share the same house, and the same bed. Before long we would start making each other vomit blood. It's best for you to stay wherever you are. I'd rather die from loneliness."

considered early modern appearances of same-sex relationships between women.¹¹⁸ However, in *Leyla ile Şirin*, sapphic desire and love do not glorify the penis, or heterosexuality. On the contrary, all men in the novel are shown as incompetent characters. First, Mahir is portrayed as impotent who is always afraid of getting caught by his wife because he depends on her economically. Özgür, in contrast to his name, is bound by his sexual instincts, and the power of money as he works as an advertiser in a capitalist society. His father, whose even name is lost, is a fallen hero of the ideals of socialism for Turkey in the 60s, who now uses a wheelchair as it connotes his lack of strength just like he mentions in the novel several times. There seems no hierarchical positioning between them because all male characters find themselves ridiculed throughout the novel. According to R. W. Connell, the term masculinities refers to multiple ways of masculinity and a hierarchy between hegemonic masculinity that is idealized and praised by cultural and social norms and others, though it may change depending on times, conditions, and geographies.¹¹⁹ Though in the novel Özgür shows an excess of male desire and objectifies women, or Mahir sexually assaults Şirin and Özgür's father does not hesitate to speak his lust towards Leyla; these do not show them as powerful, rather they appear as weak and incompetent. Connell, in *Gender and Power*, asserts that all masculinities and femininities subordinate to hegemonic masculinity.¹²⁰ However, in *Leyla ile Şirin*, the novel does not construct a hegemonic masculinity Leyla or Şirin must submit to. While lesbian love thrives in the lack of hegemonic masculinity, Leyla's femininity prevails as the hegemonic femininity both by economic and cultural means. Connell and James Messerschmidt define it as

¹¹⁸ Bilge Ulusman, "Son Dönem Osmanlı Erotik Yazınında Eril Fantezinin İnşası: Patolojik Bir Vaka ve Ahlakî Bir Sapma Olarak 'Mu'âşakat-ı Nisaiye'," *KaosQ+*, no. 8 (November 2019): 15.

¹¹⁹ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2005).

¹²⁰ R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987), 167 – 228.

“emphasized femininity,” identified by “compliance to patriarchy,” and cultural dominance.¹²¹ While Şirin comes from a poor family and works as a secretary while living in the poor side of Istanbul, Leyla is a cultured art teacher who lives in an apartment building in the wealthier part. As Leyla embodies hegemonic femininity by making Şirin move-in with her, or wanting her to control, their love relationship also becomes a trial ground for Leyla’s thesis on love, without binding it to heterosexuality.

Furthermore, the description of a man created just for Leyla and afraid of falling into deserts (“*çöllere düşmek*” in Turkish) is a direct reference to the folk tale of *Leyla ile Mecnun* because Mecnun, in the tale, wanders around deserts while searching for his lost love Leyla. This story is an Arabic folktale rewritten several times within Ottoman literature, most famously first by Nizami Ganjavi and then, by Ali Şir Nevâî and Fuzuli.¹²² Hindered from seeing his beloved Leyla, Mecnun becomes mad. His impossible love makes him wander around the deserts, waiting and searching for her. After struggling to come together, Leyla finally finds a way to Mecnun; however, she finds him drunk on divine love and has given up on all material attachments, including Leyla. Finally, Leyla dies from heartbreak, and upon hearing her whereabouts, Mecnun begs God to take his life and dies by saying Leyla’s name as his last words.¹²³ Through the imagery of the lover wandering around the desert searching for the beloved, in the novel, Leyla’s longing also refers to the traditional version of the story, this time with a twist. As the quotation mentioned above suggests, she rejects such love and the imagery of the lover as Mecnun through a contemporary mindset. Considering that many of the love *mesnevis* end without lovers’ union, she foretells their uncompleted story by saying

¹²¹ R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 848.

¹²² For detailed information on this topic please see: Rafael B. Huseynov, “The Influence of Nizami Ganjavi’s heritage on the shaping of the coherent cultural tradition in Oriental literature,” *Khazar Journal Of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Special Issue 1 (2018): 113 – 128. DOI: 10.5782/kjhss.2018.113.128

¹²³ Pala, “Leyl,” 300-301.

that they would probably separate and hate each other at the end if they would unite. Even at the beginning of the novel, though this is only one of the instances where the novel references the traditional love narratives, it rejects the glorification of any love through the union (or failed attempt of finding each other) of the heterosexual couple. Leyla rejects such love story by saying, “En iyisi neredeysen orda kal.”¹²⁴

Besides rejecting such a traditional take on love, *Leyla ile Şirin* also humiliates heteronormativity by using camp to exaggerate and ridicule any indication of heterosexual intimacy or attraction. According to Susan Sontag, camp is something hard to define; however, in her work *On Camp*, she gives fifty-eight articles for us to grasp the meaning of it.¹²⁵ The second one stating that: “[...] the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical,”¹²⁶ is helpful to decipher how *Leyla ile Şirin* uses camp to debilitate heteronormativity, especially at the beginning of the novel. Sontag emphasizes the importance of “stylization” and “artifice” in camp and puts it as the first thing on the list.¹²⁷ The use of the popular types of lovers and beloveds following the traditional *mesnevis* in *Leyla ile Şirin* certainly checks Sontag’s biggest box because in these traditional narratives, lovers’ characterizations are often stylistic, and the imagined beloved as a woman is a fictitious, an artificial woman.¹²⁸

Parallel to this, even the names of the two protagonists are symbolic. For instance, the name of Leyla comes from the word ‘leyl,’ which means ‘the night’ or even ‘nocturnal,’ connoting the beloved’s long and dark hair, which according to Divan

¹²⁴ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 27; “It is best for you to stay wherever you are.”

¹²⁵ Susan Sontag, *Notes on Camp* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2018), chap.1, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/308595/notes-on-camp-by-sontag-susan/9780241339718>.

¹²⁶ Susan Sontag, *Notes*, chap. 1.

¹²⁷ Sontag, *Notes*, chap. 1.

¹²⁸ Bahar Gökpinar, “Değişken Erkek-lik(ler) Açısından 17. Yüzyıl Öncesine Bakış (Mesnevîler),” in *17-18-19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Yazınında Erkek-lik(ler) Kurgusu*, (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent Üniversitesi, 2016), 26.

poetry, imprisons the lover.¹²⁹ In its traditional use, such description is symbolic, and the aim is to describe the lover's situation as a tortured character.¹³⁰ Correspondingly, Leyla's hair in the novel is also described as long and dark. In a dream sequence seen by Şirin, Leyla plays an instrument although her long, wet, and dark as a coal hair clinging to her own throat, almost choking her.¹³¹ In a scene where Şirin bathes Leyla because she fails to do that on her own due to her mental state, while combing Leyla's hair, she says: "Ne kadar uzun, gür ve parlak saçların var! Saçların gece gibi gizemli."¹³² As Leyla's obsession finally drags her into madness, she demands that Şirin should cut Leyla's hair. Şirin rejects such a request, and she starts cutting her hair disorderly. After rejecting a stereotype of Mecnun-like lover, through her maddening, Leyla embodies the characteristics of Mecnun.¹³³ In Divan poetry, the hair of the beloved is long and curly because there is a wordplay in the word *perişan*, which both describes the messiness of her hair and how the lover is messed up because of the beloved's love.¹³⁴ So, by adapting this traditional proposition of the beloved's hair, Leyla embodies both the lover and the beloved, and cutting her hair also means releasing herself from the bounds of Şirin's love. Consequently, this scene happens at the novel's end, as they break up violently. Therefore, Leyla becomes a character to which the novel adapts the stylization technique of the traditional *mesnevis*.

Şirin and Özgür are also similar in the sense that their names connote certain stylizations of their characters. Besides being the name of the beloved in the *Ferhat ile Şirin* tale, Şirin also relates to the sweetness of the beloved. It also evokes the beloved's

¹²⁹ Pala, "Leyl," 300-301.

¹³⁰ Harun Tolasa, "İnsan," in *Ahmet Paşa'nın Şiir Dünyası* (Ankara: Sevinç Matbaası, 1973), 154.

¹³¹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 98.

¹³² Doğaner, *Leyla*, 131; "Such long, bright and luscious hair you have! Your hair is mysterious as the night."

¹³³ Pala, "Mecnun," 313; The name Mecnun means crazy in love, or madly in love. In the traditional story of *Leyla ile Mecnun* and he becomes mad while searching for Leyla in the desert.

¹³⁴ Tolasa, "İnsan," 152 – 156.

mouth and words, as Divan poetry makes an analogy between the imagery of pearl and the beloved's words and teeth.¹³⁵ Leyla sees Şirin for the first time when the desserts are being distributed during the teacher's event. A link between sweetness and Şirin emerges immediately. In parallel to Leyla's perception of Şirin, the third-person narrator also constantly describes Şirin as childlike. In their first encounter, Leyla thinks of her as a vulnerable little girl in a mad world.¹³⁶ However, in the chapters where the narrator focuses on Şirin, the reader sees that Şirin is a cunning character rather than innocent and sweet because she finds her way in a capitalist world with some unique tricks, including turning Mahir's expensive gifts into money. Through Leyla's perception there is a stylization of her character as sweet, childlike and innocent girl. In the first and third chapters, Şirin's sentences directly cut the third person narrator's telling, and in the instance where Leyla's thoughts about Şirin are given, she says: "O kadar da küçük değildim."¹³⁷ Özgür, on the other hand, appears as a sexually 'independent' man but ironically defines himself as a sex addict.¹³⁸ Moreover, contrary to his father's dream of an independent Turkey ruled by socialism and his revolutionary ideas results in him naming his son Özgür; he values money more than anything else. The first words belonging to Özgür appear in the novel through his diary, and he says, "Tek dostum para[.] Parasız yaşayamam. Tanrım, beni hiç parasız bırakma!"¹³⁹ Both women laugh at the exaggeration in these sentences as Leyla reads them out loud. Özgür also works in advertisements where they influence people through secret signals to buy excessively, which contradicts his father's socialist idealism. Özgür, in his diary again, even says:

¹³⁵ Pala, "Dürr," 136.

¹³⁶ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 46.

¹³⁷ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 46; "I wasn't that little!"

¹³⁸ Özgür means free and independent in Turkish.

¹³⁹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 73; The translation would be: "I cannot live without money. My god, don't leave me without money!"

Bana bu ismi verdiği için babamdan nefret ediyorum. Bu isim, her duyduğumda, asla özgür olamayacağımı bana yeniden hatırlatıyor. [...] Kadınlara olan zayıflığımı, bu yüzden başıma gelenleri düşündükçe, iki damla kan uğruna ezilip yamyassı olan bir sivrisinekten farklı göremiyorum kendimi. İçgüdülerimizin tutsağıyız.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, in both Şirin's and Özgür's cases, their names depict the opposite of their characteristics, while Leyla seems to conform to the imagery and meaning of hers.

While the stylization of the characters could be considered as campy features of *Leyla ile Şirin*, the novel's set-up builds upon the humiliation of heterosexuality to create the groundwork for the lesbian relationship between two women. In camp, there is a certain astonishment with the androgynous because it creates an opportunity for "exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms."¹⁴¹ Alongside exaggeration, vulgarity and urbanism are other essential camp elements.¹⁴² Similarly, in the novel, whenever heterosexuality comes forward, any act of sex or any reference to sexuality becomes exaggerated in a ridiculous way. For instance, in the first chapter, the reader meets with the PE Teacher, Sevim, who cuts her nails at the bottom, wears a medallion symbolizing that she has sworn to be a virgin for eternity, and is exceptionally disgusted with any inclination of sex. The desserts at the event organized by Leyla's school are described as in the shape of three tits, with a cherry on the top – the name of the dessert literally is "Three Tits." For women teachers, penis-shaped desserts are being served. Upon seeing how real these desserts seem, Sevim starts shouting by saying, "Aptallar, sapıklar!" and running off with her "memesiz kıcsız gövdesiyle,"¹⁴³ as she shouts and drops some ice cream along the way.¹⁴⁴ The scene

¹⁴⁰ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 89. "I hate my father for giving me this name. Everytime I hear this name, I am reminded that I will never be free. [...] As I contemplate about my weakness towards women, and what happened to me because of that weakness, I see no difference between myself, and a mosquito crushed in order to get two drops of blood. We are prisoners of our instincts."

¹⁴¹ Sontag, *Notes*, chap. 1.

¹⁴² Sontag, *Notes*, chap. 1.

¹⁴³ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 14; "[...] with her breastless and buttless body."

continues with sexual connotations where characters become ridiculed. Canan Hanım's way of eating the penis shaped ice-cream described as: "[...] tabağını şen bir iştahla tombul yüzüne doğru kaldırarak, çikolataya bulaşan dudaklarını yalayıp temizleyerek, kaşık kullanmadan yemeyi sürdürdü dondurmasını."¹⁴⁵ Later, the ridiculousness continues with the dance of 'Yahudi Türkçe öğretmeni Sami Bey' and 'Fransız Fransızca öğretmeni Mlle Fraise':

Pistin ortasında, suratını pembe bluzlu ve pembe pabuçlu Fransız Fransızca öğretmeni Mll. Fraise'in saçlarıyla boynunun arasına gömerek, kızın sırtında duran elinin küçük parmağını havaya kaldırıp poposunu çıkartarak dans eden Yahudi Türkçe öğretmeni Sami Bey, şarkı bitince dansın da bitmesi gerektiğini biraz gecikerek de olsa fark etti.¹⁴⁶

The dance scene ends as Sami Bey's pants get dirty with the chocolate ice cream from the spilled dessert. In these instances, first, the PE teacher herself serves camp with her androgynous body that is breastless and buttless. Her revulsion and extreme reaction to anything related to sex are exaggerated. Every teacher character, besides creating a total urbanite community in the *Seçkinler Koleji* where they serve to country's 'elite of the elites,' should also be read in quotation marks because all of them are stylistic characters depending on their faculty, just like 'Fransız Fransızca öğretmeni.'¹⁴⁷ Finally, every act related to these desserts are also connotations for sexuality as they symbolize tits and penises. The ridiculousness of the scene is marked by Leyla's laughter which she tries to hide. Also, everything in this scene stylistically seems existing in a normative matrix, that is Leyla's perspective judging peoples' looks and behaviors. The contrast between Sevim's reaction and Canan Hanım's passion for the

¹⁴⁴ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 15; "She continued to eat her ice cream spoonless, lifting her plate toward her chubby face with a hearty appetite, licking and cleaning her lips stained with chocolate."

¹⁴⁶ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 15.

¹⁴⁷ Her name means 'Strawberry,' in French and in the scene, she is also described as someone who is dressed all in pink. There is a certain connotation between the name's meaning and the color.

dessert also highlights the exaggerated reaction towards the desserts. Through Sami Bey's lustful dance with Mme. Fraise, every connotation of heterosexuality is ridiculed. Besides sexuality between Leyla and Şirin, heterosexual desire and sex are met with a similar attitude entire novel, such as Özgür's father's desire towards Leyla, which makes him ridiculous again because it certainly breaks the idealist leftist imagery of him, or Özgür's lust which cannot be chained and results in his failure in relationships.

3.2 *Queering the Dichotomy Between the Lover and the Beloved*

While ridiculing heterosexuality through camp, *Leyla ile Şirin* also re-writes traditional folktales through queer adaptation. As the novel dives deep into Leyla's and Şirin's sapphic desire, the emphasis on sexuality becomes more serious, purified from ridicule because there is no use of camp when describing their sexual relationship. On the contrary, from Leyla's perspective, lesbian sex is glorified as it makes her think about only the good and the beautiful things. Her perception changes, and unlike the unhappy woman she is at the novel's beginning, Leyla "realizes that she is alive."¹⁴⁸ Their sapphic love cannot be read as camp because seriousness is the opposite of camp.¹⁴⁹ So, the novel starts trying its thesis on a lesbian relationship that adapts the two of the most well-known love stories of the Anatolian culture. It utilizes the framework in which heterosexuality is humiliated and constructs a queer adaptation out of these popular folk tales. Pamela Demory describes queer adaptation as: "a way of resisting normative ideologies and revealing the fissures, absences, or silences of canonical texts."¹⁵⁰ One of the ways of adapting queerly is to deliberately queering source texts, and another is to create "adaptations that proliferate in promiscuous multiplicity, when

¹⁴⁸ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 100-101.

¹⁴⁹ Sontag, *Notes*, chap. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Pamela Demory, "Queer/Adaptation: An Introduction," in *Queer/Adaptation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1 – 17, 4.

one text generates multiple adaptations, or when one text adapts multiple sources.”¹⁵¹ In the case of *Leyla ile Şirin*, adaptation works similarly. Doğaner’s novel adapts multiple sources at once while queering them at the same time.

To decipher the relation between Demory’s definition of queer adaptation and Doğaner’s novel, first, I would say that *Leyla ile Şirin* breaks down the normativity of not only the canonical heterosexual couples such as *Leyla ile Mecnun* and *Ferhat ile Şirin* but also the dichotomy and hierarchy between the lover and the beloved embedded in the tradition of Ottoman literature. To do that, Doğaner creates a hybrid character in Leyla as she embodies several characteristics of the lover archetype in Divan poetry and by giving a voice and agency to Şirin, hence, the beloved archetype. Bahar Gökpinar, in her work on Ottoman masculinities, discusses these *mesnevis* as literary works serving the coming of age of young men.¹⁵² In these *mesnevis*, she argues, appears a specific act of shedding the skin of the masculinities as time passes. However, a male canon always decides the sphere of what counts as masculine. So, these love stories are indeed canonical; however, they are written by men for men.¹⁵³ While in *Leyla ile Şirin* such subtext of male coming of age is set aside, Leyla also embodies different attributes of the lover archetype, but she is a ‘beloved’ figure in tradition. As I have discussed earlier, through her obsession turning into madness, she slightly turns into Mecnun, symbolically and literally, as the name suggests, drunken in love. However, with the emphasis on her challenge to draw Şirin, she also starts showing similar attributes to

¹⁵¹ Demory, “Queer,” 8-11.

¹⁵² Nuran Tezcan, “Aşk Mesnevîlerini Şövalye Aşkı Bağlamında Okumak,” *Virgül* 99, (September 2006): 55-58. Cited in Bahar Gökpinar, “Değişken Erkek-lik(ler) Açısından 17. Yüzyıl Öncesine Bakış (Mesnevîler),” in *17-18-19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Yazınında Erkek-lik(ler) Kurgusu*, (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent Üniversitesi, 2016), 13.

¹⁵³ Bahar Gökpinar, “Değişken Erkek-lik(ler) Açısından 17. Yüzyıl Öncesine Bakış (Mesnevîler),” in *17-18-19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Yazınında Erkek-lik(ler) Kurgusu*, (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent Üniversitesi, 2016), 25.

Ferhat in Şirin's origin story.¹⁵⁴ The most important part of that story for this novel is that in an instance of imprisonment, Ferhat starts drawing a portrait of Şirin in a cave as he starts living in that cave alone. Leyla's obsession with Şirin and her isolation from people or society as she immerses herself in Şirin coincides with the original material. Although Leyla is the beloved archetype in tradition, by embodying attributes of Ferhat and Mecnun simultaneously, she also becomes the lover in the novel.

Though Leyla seems to epitomize the lover's attributes, the male poet/painter, in this case, Şirin, does not lack agency or is not passivized as the beloved imagery in traditional Ottoman literature. The novel very much narrated by Leyla's thoughts and perceptions given by free indirect speech; however, Şirin moves beyond the framework of the fictive woman because her thoughts are given in italic sentences throughout first and third chapters. That way, the novel not only gives Şirin a voice and makes her a tangible character, but Şirin even rejects Leyla's certain assumptions about her. For instance, at the beginning Leyla only perceives Şirin as a subject matter for her drawing by saying, "İçinde kendisine yabancı bir yaratıcı güç alevleniyordu. O güne dek gördüğü hiçbir konu onu böyle etkilememişti."¹⁵⁵ Before getting to know her, Leyla does not care about Şirin's personality. She instead appears as a lifeless subject matter. However, Şirin's voice immediately reacts to these thoughts by cutting to the third person narration: "*Konu, evet, konu! O geceyi bana anlatırken, yüzüme karşı bile bu*

¹⁵⁴ Pala, "Ferhâd," 162-3; In the origin story, Ferhat ile Şirin are two lovers who cannot be together. Ferhat is the son of the painter who works for Şirin's family (*nakkaş*), and while working in their mansion Ferhat ile Şirin meet. Şirin asks Ferhat to connect a spring – there are also some sources describing it as a creamery, and Şirin asks for fresh milk to flow, to the mansion to prove his love but there is a mountain called Bisütün. Ferhat tries to drill the mountain. With the schemes of the people in their surroundings who does not want these lovers to unite, Ferhat thinks that Şirin is dead and starts sighing making the mountain falls upon him as it cannot bear the pain of Ferhat. Upon hearing Ferhat's death, Şirin also kills herself at the end.

¹⁵⁵ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 30; "She had a strange creative power kindling inside. Until that day, no subject she had seen had affected her like this."

sözcüğü kullandın.”¹⁵⁶ So, the hierarchy between the beloved and the ‘male’ lover is dismantled because not only the reader hears Şirin’s voice, but in those sentences, there is also a particular engagement with and desire towards Leyla.

However, by giving agency, the novel subverts the hierarchy within the poet-the beloved dichotomy and the painter and its subject by referencing Balthus. From the first moment Leyla sees Şirin, she thinks Şirin resembles the girls in Balthus’ paintings. These are the paintings where young girls are depicted through an objectifying voyeuristic male gaze, and the same applies to Leyla as she creates a concept of Şirin as the innocent, sweet, and little girl because of an age gap between them.¹⁵⁷ However, Şirin again rejects such analogy by saying: “Onun kızı olmak şöyle dursun, bu isimde bir yirminci yüzyıl ressamından bile habersizdim.”¹⁵⁸ While the novel sets a hierarchy between them through cultural knowledge, Şirin is more than only a subject matter, and the novel gives that through her voice and thoughts as her sentences cut off the focus on Leyla and sometimes even disregards what Leyla thinks, or gives details about her own story, as well as her own observations about Leyla: “Seninle ilgili bir başka gözlemim: Mutsuz olduğun anlarda katı bir muhalif gibi düşünür, kendinle ve yakın çevrenle barışık olduğun zamanlardaysa düzenle de barışık görünürdün.”¹⁵⁹ Although Leyla sees Şirin as the subject of her drawing and gaze, these lines show that looking is not always one-sided. Sometimes, just like here in the novel, the subject looks back at the painter or even observes the painter as much as him/her.

¹⁵⁶ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 30; “Subject, yes, subject! When you were telling me about that night, you even used this word to my face.”

¹⁵⁷ I’m borrowing the terminology from Laura Mulvey here. For further information on male gaze see: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.806>

¹⁵⁸ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 16; “Let alone being his daughter, I wasn’t aware of an artist with this name in the twentieth century.”

¹⁵⁹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 41; “Another observation about you: When you were unhappy, you would think like a staunch opponent, but during the times when you were at peace with yourself and your immediate surroundings, you seemed to be at peace with order as well.”

Leyla's thesis on love clarifies why there are no voiceovers of Şirin cutting off the narration in the second chapter called "Paylaşma." According to Leyla, halves find each other immersed in a competition of conquering each other rather than existing in common ground where they are equals. Though the title says sharing, in this chapter, Leyla and Şirin's relationship develops into a sapphic companionship, which is also where Leyla becomes obsessed. Şirin gets dependent on her step by step. The most apparent manifestation of that co-dependency is that Şirin leaves her sister's house and moves in with Leyla. During this episode, they also have sex for the first time, which is quite rare to read in modern Turkish literature. Even in *Béla*, there is no indication of sex in any way, feelings are more at the front, but the novel ends in the moment where Béla rekindles with Güneş, and the biting itself is used as a metaphor for gay sex. In one of the sex scenes in the episode called "İki Kadın (Two Women)," before they have sex, Leyla forces Şirin to look at the mirror and say what she sees. Şirin answers: "Two women."¹⁶⁰ The emphasis here on them being two women indicates first that they are separate beings emphasized by the number of two, and second not only Şirin acknowledges that they are two women, but also it is a direct declaration towards a male-dominated literary canon that these are two women who are about to have sex, without men. However, the two start to melt into each other towards the end, just like Leyla's perception of love. During a fight in the last chapter, Şirin asks with her inside voice: "*Ama biz aynı kişiydik, unuttun mu?*"¹⁶¹ Leyla even admits, "Sensiz olamam ben, yokum, boşluğum, hiçbir! Sense bana muhtaç değilsin. Kendine yeterli olmakla incittin beni!"¹⁶² It happens just before she demands Şirin to cut her hair. However, Leyla's perception of Şirin is not reciprocated because Şirin also thinks: "*Beni sevdin, beni*

¹⁶⁰ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 108.

¹⁶¹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 154; "Did you forget that we were the same person?"

¹⁶² Doğaner, *Leyla*, 155; "I cannot be without you, I don't exist, I'm empty, I'm nothing! You don't even need me. You've hurt me by being self-sufficient."

kıskandın, beni korumak istedin. Ruhuma, aklıma ve bedenime sahip oldun. Başka da bir şeyim kalmadı.”¹⁶³ In conclusion, in a manner that justifies Leyla’s thesis on love, they both feel lost in the other, devoured by the other.

Though up until this moment, it seems like the novel itself confirms the thesis defending that the halves in love devour each other, through the metaphors of the beloved’s attributes used in Divan poetry, both Leyla and Şirin emancipate from their relationship. I have already discussed Leyla’s hair is an essential characteristic of the Divan poetry’s beloved; however, by cutting her hair, Leyla releases herself from the deadly love of Şirin because hair is one of the attributes of the beloved that makes the lover miserable while imprisoning him, in that case, Leyla herself. Similarly, Şirin has her moment of emancipation symbolically. Besides being sweet and delicate, in Divan poetry Şirin also represents the beloved’s sweet words, symbolized as the pearl.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, Leyla gifts a pearl necklace to Şirin inherited by her family, but at the end of the novel, during their fight, she pulls the necklace from Şirin’s neck and throws out the pearls one by one. That way, both characters are freed from the physical restraints that represent their love. While leaving Leyla’s house, Şirin thinks: “Nereye giderse gitsin, tıpkı Leyla gibi, kendi yalnızlığını içinde taşıyacağını düşündü.”¹⁶⁵ Up until this moment, everything seems to confirm Leyla’s thesis. Nevertheless, the last page of the novel blurs the boundaries between the real and the imagery, the lover and the beloved, and every definite judgment with the note titled “Veda Yerine”:

*İşte bir hikâye daha: Leyla ile Şirin.
Bunu sen mi bana anlattın, ben mi sana, bilmiyorum.
Bu bizim hikâyemiz. Hem her anını paylaştık, hem asla paylaşamayacağız.
Sen hikâyeyi bulduğunda ben hikâyeden çıkmış olacağım.*

¹⁶³ “Doğaner, *Leyla*, 156; You loved me, you’re jealous of me, you wanted to protect me. You held my soul, my mind and my body. There is nothing left of me now.”

¹⁶⁴ Tolasa, “İnsan,” 252 -256.

¹⁶⁵ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 158; “Wherever she went, just like Leyla, she thought she would carry her own loneliness within.”

*İşte bir hikâye daha sana. Mutlu mu, hüünlü mü, bilmiyorum. Hayal mi, gerçek mi, bilmiyorum.
Belki böyle bir hikâye hiç olmadı, belki de hep vardı.
Bitti mi, başlıyor mu, bilmiyorum.*¹⁶⁶

Although these sentences are written in italic just like Şirin's sentences cutting the narration of the third person narrator, when the owner of this closing part says that they do not know whether they are the one who told the story or someone else (Leyla or Şirin, in this case) it dismantles both the binary between the narrator and the subject of the story and the boundaries between I and the other. Ultimately, this whole part queers every structure or thesis that the reader attempts to take. Just like Judith Butler arguing that queer "reveal[s] the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified, and to destabilize and mobilize the sign,"¹⁶⁷ *Leyla ile Şirin* achieves queering the traditional love narratives and their stereotyped imaginaries, and at the end, its own thesis and narration by claiming its fictiveness.

3.3 *The Closet, the City and the Night, or the Right to Have It All*

Considering the novel queers everything it constructed and disregards its thesis though it was about to prove that same thesis, then, I feel the urge to ask why this sapphic love story failed just like any other love story that finalizes with the lovers failing to meet in the tradition. To answer such a question, I need to include *Leyla ile Şirin*'s futuristic Istanbul as an essential element, and as a character, which has

¹⁶⁶ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 159;
"Here's another story: Leyla ile Şirin.

I'm not sure if you were the one who told this story, or me.
This is our story. We shared every moment of it, yet we'll never be able to share it all. By the time you find the story, I will be out of it.

Here, there is another story for you. I don't know whether it's happy or sad. Is it a dream or is it reality, I don't know.

Maybe such a story never existed, or maybe it has always been there.
Has it ended, or is it just beginning? I don't know."

¹⁶⁷ Judith Butler, "Subversive Bodily Acts," in *Gender Trouble* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990), 167.

everything to do with the failure of this sapphic love. In contrast to Béla's attempt to come out, go out and expand his queerness, after Leyla and Şirin's love is established, as the focal point of the novel, Leyla's use of space constantly contracts while Şirin answers to that contraction by searching for a utopia in the city that is *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* (The Neighborhood of Little Anxieties). At the first instance of their separation, Leyla goes out to participate in a meeting at school after they confess their love to each other. However, she finds it challenging to be outside the home and experiences a panic attack, ending with her being escorted home by a police officer. That way, Leyla comes back home, never to come out again. Her panic at the outside after their sexual intercourse supports a reading of that panic attack as an implication of Leyla's estrangement from the heteronormative Istanbul and the norms of the life she had before. As she connects with the 'other Leyla'¹⁶⁸ inside of her, who embodies Leyla's queer desires, such as touching Şirin, loving, and kissing her, she also becomes queer in relation to the normative world she is used to. The panic here could be read as a panic toward the possibility of her queerness being out:

Bu kez anayola kadar bile gidemeden, dayanılmaz bir korkuya kapılıyor. Ellerin titrediğini, kalbinin göğsünden çıkmaya çalıştığını fark ediyor. "Ölüyorum," diye düşünüyor. Bitişik gökdelenin dibinde, "Herbalist Yonca"nın geniş camlı vitrininin önünde durduruyor arabayı. Çevre tanışıklığını yitiriyor, her şey gözüne yabancı görünüyor. Nerede olduğunu ve orada ne aradığını çıkaramıyor.¹⁶⁹

As Özgür's father's diagnosis, Leyla has agoraphobia. It occurs as a response to acknowledging her queerness not only in the sense that she is a woman-loving woman – the previous episode is the chapter called "Two Women" where Leyla stresses that her

¹⁶⁸ The other Leyla is mentioned quite often until the point she finally confesses her love to Şirin.

¹⁶⁹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 101-102; "This time, without even being able to reach the main road, an unbearable fear seizes her. She notices her hands trembling, and her heart attempting to escape from her chest. "I'm dying," she thinks. She stops the car in front of the wide glass shop window of "Herbalist Yonca," just at the base of the adjacent skyscraper. She loses her familiarity to the surrounding, and everything appears foreign to her. She can't figure out where she is or what she's looking for there."

love from Şirin is not a men's love – but also, in the sense that every kind of structure of the heteronormative world is now strange to her because she is a queer being that disrupts that world's normalcy.

Leyla's hiding in her apartment flat, which Özgür leaves to her after their divorce, revokes the imagery of 'the madwoman in the attic' as she devotes herself to finding the perfect portrait of Şirin as she draws. Such imagery connotes Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's monograph with the same title which refers to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which they examine the novels of female authors from the 19th century, they argue that the themes of enclosure, imprisonment, and dreams of escape are often manifested as mental illnesses such as agoraphobia, anorexia, and claustrophobia in these novels as a response to the male-dominated literary space as well as the patriarchal society demanding women to be docile wives.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Leyla's recognition of her queerness and its relation to the heteronormative world outside manifests as agoraphobia. She becomes a continuant of the archetype of the 19th-century female writer as the maddened with her artistic personality and is obsessed with drawing. In the chapter "Sözler Tükendi (Run Out of Words)" her feeling of being stuck is described as:

Deli gibi çalışıyor Leyla. Bir bataklığa düşmüş de kurtulmak için çırpınırmış gibi, hayatı buna bağılmış gibi çalışıyor. Ama her seferinde bir an geliyor, beyaz yüzeyleri kirletmekten başka bir şey yapmadığı duygusuna kapılıyor. Paletten tuvale aktardığı boya anında pisliğe dönüşüyor.¹⁷¹

Here, the motives of being stuck continue with an analogy of falling into a swamp, and just like the 'mad' female writers of the 19th century, Leyla uses her creative power

¹⁷⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Preface to the First Edition," preface, in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut; London: Yale University Press, 2020), xi–xv.

¹⁷¹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 124; "Leyla is working like mad. As if she fell into a swamp and she is struggling to come out, she is working as if her life depends on it. But every time, a moment comes, and she feels like she is does nothing but dirtying the White surfaces. The paint she transfers from the palette to the canvas turns into filth in a moment."

and art to get out of that swamp. At the same time, since the novel uses the archetypes created by male authors, such devotion to her art could also be read as an act of fighting back against the patriarchal literary historiography through her artistic creation. Consequently, Şirin concludes that: “Asıl olan resimdi. Resmin dışında kalan her şey resmin bahanesiydi.”¹⁷² The only thing that mattered was the painting because it was not only a painting but also a symbol of independence or even emancipation from the male-dominated sphere of literature and arts, considering the references to Balthus’ paintings.

However, *Leyla ile Şirin* does not only gives another reflection of ‘the madwoman in the attic’ trope but it also combines it with the imagery of the closet that is used to describe gay oppression.¹⁷³ Just as I discussed in the sub-section “Nocturnal Queers of İstanbul,” similar to *Béla*, being outside of home, being in the city, meddling with other people deemed ‘normal’ by the heteronormative framework creates an anxiety of being outed, of others noticing Leyla’s queerness that is reflected as agoraphobia. Hence, the skyscraper flat she inherited from Özgür becomes both the attic captivating her and the closet that she is hiding from the heteronormative world outside. The tension between the concepts of outside and inside finds its reflection inside of Leyla just like the dichotomy between the inside of the flat and the outside, İstanbul. When Leyla first starts drawing Şirin, she feels the existence of another Leyla that is “Leyla’nın içindeki Leyla” wanting to reach out and touch Şirin’s breasts as if her body had its own mind while the other Leyla only stands in front of Şirin, thinking that even looking at her is false.¹⁷⁴ Upon noticing this, Leyla’s first reaction is to reject:

Bir kadının bir kadına duyduğu bir istekti [Leyla’nın Şirin’e duyduğu arzu]. Karşılıksız da değildi; bundan hemen hemen emindi Leyla, hemen hemen! [...]

¹⁷² Doğaner, *Leyla*, 143; “The only thing that mattered was the painting. Everything outside of that painting was just an excuse.”

¹⁷³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 67-91

¹⁷⁴ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 64.

Ama silkindi ve kim olduğunu anımsadı. Erkeklerden hoşlanan normal bir kadındı o. [...] Ama yine de doğru olan, kadınların erkeklerle birlikte olmasıydı.¹⁷⁵

Leyla's anxiety, again, reflects through these sentences. She is aware of the tension between them and the sapphic desire is reciprocated by Şirin; however, Leyla tries to re-establish heteronormativity in her mind and chooses to repress what novels defines as Leyla inside of Leyla which is the part desires Şirin. Nevertheless, that repression and the fear of being outed resurfaces in the chapter called "Leyla'nın Rüyası" (Leyla's Dream). As the name suggests, in a dream sequence, Leyla finds herself in bed with Şirin in front of almost everyone she knows and her principal shouts, "Kovuldun!" and continues: "Hem okuldan, hem de iyi insanların arasından!"¹⁷⁶ At the end of the chapter, Özgür also says: "Bu yaptığınız çok yanlış ve kötü bir şey," and "Hem yasalara aykırı, hem de büyük bir günah. Emin değilim ama, görgü kurallarına bile aykırı olduğunu sanıyorum. Neresinden bakarsan bak, suç işte."¹⁷⁷ Leyla's dream does not only reflect on her individual fear of being outed but emphasizes a societal pressure as Özgür mentions both the law and social norms. Since all of these happen in Leyla's dream, it shows that her anxieties depend on the fact that there is a possibility of being excluded from her familiar surroundings, being fired from her job, and eventually being punished.

An analysis of the use of space creates an opportunity to understand the city setting's importance because it displays the circumstances that make a sapphic love story possible and forces it into the closet at the same time. Since Leyla and Şirin comes from different sides of Istanbul, it is necessary to see what kind of Istanbul is presented

¹⁷⁵ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 65; "It was a desire that one woman felt for another woman [Leyla's desire for Şirin]. It wasn't entirely unreciprocated; Leyla was almost certain of it, almost! [...] But she shook herself and remembered who she was. She was a normal woman who liked men. [...] Nevertheless, what is right, was for women to be with men."

¹⁷⁶ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 116; "You are fired! Both from the school and among good people!"

¹⁷⁷ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 122; "What you are doing is both wrong and awful. It is both against the law and is a big sin. I'm not sure but I think it is even against the rules of etiquette. However, you may look, it is obviously a crime."

in the novel how it affects the characters' relation to the city and each other. The novel opens by stating that Turkey is now a state run by the wealthiest man in the country when the history teacher Güngör Bey states that it is the biggest revolution that happened in the country, even more significant than transitioning to the presidential system and the transition of the presidency from soldiers to civilians.¹⁷⁸ Though the novel is written in 1992, the last incident refers to the introduction of neoliberalism after the 1980s coup because, after Kenan Evren, the presidency finally moved to civil governments rather than a military junta in the years Turkey's economy radically changed under the influence of neoliberalism and with the new constitution, socialist unions and organizations are purified from the scene of the mainstream politics, as well as workers' lives and more capitalist working conditions in favor of employers are introduced.¹⁷⁹ Considering that Turkey's presidential system was accepted on April 16, 2017, with a referendum, the novel blurs the distinction between fiction and the real with its farsightedness. The emphasis on the wealthiest man ruling the government shows that the novel sets in a harsher capitalist regime. From the beginning chapter, it pays attention to the government's economic structure, which inherently affects the cityscape. While Şirin and Mahir arguing, Mahir explains to Şirin what kind of a period they are living in by saying: "Çevre kirli, sular zehirli, güneşin ışınları hepimizi öldürüyor[.] [...] Sokaklar güvensiz, devlet yozlaşmış, insanlar birbirini gırtlaklıyor[.]"¹⁸⁰ Mahir describes a dystopian Turkey where the law does not apply. The environment is polluted to the degree of almost being inhabitable. Accordingly, the city is divided into two: *Eski Kent*, where the poor and marginalized live, and *Yeni Kent*,

¹⁷⁸ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 11.

¹⁷⁹ Suavi Aydın and Yüksel Taşkın, *1960'tan Günümüze Türkiye Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2015), 324-344.

¹⁸⁰ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 19; "The environment is polluted, the waters are toxic, the sun's rays are killing us. Streets are unsafe, the state is corrupt, people are at each other's throats."

where the upper class live peacefully in their skyscraper flats run by the latest technology. Since Leyla lives in *Yeni Kent*, while Şirin stays with her sister in *Eski Kent*, they belong to different parts of the city, as well as different classes and cultural upbringing.

Istanbul becomes a determinant of their love's fate because the difference between Leyla and Şirin's urban footprint points to different, almost opposite cultural, and economic capitals. Their differentiation becomes tangible through the cityscape first in the chapter "Eski Kent," when Leyla goes to *Eski Kent* to pick up Şirin for another drawing session. Since she leaves *Yeni Kent*, the upper- and middle-class citizens live, almost never; Leyla gets lost along the way. She also fails to find that part of the city on the navigation device. In other words, *Eski Kent* is the part of Istanbul that does not even exist on the map. The third-person narrator describes *Eski Kent* through Leyla's eyes by saying:

Oysa var olduğunu gözleriyle görüyor. Kaldırımlarda yatan sarhoşları, ayak sürüyerek dolaşan Paçavralıları, erkeklerle pazarlık eden çocukları, inilleyen dilencileri ve yıkılacakmış gibi üstüne üstüne gelen duvarların üstündeki iğrenç yazıları görüyor. Camı açıp kimseye yol soramıyor. Şirin bile aklından çıkıyor. Buralardan kurtulmak bir an önce evine dönmek istiyor.¹⁸¹

Differently from the sterilized surroundings of Leyla in *Yeni Kent*, the city's misfits and marginals live here. Of course, there is an economic factor to such division in the city. In *Eski Kent*, boys sell their bodies to men for money, for instance. Finally accepting that she is lost, Leyla "decides to go straight [,]" because she knows only "[i]f she goes straight, she may survive from this hell."¹⁸² There is a subtext in the word

¹⁸¹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 59; "However, she sees its existence with her own eyes. She sees the drunks lying on the sidewalks, the ragged ones shuffling along, the children bargaining with men, the whimpering beggars, and the disgusting graffiti on the walls that seem like they're about to collapse. She can't roll down the window and ask for directions from anyone. Even Şirin slips from her mind. She wants to escape from here as soon as possible and return home."

¹⁸² Doğaner, *Leyla*, 59.

‘straight’ (düz) here. It shows that what has been coded as ‘not straight’ in Leyla’s mind is *Eski Kent* of Istanbul, where the homeless, poor, and marginalized live. According to Sara Ahmed, “[o]rientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward.”¹⁸³ Consequently, in this scene, Leyla’s inevitable disorientation is marked by getting lost in a place that does not exist on the map in the first place. The moment of disorientation also shows the structures of orientation and how a person becomes oriented.¹⁸⁴ The disorientation of Leyla creates a response in her to go straight no matter what because the world of *Eski Kent* is strange, queer, and foreign. The fear of the unknown, and the uncanny feeling she is experiencing being lost in *Eski Kent*, makes her go straight to the world of “good people,” as the principal says in her dream sequence. When she finally sees a skyscraper, she feels safe: “Çeliği ve betonu ilk kez böylesine seviyor. Hızla geçen otomobiller, köşebaşında plastik maskeleriyle dikilen robot görünümlü polisler, tanıdık bir dünyada bulunduğunu müjdeliyor ona.”¹⁸⁵ What Leyla deems familiar is the straight world, not only in terms of heteronormativity, but it also refers to every kind of normative structure where Leyla falls on the privileged part of the city as a member of the petit bourgeoisie.

Considering Istanbul is an essential element of this love story as the determinant of Leyla and Şirin’s responses towards the queer orientations they discover, this novel could be read in relation to the Right to the City Novels genre. Right to the City Novels is a way of naming a certain branch of novels in contemporary Turkish literature by N. Buket Cengiz who presupposes such categorization following

¹⁸³ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Find Your Own Way,” in *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁸⁴ Ahmed, “Introduction,” 6.

¹⁸⁵ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 61; “For the first time, she loves steel and concrete like this. The swiftly passing cars, robot-like policemen standing at street corners with plastic masks, reassure her that she is in a familiar world.”

the concept of right to the city of Henry Lefebvre, who says that cosmopolitan cities not only produce economic capital but also “knowledge” and “oeuvres (works of arts, monuments).”¹⁸⁶ Therefore, cities have “use value,” meaning benefiting from the urban culture and knowledge and enjoying the city's common places, such as parks or squares, and Lefebvre describes the right to the city as “a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit.”¹⁸⁷ In relation to Lefebvre, Cengiz looks at contemporary Turkish novels set in Istanbul and problematizes the nostalgia felt towards an old Istanbul inhabited by upper-class- and mainly seven-generation Istanbulite families, and defines the ‘Right to the City Novels’ concept as specific to Istanbul, serving as a counterargument to Istanbul nostalgia.¹⁸⁸ These novels also depict “migrants’ way of meeting their needs in the urban context.”¹⁸⁹ Though Leyla or Şirin are not immigrant characters because they do not move to Istanbul from outside, their experience resembles migration in terms of not belonging. When she visits *Eski Kent*, Leyla immediately feels that sense of not belonging not only to *Eski Kent* considering her economic and cultural capital, but also to *Yeni Kent* as a queer subject. Şirin, on the other hand, moves to Leyla’s apartment, and there is no mention of her experience moving to a part of the city where she does not originally belong, as if that experience is almost deleted. However, at the novel's end, it becomes apparent that Şirin has never been a permanent subject of that apartment or *Yeni Kent*. The experience of being an outsider and lacking economic means corresponds with

¹⁸⁶ Henri Lefebvre, “Right to the City” in *Writings on Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 66. Cited in N. Buket Cengiz, *Right to the City Novels in Turkish Literature from the 1960s to the Present* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 6.

¹⁸⁷ Henri Lefebvre, “Right to the City” in *Writings on Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 66. Cited in N. Buket Cengiz, *Right to the City Novels in Turkish Literature from the 1960s to the Present* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 227.

¹⁸⁸ N. Buket Cengiz, “Conclusion: Reading the Right to the City Novels in a New Istanbul,” in *Right to the City Novels in Turkish Literature from the 1960s to the Present* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 227.

¹⁸⁹ Cengiz, “Conclusion,” 228.

Şirin's experience of the city. Compared to Leyla, Şirin is also more resilient because she comes from *Eski Kent*. She is a survivor of sexual violence and is also sexually exploited by her boss at work though she accepts that as something normal. She is resilient because she has her own ways to survive, such as cashing out Mahir's expensive gifts and saving money. So, it is also possible to read the novel concerning what Cengiz discusses as the genre of the right-to-the-city novel since Leyla's reaction and Şirin's search for a utopia outside the city corresponds with Lefebvre's concept.

Examining the importance of Istanbul in Leyla and Şirin's relationship is also important to decipher the power relation and hierarchy between these two women and their access to the city. Under the heavy influence of consumerism and consumption, the novel imagines a future Istanbul changed according to wealth and people's status in a capitalist society. For instance, justice is served through advertisements and secret messaging, demanding from people who watch these advertisements to punish themselves if they feel guilty about any crime, even the petty ones. The ones who watch advertisements are mainly the working class, and people like Leyla, who has relations with the upper class, get the chance to be warned before these advertisements. Such instances show that not only money, but Leyla's network makes her privileged compared to Şirin. Pierre Bourdieu explains that kind of privilege as "cultural capital," and it has three states: "embodied" refers to how people present themselves in society, including manners of speaking and style; second, is "objectified state" in forms of owned cultural goods, including artworks, books, instruments, and machines; and third one is "institutionalized state," meaning "educational properties," that are guaranteed to last.¹⁹⁰ The novel emphasizes that according to these properties, Leyla and Şirin belong

¹⁹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241-58; 17.

to different classes and parts of the city. For example, even the name of the college where Leyla is working, *Seçkinler Koleji* (Elite College), and the headmaster's emphasis on how they serve the crème de la crème of Turkey points out that in the ladder of hierarchy, Leyla is above Şirin in terms of institutional capital.¹⁹¹ Even Leyla's obsession with likening Şirin to Balthus' paintings and Şirin's lack of artistic knowledge show that Leyla's cultural capital makes her a class that Şirin cannot reach. Lastly, as a painter herself Leyla can produce objectified cultural capital while Şirin could only be her subject matter. On the other hand, Şirin's relations and network are limited because of *Eski Kent*'s borders. Besides Leyla, the only relations that allow her to go to the other side of the city are with her boss and Mahir, and both exploit and assault her sexually so that she has a right to be in *Yeni Kent* as much as her use value – even for Leyla, she is important because of her use value as a subject matter.

Differently from Leyla's contraction and being closeted even more, Şirin finds herself in the trace of a utopia outside the city. She first sees a sign saying '*Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi*' and decides to visit there though she has never heard of it before. This neighborhood is where the air is clean, without any noise, criminals, and police that neither resemble *Yeni Kent* nor *Eski Kent*. In the chapter with the same name as the neighborhood, it appears that this place exists because its inhabitants decide to exclude themselves from the city and stopped using advanced technology. An older man from the neighborhood even says everything is getting worse outside because of consumerist and capitalist society fueled by technological advancement. All the things Şirin could see in *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* also existed in the city fifty years ago. In the neighborhood, there are no fears and no hate, and it is a place that is open to everyone

¹⁹¹ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 13.

and “[n]obody fears love, being left behind or being cheated on.”¹⁹² Against the heteronormative dystopian world of the city, *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* exists as a queer Utopia, invalidating every oppressive hierarchy that is created within the city and stands as a source of hope as it is described by Kerem, a little boy Şirin meets when first visited the neighborhood. *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* creates a queer Utopia, then, for both Leyla and Şirin, where they can be themselves together without any shame. That way, it becomes an queer space that rejects the normativity of the city and stands as “the rejection of a here and now” of the novel’s near-futuristic Istanbul and opens a “possibility for another world.”¹⁹³ Hence, it concretizes Şirin’s wish at the novel’s beginning when Leyla asks her where she would go if she had a car and Şirin answers: “Burası gibi olmayan bir yerlere.”¹⁹⁴

Here, Lefebvre’s concept of “right to the city” helps to understand further the underlying reasons for Leyla’s seclusion into her apartment and Şirin’s search for a utopia because according to Lefebvre, under the influence of capitalism, traditional cities had to be renewed, and the contradiction between “socialization” and “segregation” must be studied with a utopian attitude to plan cities that meet populations’ needs, including people from all class, gender, and age.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, “[t]he right to the city cannot be conceived as a simple visiting right or a return to the traditional cities. It can only be formulated as transformed and renewed *right to urban life*.”¹⁹⁶ It shows that while Leyla’s reaction to the threat of losing her cultural and social capital because of her queerness was segregation from her familiar environments and class, as a part of the working class, Şirin searches for a utopia outside of the city.

¹⁹² Doğaner, *Leyla*, 147.

¹⁹³ Muñoz, “*Cruising Utopia*,” 25; 1.

¹⁹⁴ Doğaner, *Leyla*, 46; “Somewhere not like here.”

¹⁹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City,” in *The Right to the City*, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: UK: Blackwell, 1996), 147 – 159.

¹⁹⁶ Lefebvre, “The Right,” 158.

Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi offers everyone a right to access and live in the neighborhood, and the fact that they do not aim for progress and exist in a realm outside of the city shows their sole principle is to build a community rather than a city. Therefore, *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi* exists as a utopia outside of Istanbul. In conclusion, the concept of the right to the city shows that the spaces of exclusion do not only depend on segregation based on gender and sexuality, but they are also based on economic, cultural, and social capital. The reason for Leyla and Şirin's relationship fails, then, does not only stem from the heteronormative matrix but the lack of right to urban life and because both of them cannot find common ground where they can exist equally in a capitalist society where every relationship turns into consumption.

Chapter 4:

CONNECTIONS: ADAPTATION, MEDITERRANEAN AND QUEER

While analysis of queer space in *Béla* shows that literature and adaptation could be a tool to protect and preserve queer histories of Istanbul and keep them accessible to imagine current cultural politics that are inclusive and utopian, *Leyla ile Şirin* opens up a discussion of a queer Utopia that is outside of the city, and its spaces of exclusion creating possibilities of transgression that is still controlled within terrestrial boundaries such as Ülker Street. The correct word is *taşra* in Turkish, and here I prefer to use *taşra* instead of saying periphery because, in old Turkish, it means “out of,” to point out the out of the palace and the Ottoman capital.¹⁹⁷ Although the term has long been discussed and is now accepted as a term bearing multiple meanings, such as the *taşra* in the city, Istanbul still exists as the reference point to define something as *taşra* in its Turkish context. Recollecting some of the movies of the last ten years, including Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s movies, Emin Alper’s *Kız Kardeşler* (2019) and *Kurak Günler* (2022), or even Selcen Ergun’s *Kar ve Ayı* (2022) also show that *taşra* has a terrestrial feature that bounds people to the earth, limiting their motion within the boundaries of the periphery, and turning the motif of escape into captivity. However, I do not aim to discuss such terrestrial aspects; instead, I will pursue a Mediterraneanist approach to the *taşra* question that goes beyond the boundaries of the terrestrial. Therefore, as I will draw upon Mehmet Yaşın’s poem *Don’t Go to Kyrenia* and its utopian framework, in this chapter, I aim to show that two film adaptations of Atıf Yılmaz, *Dul Bir Kadın* (1985), and *Düş Gezginleri* (1992), offer a possibility to discuss a utopia as a place imagined in the Mediterranean *taşra* and opens ground for discussing its queer and economic

¹⁹⁷ *Nişanyan Sözlük*, s.v., “Taşra,” last date accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.nisanyansozluk.com/kelime/taşra>.

politics. Through such discussion, I will argue that one of the possible readings of the Mediterranean through queer perspective also reveals its potential to turn into a queer Utopia.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan is one of the most famous directors of this long-debated tension between center and *taşra* – Ceylan is also famous internationally, considering he won the Palme d’Or in 2014 with *Winter Sleep*. Following upon Ceylan’s *taşra* film aesthetic, which heavily depends on long takes of the landscapes of Anatolia, an emphasis on the stagnancy of the geography and its people. These films are also dominated by yellow tones, indicating the earth's dryness and the dullness of *taşra* life. The *aydın* trope finds its latest version with the movie’s lead character, Aydın, as the name denotes the term intellectual. This time, the intellectual appears as someone stuck in *taşra* who lost his voice between the pages of a local newspaper nobody reads. Through the *aydın* trope, the once idealist intellectual who voluntarily goes to *taşra* to educate people, such as *Çalılıkusu*’s Feride teacher or *Yeşil Gece*’s Şahin teacher, evolves into a petit-bourgeoisie stuck in the moorland, devoid of his virility as he notices that he is no different from the *taşra* teacher in the movie.¹⁹⁸ In these movies and novels, it seems *taşra* is never only about itself but also about the individual’s distress. In Turkish, it is called *taşra sıkıntısı*; however, no translation meets the word's exact meaning. It could mean boredom, but it also defines a malaise caused by being stuck. Nurdan Gürbilek defines the stories revolving around *taşra* as stories about the dreams of other worlds and lives, and though the desired object sometimes changes to a big city or love, these worlds are transient, and eventually, they leave the individuals facing their

¹⁹⁸ Müge Günay, “Kış Uykusu: Dilsizleşen Bir Kendine Aydın,” *Birikim Dergisi*, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/566/kis-uykusu-dilsizlesen-bir-kendinde-aydin>.

troubled selves in the mirror and stuckness.¹⁹⁹ More precisely, she uses *taşra sıkıntısı* “to express the experience of being left out, feeling confined, and staying at home or the stories that are experienced as such.”²⁰⁰ To summarize, *taşra* defines introspective distress that is only understood by looking outside of one’s self and meeting the limits of the self.²⁰¹

However, Emin Alper’s recent film *Kurak Günler* (Burning Days), which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, stirred the discussion from a different point of view since it openly constructs the rural town the film sets as an allegory of Turkey’s current political atmosphere. As a prosecutor, Emre moves to a rural town called Yanıklar on the verge of an important lawsuit that could solve the water crisis in the town. After a drunken night, he does not remember what happened and wakes up in his bed; however, as the day goes on, he finds himself in a dilemma: he is either one of the perpetrators who raped a girl called Pekmez or that same night he had sex with a man named Murat who is town’s journalist researching about the water crisis and sink-holes appear around the town. Although *Kurak Günler* follows the path of its predecessors both in literature and cinema, including Nuri Bilge Ceylan, by centering around the conflict between the *aydın* type and the people of the town, the movie brings political thriller to the dull life of *taşra* with a commentary on the current anti-LGBTQIA+ politics of Turkish government. Even the possibility of a homosexual relationship between two male leads caught the Turkish government’s attention, and the Ministry of Culture is now withdrawing the funds long spent on the film’s shooting. However, as it stayed successfully at the box office for 14 weeks, *Kurak Günler* made almost 17

¹⁹⁹ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Taşra Sıkıntısı,” in *Yer Değiştiren Gölge* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1995), pp. 42 – 69; 47.

²⁰⁰ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Taşra Sıkıntısı,” 48.

²⁰¹ Gürbilek, “Taşra,” 42 – 69.

million Turkish liras.²⁰² Its success also stems from the fact that going to the theatre to see the movie and buying tickets was marketed (by its director, actors, and production crew) as an act of activism against censorship and freedom of thought and conscience.

However, I do not aim to discuss queer politics of *Kurak Günler* here. Instead, the title of the category “un certain regard” (a certain look) in which *Kurak Günler* competed in Cannes makes me think about its meaning: What kind of un regard is *Kurak Günler* giving? According to CNC, this selection is designed for “original films and future talents.”²⁰³ In terms of being a *taşra* movie, it does not promise much besides a well-constructed cinematography and sound world, and problematic hints towards a queer relationship between Emre and Murat by putting a rape case at the other end of the equation. Like many others, the film focuses on men who cannot self-actualize. Secondly, the ambiguity in the characters’ queerness revokes a “feeling backward,” that is a term stemming from queer suffering discussed by Heather Love who connects the term with “social seclusion” and “historical impossibility of same-sex desire,” which evokes “dark feelings” such as “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness.”²⁰⁴ I find reading *Kurak Günler* focusing on this valuable concept because the stigmatization of an individual as gay is coded as something shameful throughout the movie and never resolves. As a result seeing that it is not as original as the category might be, I was tempted to historicize queerness in Turkish cinema to see if another framework

²⁰² “Kurak Günler,” Box Office Türkiye, March 31, 2023, <https://boxofficeturkiye.com/film/kurak-gunler--2015951>

²⁰³ “Festival de Cannes : qu’est-ce que la sélection Un Certain Regard ?”, CNC, accessed September 18, 2023, https://www.cnc.fr/cinema/actualites/festival-de-cannes--questce-que-la-selection-un-certain-regard_992973.

²⁰⁴ Heather Love, “Introduction,” in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 1 – 31, 4.

independent from male and *taşra* dominated narratives is possible, especially concerning women's queer desire.

Before diving deep into the analysis of Atıf Yılmaz's movies, a map showing the relationship between adaptation and the Mediterranean logic of time and space is needed to comprehend the framework of Mediterranean space in both movies. Linda Hutcheon's description of adaptation helps to connect adaptation to queer spatiality in my analysis thanks to its emphasis on intertextuality: "Adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation."²⁰⁵ This quotation needs deciphering to understand better what kind of a palimpsest structure an adaptation serves. Hutcheon does not only refer to adaptation as an intended process of deriving a related yet autonomous work from a text produced first but also the receiver's recollection of other texts when deliberately using the word palimpsest. Hutcheon's idea of adaptation as palimpsest also includes a direct connection with hybridity.²⁰⁶ As the texts travel around the world across time, space, and different media, they give birth to hybrid bodies.²⁰⁷ Both of Yılmaz's film adaptations embodies the ruins of their source material, including character names that stayed the same. In *Dul Bir Kadın*, the beginning point of the story is the same: a widowed young woman, Suna, is forced to choose between her young lover Engin (in the play, his name is Ergun) and a marriage with a wealthy and older man that is accepted by society. In *Düş Gezginleri*, from the ending of Osman Çallı's short story with the same name, Havva and Nilgün's relationship starts. Besides textual ruins, Mediterranean space is adapted into these

²⁰⁵ Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning to Theorize Adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?" in *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-33, 8.

²⁰⁶ Hutcheon, "Beginning," 1-33.

²⁰⁷ Linda Hutcheon, "Where? When? (Contexts)" in *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 141-169, 150.

movies as a place enabling nonconforming desires to arise. Suna starts her romance with Engin in Bodrum, and Bergama motivates Nilgün and Havva to imagine a future together. Consequently, adaptation theory underlines the importance of connectivity among texts, while adaptation also refers to the process of adapting.

One of the most discussed problems in adaptation theory is its legitimacy compared to the original texts. Hutcheon defends that the success of an adaptation depends on the adapter's ability to create an autonomous work derived from the source material, hence, emphasized creativity.²⁰⁸ Moreover, John Bryant asserts that for adaptation to gain its dignity as opposed to the fidelity discourse, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of adaptation called "the fluid-text approach," including all its forms incorporating different readings and revisions.²⁰⁹ Such perspective is also in parallel to "considering adaptation as a process of forming *connections*," which Regina Schober refers to as a "transmedial approach", and she "prose[s] a view of intermediality that emphasizes the dynamic, reciprocal and relational nature of media adaptations."²¹⁰ Adaptation's palimpsestic, hybrid, and fluid texture puts forward the analysis of different mediums in the adaptation process, such as spatiality and its influence on the text itself. Even focusing only on the space's perpetuation or alteration reveals further potential for studying adaptation. In addition to the prospective contributions of an all-embracing methodology of adaptation, transmediality also creates new pathways for adaptation to connect with queer and Mediterranean studies.

²⁰⁸ Linda Hutcheon claims that the success of an adaptation depends on the adapter's ability to create an autonomous work derived from the source material in Chapter I, page 20.

²⁰⁹ John Bryant, "Textual Identity and Adaptive Revision: Editing Adaptation as a Fluid Text," in *Adaptation Studies New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 47-69, 47-48.

²¹⁰ Regina Schober, "Adaptation as Connection – Transmediality Reconsidered," in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 89-113, 91.

In the previous paragraph, I especially emphasize the concept of palimpsest and hybridity since they are adaptation's nexus to the Mediterranean. In parallel to the recent studies on adaptation theory, the critical Mediterranean studies underline the importance of connectivity. While Armondo Gnisci announces that his proposition of the Mediterranean as an "interliterary network" benefits from Fernand Braudel's perspective seeing it as a palimpsest, it also centers around the sea like a "net" that depicts the Mediterranean as "a hybrid meeting place, a receptacle of affinities and contrasts in which the net of exchanges has produced a long-lasting multiform experience of inextricable fusions and of differences that have remained intact."²¹¹ Such formation of the Mediterranean inevitably reflects upon the land itself since the ruins of civilizations keep adding on top of each other as the cities re-emerge. Like Gnisci's theorization, John Watkins emphasizes that the Mediterranean is a prototype of what we call globalism today which does not reduce any value from the importance of regional specificity as the region becomes an environment for interconnectivity.²¹²

When discussing the formation of the Mediterranean, one should also consider the colonial past of the region. Although thinking Mediterranean as a source of interconnectivity opens new discussions in globalism studies, Claudio Fogu points out the imperial past of the region, while reminding us that the term itself is a modern construct, and to diffuse what he calls the "spider-web model" in which the Roman past is the focal point, Fogu proposes "the fishnet matrix of Mediterranean connectivity" that sees the sea and its region as multidimensional consisting of different centers rather than

²¹¹ Armando Gnisci, "The Mediterranean as Interliterary Network" in *Mediterranean Reconsidered: Representations, Emergences, Recompositions*, ed. Mauro Peressini and Ratiba Hadj-Moussa (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), pp. 261-267, 264. muse.jhu.edu/book/65465.

²¹² John Watkins, "The New Mediterranean Studies: A Mediator between Area Studies and Global Studies," *Mediterranean Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 149–54. <https://doi.org/10.5325/mediterraneanstu.21.2.0149>.

just one.²¹³ The key terms of the discipline, such as interconnectivity, hybridity, and fishnet matrix bear the need to find a way to implement them into the field of literature. For that reason, Sharon Kinoshita advocates that studying Mediterranean literature should free the field from the domination of national literatures focusing on homogeneity in terms of cultures and languages of the region; instead, she draws upon the importance of cross-reading, multilingualism, and connectivity.²¹⁴

Such formation almost seems inherent to the discipline of the Mediterranean; however, it is only until Edwige Tamalet Talbayev talks about transcontinentalism to dismantle the colonial remnants in the Mediterranean mindset while emphasizing the fluidity of the Mediterranean in the sense that it has the potential to diffuse the national borders and asserting that focusing on the locality paves the way for the mobility between the local and the global.²¹⁵ That way, a Mediterraneanist perspective requires cross reading a local space to make its connections more visible to history, the past, and the global. I argue that the Mediterranean, in the sense that it is hybrid, fluid, and palimpsestic, shows similarities with adaptation studies. The connections between the Mediterranean and adaptation demand contemplation about how to deal with Mediterranean space when used in adaptations. I already discussed that Mediterranean space is also palimpsestic. Therefore, it is intertextual. The term Mediterranean can connote its different attributes, such as its sea, islands, civilizations, and the narratives historically constructed around the region. For instance, in correspondence to

²¹³ Claudio Fogu, "We Have Made the Mediterranean; Now We Must Make Mediterraneans," in *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis*, ed. Yasser Elhariry, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 181-197, 194.

²¹⁴ Sharon Kinoshita, "Mediterranean Literature," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, edited by Peregrine Horden and Sharon Kinoshita (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 314-329. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118519356>.

²¹⁵ Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, "Introduction," in *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 1-36, 18. muse.jhu.edu/book/52299.

homosexual writing, Robert Aldrich mentions that the Mediterranean divides Northern and Southern Europe as the young male body of the Southern European (or in other words, Mediterranean) mainly embodies the meanings of ambiguity, transgression, and seduction for the older subject of Northern Europe who holds the position of power since he can regulate the economic and cultural capital.²¹⁶ From such a point of view, the Mediterranean becomes the object of artistic creation. At the same time, it also signifies a homosexual fascination of the Northern Europeans through a colonialist perspective seeing that the South becomes a place for him to actualize his desires, usually received as deviant or perverted in the West.²¹⁷

On the other hand, Fernand Braudel brings a new conception of time via Mediterranean modernism, and it helps to comprehend the subconscious of history, which event-based understanding of history falls short of comprehending.²¹⁸ However, that kind of longevity indicates a sense of unchanging while it creates a possibility of reading the Mediterranean as a land of backwardness.²¹⁹ What Aldrich problematizes in Northern narratives around the Mediterranean, such as *Death in Venice*, is the same idea of Mediterranean backwardness saying that as long as the Mediterranean stays backward as a reference point of antiquity and homosexuality of Ancient Greece and Rome it becomes the land of desires for the Western subject.²²⁰ As opposed to the male-centered and Euro-centric framework imposed upon the Mediterranean, it can also symbolize femininity, lesbian desire, and sapphic relationships. Elaine Marks' famous

²¹⁶ Robert Aldrich, "The Introduction: The Mediterranean obsession," in *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, art and homosexual fantasy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203160053>

²¹⁷ Aldrich, "Introduction," 11.

²¹⁸ Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," in *On History* trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1980), 25-54.

²¹⁹ Alexis Wick, "Thalassomania," in *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space* (California: University of California Press 2016), 155-185.

²²⁰ In the book Aldrich also dates the homosexualities of the region back to Ancient Greece and Rome.

article “Lesbian Intertextuality” presents a valuable framework for finding such representation while claiming that a fragmented tradition has been created around the name of Sappho concerning lesbian narratives, and adding: “Sappho and her island Lesbos are omnipresent in the literature about women loving women, whatever the gender or sexual preference of the writer and whether or not Sappho and her island are explicitly named.”²²¹ She even describes the “conglomerate elements” of this fragmented tradition as “islands, beach, the sea, the color violet, strong female bodies, uniquely female names.”²²² Here, if the aim is an intertextual analysis regarding lesbian narratives, the spatiality, and imagery of bodies are inseparable in the Mediterranean context. Due to the diverse meanings Mediterranean space connotes, an intertextual reading is necessary when dealing with adaptations that use the Mediterranean as a setting.

Under the influence of such framework discussed above, to define the place of the Mediterranean within the tension between *taşra* and the center as Istanbul, first, I need to define what *taşra* is and differentiate it from the Mediterranean space. Scholars of Turkish literature and cinema have long discussed the problems of the dichotomy between a monolithic description of *taşra* and the center. Although Istanbul as a center socio-politically and demographically changed over the years, Evren Özselçuk defines *taşra* as “a domain to be developed and regulated,” just like “people of the *taşra* were to be educated, refined and brought into maturity/ modernity as citizens of a modern state.”²²³ As Özselçuk defends the importance of historical shifts and politics while

²²¹ Elaine Marks, “Lesbian Intertextuality,” in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts, Critical Texts* ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1979), 356.

²²² Marks, “Lesbian Intertextuality,” 376.

²²³ Evren Özselçuk, “Turkey’s Internal Other: Embodiments of *Taşra* in the Works of Orhan Pamuk, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and Fatih Akın” (PhD diss., York University, 2015), 15.
<https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/30622?show=full>

defining *taşra*, he also claims that these definitions are fluid and changeable and the dichotomy of the center and *taşra* must be taken as relational.²²⁴ Such relational formation demarcates the center as the source of modernization, and *taşra* becomes an implication of “the unadulterated native self,” which opposes modernity.²²⁵ It means that *taşra* cannot be defined only based on its geographical attributes being far away from the center.

For instance, Istanbul can bear its own *taşra* within its geographical limitations. One of the most well-rounded characterizations of *taşra* comes from Nurdan Gürbilek as a form of “exclusion, contraction, and experience of staying at home.”²²⁶ These approaches to the *taşra* problem show that there could be different manifestations of *taşra*. However, it has to be a form of narrowing down and segregation, whether in terms of geography or individual experience. These points are also where *taşra* separates from the Mediterranean. Although in both movies that I will focus on in this chapter the Mediterranean embraces many of the attributes of *taşra* as a place outside of the center, both Bodrum in *Dul Bir Kadın* and Bergama in *Düş Gezginleri* expands the meaning of the space and the relations of the characters with themselves since they are inherently intertextual places in the Mediterranean. Though the use of the Mediterranean space resembles *taşra* in its formation as a place outside of Istanbul, the primary differentiation happens in the moments of Mediterranean effect, expanding any monolithic meaning with its intertextuality, hybridity, and fluidity. As a result, the Mediterranean has the potential to expand a text across time and space with its connectivity and intertextuality.

²²⁴ Özselçuk, “Turkey’s Internal Other,” 16.

²²⁵ Özselçuk, “Turkey’s Internal Other,” 24.

²²⁶ Nurdan Gürbilek, “Taşra Sıkıntısı,” in *Yer Değiştiren Gölge* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1995), pp. 42-69, 46.

Reading the Mediterranean as a queer space also problematizes the peripheral positioning of the Mediterranean by the Western gaze. However, what I propose here moves beyond the limitations of representation politics. I refer not only to “the *formation* of homosexualities” but also queer as “the *deformative* and *misappropriate* power,” as Judith Butler suggests.²²⁷ That is to say, the term queer resists any normativity and fixation. Instead, it stands as a fluid term that depending on the context that could embody overlapping or confronting meanings. Such a definition is akin to the hybridity and fluidity of the Mediterranean. Even the Sappho myth and lesbian intertextuality become queering devices beyond lesbian representation since they can make non-normative readings possible. Reading the subversion, created through Mediterranean intertextuality alongside queer (in this context, it subverts the established sexual norms of modernity), opens a new door for the discipline. That way, the Mediterranean finds an opportunity to exist and circulate as a queer space, defying any fixation on the definition of the Mediterranean itself.

Deciphering the Mediterranean's spatial and temporal logics together helps to understand what makes it a queer space by showing the discrepancies of heteronormativity. Jack Halberstam describes queer space as a tool to liberate “queerness from an essential definition of homosexual embodiment,” that “refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage, and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.”²²⁸ Harking back to Aldrich’s problematization of the Mediterranean, which was constructed as a perverse place, seeing the Mediterranean as a queer space

²²⁷ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 223-242, 229.

²²⁸ Halberstam, “Queer,” 17-18.

gives an agency and the power to transgress the norms of Western modernity.²²⁹ Nancy Fraser presents the term “subaltern counterpublics” to imagine a more inclusive and egalitarian public sphere, and it points out to “women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians” that find their voice outside of the dominant public sphere.²³⁰ One of the texts that make such a reading possible is Mehmet Yaşın’s *Don’t Go to Kyrenia*, which represents the Mediterranean as a queer place beyond the boundaries of essentialist perspective that bounds it to homosexualities through raising voice for queer desires of the Mediterranean, then, Mehmet Yaşın uses poetry to create a queer counterpublic. Bringing Yaşın’s poetry into discussion expands the timeline of this thesis from Ancient Greece to more contemporary. It also shifts the locality from Lesbos to Kyrenia. Here, I will maintain a frame concerning Claudio Fogu’s fishnet imagery that emphasizes the circulation of specific texts and themes.²³¹ By using an analysis of Yaşın’s poetry, then, this thesis would be traveling along different port cities of the Mediterranean, including Lesbos Island, Bodrum, İzmir, and finally, Kyrenia.

Scholarly work on Mehmet Yaşın’s poetry mainly emphasizes the existence of timeless and borderless space. Angelos Evangelou discusses that after Cyprus’ partition, borders inflicted by both Greek and Turkish sides created “a buffer zone” that is also “a dead zone,” creating a third space between the borders of the two sides, as well as within the borders of the island.²³² Evangelou claims that this third space reflects upon Cypriot poetry after the partition, creating a poetics of a “neutral and liminal space” that

²²⁹ Aldrich, “The Introduction,” 1-13.

²³⁰ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* no. 25/26 (1990): 67.

²³¹ Claudio Fogu, “We Have Made Mediterranean; Now We Must Make Mediterraneans,” in *Critically Mediterranean* ed. yasser elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 181-199.

²³² Angelos Evangelou, “Peace-Making within the Green and Liminal Borders of Cyprus,” *Poligrafi* no. 21 vol. 83/84 (2016): 115-117.

“is devoid of either side’s [...] territorial and national(istic) discourses.”²³³ By examining colonial and postcolonial Cyprus through literature, Daniele Nunziata claims that contemporary Cypriot authors and poets, including Mehmet Yaşın, use such a third place to speak back against the borders through “cultivating literary territory to challenge the Buffer Zone,” that is a “timeless home [...] deconstructing the hegemonic colonialism and nationalisms used to build the ideology of partition.”²³⁴ The emphasis on the concept of timelessness can be seen in Mehmet Yaşın’s poem *Don’t Go to Kyrenia* as the tenses of the stanzas change throughout the poem. First, it starts with the simple past tense referring to the island’s colonial history written by the dominant public sphere, which results in partition, such as the lines saying, “It was the same boat that docked, you thought the sail was satin, it was shroud.”²³⁵ At the end of the second stanza, these boats become the carriers of plague and poison: “and those who drank from them poisoned, but if they didn’t drink, they’d die of the plague.” The boats coming to the island from outside are the colonial boats carrying plague and disease from Europe. With boats not only poison and plague come to the island, but also war because in the same line war is mentioned for the first time in poem with the line, “and if they didn’t die, they’d go to war.” Later in the fifth stanza, the boats turn into planes bombing the island, connoting partition, and Turkish invasion, saying: “She will still be bombed by planes.” In these lines, while simple past tense refers to the island’s colonial history, it also shows progress toward war because war only breeds war. After all, the

²³³ Evangelou, “Peace,” 120-121.

²³⁴ Daniele Nunziata, “Travelling Across the Buffer Zone: Intersections in Language, Genre, and Identity, 2000 – 2013” in *Colonial and Postcolonial Cyprus* (Oxford, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 195-196.

²³⁵ Mehmet Yaşın, “Don’t Go to Kyrenia,” trans. Taner Baybars, Poetry Magazines - Don’t go to Kyrenia, accessed October 6, 2023, <http://poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record051-2.html?id=13088>.

path starts using simple past tense and ends with a future prediction: “There’ll soon be a war, anyway.”

Towards the end of the poem, *dansevi* (discotheque) offers the timeless and neutral space that Evangelou and Nunziata talk about, but differently from what these critiques said, the discotheque also exists as a queer Utopia that turns Yaşın’s poem into a counterpublic deconstructing the colonial and postcolonial history of the island full of wars. It offers a sense of immortality as it continues to swerve through the last lines, saying: “the lights at the discotheque, let them daze / there’ll soon be a war, anyway, let the lights daze, daze...” The upcoming threat of war is deliberately rejected and letting the lights at the discotheque daze is a way of imagining a space not marked by war. The discotheque, then, creates an alternative Kyrenia unbounded by timelessness. The poem builds a queer space line by line through the sixth stanza rather than the island’s history. First, it starts with the soldiers coming to the island for war and turns them into strip dancers as it says: “If we’ll strip down to soldiers in the Fort,” and *Akdeniz* turns into *Aşkdeniz* [Loveterranean] with these lines “around the Loveterranean, our sea.” In her book on queer club culture and its politics, Fiona Buckland asserts that different elements of the club as a place situated outside of the heteronormative world, claiming bodies in such environment as independent through continuous music and rhythm; the club becomes a device for “autonomous invention.”²³⁶ She also states: “Every time I walk into a club, I feel a vivid confusion. It’s like entering a city in an unknown country. The elements are the same as every other city [...], but the rules that act as interface between me and my environment are unknown.”²³⁷ Yaşın’s discotheque is also an imagined ‘unknown country’ in Kyrenia, and the interface between the reader and

²³⁶ Fiona Buckland, “Slaves to the Rhythm? Using Music, Space, Dance and the Ideas of the Body,” in *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002) pp. 36-65, 63.

²³⁷ Buckland, “Slaves,” 66.

dansevi is outside of the straight passing of time that flows through the threat of war as “we dance in the submarine-caves” against the threat of war, inventing itself autonomous from war.

The use of *dansevi* not only becomes a space for queer world-making but by defying the boundaries of straight time that only projects war for Kyrenia, the third space becomes a queer Utopia. The poem’s temporal ambiguity is marked by changing sentence tenses and if clauses manifest as a queer Utopia in the poem’s spatiality: “If we light a fire and dance, if we dance in the submarine-caves with LSD and videos and revolvers, we’ll dance,” Soldiers’ bodies, submarines, and revolvers turn into features of the discotheque under the influence of drug LSD. Muñoz discusses the influence of drugs in imagining a queer Utopia unbound by straight time: “Drugs are a surplus that pushes one off course, no longer able to contribute labor power at the proper,” and adds, “surplus [...] distorts [as] a stuttering particularity that shoves ones off course, out of straight time.”²³⁸ Therefore, here in the poem, LSD is the key to breaking the wheel of time progressing through war because the drug’s hallucinogenic effects make imagining a queer Utopia possible as the warzone turns into a club. In parallel to Muñoz’s assessment, João Florêncio claims that “Attending to queer nightlife as an important site of queer world-making is also a way of attending to queer history differently, by centering bodies and pleasures and the role these play [...] in the much-needed enfleshing of queer critique and historiography.”²³⁹ Poem’s construction of the ‘straight time,’ then, refers to wartime, so, by rejecting it with the lines, stating, “there’ll soon be a war, anyway, let the lights daze, daze...” Yaşın’s poem emphasizes the imagined

²³⁸ Muñoz, “A Jete Out the Window: Fred Herkos Incandescent Illumination,” in *Cruising Utopia*, 154-155.

²³⁹ João Florêncio, “Drugs, Techno and the Ecstasy of Queer Bodies,” *The Sociological Review* 71, no. 4 (2023): 861–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261231174970>, 862.

queer Utopia, and the consciousness of a war coming is still there. However, discotheque exists in a timeless realm outside of futurity, leading to war. Here, the poem's futurity finds its correspondence in the politics of queer Utopia because imagining of an endless discotheque refers to: "the rejection of a here and now and instance of potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."²⁴⁰

Deciphering how Yaşın's poem formulates such utopia also helps to understand other utopian reflections on the Mediterranean because, through the fishnet matrix of the sea, queer imagination finds an opportunity to travel across borders – making it possible to read Atıf Yılmaz's two film adaptations through a similar perspective. Therefore, seeing how the poem imagines a queer Utopia in Kyrenia at the end is crucial. It is only possible through a distinct combination: first, the reciting of the past as an act of recalling an old song at the beginning of the poem within the line 'Don't go to Kyrenia,' they said," later turning it into a wishful future projection with the use of if clauses in: "If we light a fire and dance," or "if we dance in the submarine-caves[.]" Here, the act of dancing and the imagination of dancing bodies under the ecstasy of LSD makes such imagination possible, and these bodies dance unbounded by the normative matrix of war's temporal and spatial logic. In the next part of this thesis, I will discuss the possibilities of such queer Utopia in Atıf Yılmaz's film adaptations *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezginleri*.

4.1 Queer and Mediterranean: *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezginleri*

Following up on how Mehmet Yaşın's poem *Don't Go to Kyrenia* makes it possible to imagine a queer Utopia in the Mediterranean, in this section, I will elaborate on Atıf Yılmaz's use of Mediterranean space in both *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezginleri*. *Dul*

²⁴⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: "The Then and There of Queer Futurity,"* (NY: New York University Press, 2019), 1.

Bir Kadın, shot in 1985, is a film adaptation of Necati Cumalı's theatre play *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan*. The protagonist, Suna, is a widowed woman whose husband was a businessman 25 years older than her. Although she gets marriage proposals from wealthy friends of her late husband, she falls in love with a young and broke photographer, Engin. They go on a vacation in Bodrum and eventually start living together. However, Engin cheats on Suna with her closest friend, Ayla. Both women leave him after that. The movie ends with a scene where they play with Suna's daughter, İnci, throwing imaginary kisses at each other and running in a park.

Düş Gezginleri, on the other hand, is adapted from Osman Çallı's short story of the same name in 1992, centering around a lesbian relationship between Nilgün and Havva. Nilgün, a young gynecologist who is also recently divorced, moves to a village in İzmir to work. Since she is a woman, they assign her to examine the sex workers in the nearby brothel. There, she reunites with her lost childhood friend Havva, who changed her name to Anjelik. Nilgün wants to save Havva from prostitution, so they live together and eventually become lovers. The villagers do not accept them, and they return to İstanbul with a dream of building a life together. Nilgün opens a clinic with the help of a wealthy doctor who wants to marry her. Havva gives all her saved-up money to build a home with Nilgün, but after Nilgün cheats her with that doctor in their home, Havva leaves her, and the movie ends with Havva walking away in the night to work on the streets. There is a connection between the two films beyond the director's personality. As Bodrum becomes a critical space for *Dul Bur Kadın* and Bergama for *Düş Gezginleri*, both movies find themselves in relation to each other by the string of Mediterranean connectivity.

Many film critics, such as Giovanni Scognamillo and Metin Demirhan, see Atıf Yılmaz almost as a savior figure who saves female characters of Turkish cinema from

being two-dimensional and passive characters by giving them agency because his directorship openly explores eroticism and different sexualities including lesbianism – which also connects *Düş Gezginleri* and *Dul Bir Kadın* as they are received as movies revolving around lesbian relationships.²⁴¹ For instance, in one of the most comprehensive studies on Turkish cinema and eroticism, Scognamillo and Demirhan clearly define eroticism: “Eroticism is an event of pleasure and measurement because of its imagery and philosophy. Eroticism is neither a show of nudity nor a display and exaggeration of a naked body independent from its circumstances, and often it does not like to be anonymous.”²⁴² What is curious about this definition is how Scognamillo and Demirhan use it to differentiate movies of Atıf Yılmaz and Halit Refiğ from populist sex films. They describe real eroticism as a scene shot with artfulness and women characters with personalities rather than showing them some typical figure only to arouse sexual pleasure.²⁴³ They discuss eroticism in Yılmaz’s movies under the chapter titled “Artık Kadının Adı Var, (Now the Woman Has a Name),” and it is an homage to another movie of Yılmaz, *Kadının Adı Yok* (Women Has No Name), which he adapted from Duygu Asena’s book with the same title. Even their title choice shows that these critics write historiography where Yılmaz (among a few other male directors) is seen as a source of female agency in Turkish cinema. However, Yılmaz’s specific mode of looking emphasized by film critics must be scrutinized and clearly defined rather than being accepted without any interrogation to see what kind of female agency is constructed through the male gaze of directors and historians of Turkish Cinema.

Therefore, the following paragraphs will first focus on how lesbianism in Atıf Yılmaz’s movies is seen by the historiography of Turkish cinema to deconstruct such a

²⁴¹ Giovanni Scognamillo and Metin Demirhan, “Artık Kadının Adı Var,” in *Erotik Türk Sineması* (Istanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2002).

²⁴² Scognamillo and Metin Demirhan, “Artık Kadının Adı Var,” 107.

²⁴³ “Artık Kadının Adı Var,” 107 – 108.

framework through a queer perspective. *Dul Bir Kadın* is one of the movies that is pointed out as one of the early versions of implicit lesbianism in Turkish cinema. For instance, Agah Özgüç defines the relationship between two female leads of the movie Suna and Ayla as “platonic lesbianism which is present in every woman’s nature,” and he adds that the reason for such an analysis is first the scene where three main characters of the movie swim naked, and the camera focuses on their bodies while implying a possibility of an orgy under water; and second, the scene where Suna and Ayla wake up naked in the same bed.²⁴⁴ Besides focusing on the implicit meanings of these scenes in order to categorize *Dul Bir Kadın* as a movie revolving around lesbianism, Özgüç also generalizes by assuming every woman has a capacity for platonic lesbianism. He asserts that although the scene showing these women waking up naked in the same bed made people question what happened between them, he trivializes the question by saying that the lesbian relationship never turns into action, as the viewer never sees an instance where the film openly shows lesbian sex.²⁴⁵

Then, I ask: What exactly makes this scene so erotic? There is a need for a detailed description of the scene to answer that question. Suna and Ayla go to Bodrum for a vacation, where Suna starts a romantic relationship with Engin. Eventually, she moves in with him for the rest of the summer. Not only for Suna and Ayla but also for their upper-class acquaintances, Bodrum appears as a popular summer resort. After seeing her married ex-boyfriend and boss vacationing with another woman from work, Ayla moves in with Engin and Suna as she cannot bear being alone. After a night of fighting with her lover Ergun, Suna goes to Ayla’s room to cry on her shoulder. The following scene shows two women waking up next to each other, half-naked, as Engin comes up

²⁴⁴ Agâh Özgüç, “Sosyal İçerikli Erotik Filmler,” in *Türk Sinemasında Cinselliğin Tarihi* (İstanbul: +1 Kitap, 2006), 210.

²⁴⁵ Özgüç, “Sosyal İçerikli Erotik Filmler,” 212.

to the room in the morning. The audience sees them not as naked but as half-exposed under the white sheets. Ergun immediately holds her camera and starts photographing them since this imagery excites and inspires him as a photographer. The camera's point of view later fixates on Engin's camera's focal point. As a result, in this scene, lesbian sexuality only appears as a male phantasy of Engin.

In her germinal work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey presents an approach that could help decode the eroticism of specifically these scenes of *Dul Bir Kadın*.²⁴⁶ According to Mulvey, one of the pleasures that cinema presents to the audience is looking (scopophilia), especially peeping regarding the female body.²⁴⁷ While mainly focusing on Hollywood cinema and its male auteurs, Mulvey asserts that the camera's point of view often serves the male audience's gaze. Under such representation, as she continues to discuss, the female body becomes a bearer of the male phantasies and embodies a role of passiveness.²⁴⁸ Consequently, in their article on the representation of women in Atıf Yılmaz's movie, İrfan Hıdıroğlu and Semra Kotan interpret the scene as a way of showing the female body as an object of pleasure since the gaze of the director, male audience and both director's camera and Engin's camera coincides.²⁴⁹ The female body and the possibility of lesbian sex become an object of desire to attract the male audience's sexual arousal because of such identification. While analyzing the movie, all these critics mentioned above do two things simultaneously. First, they isolate these two scenes from the totality of the film. Second, they discuss them in relation to each other. That way, the possibility of lesbian sex only serves

²⁴⁶ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.806>

²⁴⁷ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 6–18.

²⁴⁸ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 6–18.

²⁴⁹ İrfan Hıdıroğlu and Semra Kotan, "Sinemada Eril Söylem ve Atıf Yılmaz Filmlerinde Kadın Sorunu," *Atatürk İletişim Dergisi*, no. 9 (July 9, 2015): 61, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/397730>

Engin's pleasure. As a result, the male gaze becomes perpetuated through the aim of criticism, and the analyses of the movie are limited within the heteropatriarchal mode of thinking.

To resist such limitation and subvert that heteropatriarchal framework, I suggest returning to the scenes where Mediterranean space links *Dul Bir Kadın* into lesbian intertextuality and searching for an approach contemplating the possibility of sapphism independently from the character Engin. Hence, an intertextual analysis and a comparative reading between *Dul Bir Kadın* and the Sappho myth as a lesbian narrative is needed. Interestingly, Özgüç also harks back to Sappho in his book *Türk Sinemasında Cinselliğin Tarihi* and questions whether lesbianism is something normal or pervert and says lesbianism historically dates back before Sappho, although she appears as a symbol for lesbianism; in other words, sapphism.²⁵⁰ The keywords that Marks' use of lesbian intertextuality, including "islands, beach, the sea, the color violet, strong female bodies, uniquely female names," offer a methodology to discuss an expanded body of texts that circulates globally and nationally, including *Dul Bir Kadın*.²⁵¹ Thus, positioning two female leads of the movie not concerning the male love interest, but especially Bodrum as a place of effect reveals the queer elements of the movie better. That positioning requires seeing Bodrum as a queer place where the Sappho myth circulates with the city through the integration of female bodies with their environment.

The use of Bodrum has a similar meaning in correspondence to the concept of queer Utopia, also connecting the movie to lesbian intertextuality. Bodrum, or Halicarnassus in its ancient name, is well-known as a summer resort both for people living in Turkey and for international tourists; however, in the last ten years, Bodrum has also become a

²⁵⁰ Özgüç, "Türk Sinemasında Lezbiyen İlişkiler," 175.

²⁵¹ Marks, "Lesbian," 376.

stop for refugees running away with the hopes of sailing to Europe, most specifically to Greece.²⁵² In *Dul Bir Kadın*, it is also a liminal space where especially wealthy people go for vacation; in Suna's situation, that liminal space also changes the protagonist. Today, when entering Bodrum, there is a table with a quote belonging to Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı, also known as the fisher of Halicarnassus, stating: "Merhaba! Yokuşbaşı'na geldiğinde Bodrum'u göreceksin, sanma ki sen geldiğin gibi gideceksin. Senden öncekiler de hep böyleydiler, akıllarını hep Bodrum'da bırakıp gittiler."²⁵³ This quote emphasizes that although Bodrum is seen as a liminal space, what makes it liminal is the human factor because Bodrum stays within the same geographical boundaries, but people come and go. Bodrum also has a capacity to change its visitors.

A similar experience is seen in Suna and Ayla's first night in Bodrum. When they first go to Bodrum, they dine together at the seaside. After Ayla suggests clubbing, Suna questions whether it is appropriate for two women to go out at night on their own. Ayla answers while giving a toast: "Burası Bodrum, kızım! Hadi, her şeyi unutmaya!"²⁵⁴ At that moment, Bodrum, for both women, appears as a place of leaving the norms of their lonely lives in the city. That toast almost becomes permission for them to explore their sexual awakenings. Even without Ergun's presence in the scene, the two women make a pact to allow themselves to be affected by desire and lust because a lot happens at the same time. Suna not only accepts going to the club, but at the beach in the darkness, Engin kisses Suna, and they leave the club together. It appears that a similar relief to Kabaağaçlı happens to Suna. She relieves the norms dictated by society, and an excess

²⁵² Ceylan Yeginsu and Anemona Hartocollis, "Amid Perilous Mediterranean Crossings, Migrants Find a Relatively Easy Path to Greece," The New York Times, August 16, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/world/europe/turkey-greece-mediterranean-kos-bodrum-migrants-refugees.html>.

²⁵³ Ntv, "'Halikarnas Balıkçısı' Bodrum'da Yaşatılıyor," ntv.com.tr, April 16, 2017, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/sanat/halikarnas-balikcisi-bodrumda-yasatiliyor.qUFyNWODLEqgzptQYWMxPw>.

²⁵⁴ "Girl, this is Bodrum! Come on, forget everything!"

of desire appears at that beach. These instances also connect the movie to the spatial aspect of lesbian intertextuality because the sea and the beach appear as places evoking an excess of desire, motivating Suna to act beyond what she sees as normative.

Similarly, when they first arrive at Bodrum, Ayla tells Suna, "Gerçekten afrodizyak bir yer burası. [...] Bodrum cinsel güduları, cinsel istekleri arttırıyor derler."²⁵⁵ Through the movie's end, after the famous bed scene I discussed above, Ergun photographs Ayla and Suna around Bodrum, among the ruins of antiquity. Just like Elaine Marks points out, the imagery of the island, beach, the color violet, and female bodies subconsciously evoke the fragments of Sappho myth in the movie; we see them pose for Ergun according to that framework. Both even wear the same violet dress in turn while posing for Ergun. (Figure 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)



Figure 4.1: 00: 31: 12

²⁵⁵ "Dul Bir Kadın," Video, 31: 12, YouTube, posted by Film Atölyesi, July 22, 2022, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL4Hd2b9fT8&t=1791s>; "This place really gives an aphrodisiac effect. Bodrum is, said to increase, sexual drives and desires."



Figure 4.2: 01:02:06



Figure 4.3: 01:02: 25



Figure 4.4: 01: 02: 31

Therefore, I propose that although there is no explicit scene confirming the speculation about Suna's and Ayla's so-called lesbian relationship, the queering aspect of the movie appears through the character's relation to the Mediterranean space. The imagery of the sea and the beach become an excess of desire that is non-normative, especially in the dinner scene, club scene, and later when Suna, Engin, and Ayla swim together, naked, and the camera dives under the sea showing their legs intermingled together – Özgüç reads that scene as an orgy scene.²⁵⁶ (Figure 4.5) Ayla's sentence stating: "Burası Bodrum, kızım!" explains that Bodrum as a liminal space affects these characters in a way that they feel free from the norms that they usually feel they have to conform to because both geographically, this place far away from their city life but also the ecstasy stemming from the view of Bodrum's beaches and the Mediterranean just as in Kabağaçlı's description blur the boundaries, and for Suna a relationship with a young artist becomes a possibility. (Figure 4.6)



Figure 4.5: 00:42:10

Differently from other film critics, I suggest that the Mediterranean creates a space of freedom as a bearer of different meanings and fluidity in identities, making imagining

²⁵⁶ Agâh Özgüç, "Sosyal İçerikli Erotik Filmler," in *Türk Sinemasında Cinselliğin Tarihi* (İstanbul: +1 Kitap, 2006), 210.

life and family together possible for both Suna and Ayla. Robert Preston-Whyte emphasizes the liminal aspect of beaches and claims that: “As a cultural space [the beach] is a borderland that allows both difference and hybridity [...] reveal[ing] [...] spaces of heightened sensibilities that are temporary, personal, and elusive.”²⁵⁷ Indeed, the temporality of beaches offers freedom for Suna, where she can discover her sexual desires. There is even a scene implicating Suna and Engin having sex at the beach, as Ayla sees them lying almost naked in the bushes. Bodrum and its beaches become liminal spaces that awaken forbidden desires that Suna would not explore living in the city.



Figure 4.6: 00:34: 36

Besides subtle changes in some characters' names, such as Ergun becoming Engin, there are two significant differences between Necati Cumalı's theatre play *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan* and Yılmaz's movie adaptation. First, the play is only set in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, and there is no mention of Bodrum. Between the second and third acts, there is only a mention of a summer vacation that Suna and Ergun go on together. When one of the characters asks Suna where she has been, she answers: “Ege

²⁵⁷ Robert Preston-Whyte, “The Beach as a Liminal Space,” in *A Companion to Tourism* ed. Alan A. Lew, C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004), 349.

kıyılarındaydık. Ayvalık, Foça, biraz Urla, biraz Çeşme, Kuşadası.”²⁵⁸ Of course, shooting a movie in all these places requires more budget, and that could have influenced Yılmaz’s choice of a single place for the vacation scenes; however, in the play, that vacation does not have importance because Ergun and Suna’s relationship starts before they leave Ankara. In the movie, on the other hand, Suna and Ayla have dinner together at the beach just after the dinner scene. Suna’s change starts, and she lets her guard down against Engin. Secondly, in the play, Suna decides to leave Egun and marry one of the wealthy friends of her ex-husband to pay for İnci’s education and future. *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan* ends with a scene where Suna is last seen under the framework of her house, emphasizing her captivity between houses of old and wealthy husbands. Contrary to the play, at the end of the movie, Suna does not marry any man, including Engin, and the ending credits with the two of them holding hands with İnci open the possibility of reading the scene as if the three of them are building a queer family together. Rıza Oylum reads such ending as “a reference to a lesbian relationship though in Cumalı’s play originally there are no implications of lesbianism,” without not giving further detail.²⁵⁹ However, I suggest that such reading is possible only through Mediterranean connectivity, enabling the imagining of a queer Utopia.

In the movie, the queer aspect of their relationship is more than just a possibility of lesbian sex; instead, it is the framework of Mediterranean subverting the source text and creating an imagination of two women forming a family together against the normative ending of the theatre play where Suna has no other choice than marrying a wealthy man for the sake of her daughter’s future. In the movie, however, happiness is achieved through Ayla and Suna’s romantic friendship. In *Communion: Female Search for Love*,

²⁵⁸ Necati Cumalı, *Bir Sabah Gülererek Uyan* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 101.

²⁵⁹ Rıza Oylum, “Türk Sinemasında Necati Cumalı Uyarlamaları,” (Master’s Thesis, Trakya Üniversitesi, 2016), 77.

bell hooks talks about romantic friendships as an ever-lasting form of love and says that: “there is an erotic dimension to [romantic friendships’] passionate bond and that it acts as an energetic force, enhancing and deepening ties.”²⁶⁰ Though these relationships do not include a sexual partnership, they can still be between two people belonging to the same sex; however, such friendships are still approached with caution because, in a homophobic society, they are seen as a symptom of repressed homosexual desire.²⁶¹ hooks rejects such understanding and suggests romantic friendships are a way of love that uses eroticism to strengthen the friendship and make it persistent.²⁶² Such relationships are also “a threat to patriarchy and heterosexism because they fundamentally challenge the assumption that being sexual with someone is essential to all meaningful, lasting, intimate bonds.”²⁶³ The eroticism between Ayla and Suna directed towards Engin makes such reading possible. The movie explicitly shows that they do not hesitate to be physically intimate: they walk in the streets of Bodrum hand in hand, swim naked, or sleep naked together. Therefore, hooks idea of romantic friendship could be helpful to understand Ayla and Suna’s relationship.

The subversive power of such a romantic friendship between Ayla and Suna becomes apparent when the endings of the play and the movie are compared. In his preface to the play, Cumalı asks: “Suna [...] çevresinin değer yargılarına sağır kalarak yaşam koşullarını değiştirebilir mi? En önemlisi [...] kendisi sevdiği sürece sevileceğine inanabilir mi?”²⁶⁴ After Ayla leaves Engin, she visits Suna, and the two women make peace just by looking at each other at Suna’s apartment. Just after they reconcile their

²⁶⁰ bell hooks, “lasting love: romantic friendships” in *communion: The Female Search for Love* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 207-208.

²⁶¹ hooks, “lasting,” 209.

²⁶² hooks, “lasting,” 208.

²⁶³ hooks, “lasting,” 210.

²⁶⁴ Cumalı, “Bir Sabah,” 6; “Can Suna [...] change her living conditions while remaining oblivious to the values of her surroundings? [...] Most importantly, can she believe that she will be loved as long as she loves herself?”

friendship, the handmaid of Suna brings photos Engin has sent them. At the end of the movie, for the first time, they are seen together with İnci alone, and such an ending, rather than implying lesbianism, shows that these two women now bring their attention to İnci, but Engin, and their friendship becomes stronger after Engin as they form a family together. As opposed to the play, Suna is not seen accepting marriage proposals; instead, she is happy with Ayla and İnci. The existence of such a romantic friendship makes it possible for Suna to imagine a future without being trapped in a loveless marriage. bell hooks discusses romantic friendships as an answer to women's search for love.²⁶⁵ In the movie, Suna and Ayla's friendship does not defy the normative boundaries of the nuclear family, but it also becomes an answer to these women's search for love.

The decision for two women to form a family together becomes another manifestation of queer futurity based on Butler's definition of queer as "misappropriate" and "deformative power" because it does not stick to the idea of Cumalı's play that a woman like Suna could only survive and provide for her daughter by marrying again.²⁶⁶ Therefore, Cumalı's questions also get their answers: yes, Suna could continue living as she defies the norms of her acquaintances and social environment, and indeed, she could believe that she will be loved in return by her friend who chooses to stay by her side. Moreover, in the ending scene, Ayla, Suna, and İnci play with an imaginary ball. I read that ball as a manifestation of queer futurity. Muñoz defines queer futurity as "not here" and "not yet" and as a way of imagining a future unbounded by a temporal matrix dictating an organization of time based on a heteronormative family structure that

²⁶⁵ hooks, "lasting," 206 – 217.

²⁶⁶ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 223-242, 229.

centers around reproduction.²⁶⁷ Throwing the ball between Ayla, İnci, and Suna points out the relationship between them, and the fact that there is no ball in the scene refers to something that is not there and not now, just like Muñoz's formulation of queer Utopia. The fact that the movie ends right in that scene suggests that the future of these women is now up to interpretation, and it forces the audience to imagine a future for three of them, hence, forced to imagine a queer Utopia.

On the other hand, although *Düş Gezginleri* presents a more overtly depicted sapphic relationship between two women as it also shows a sex scene between them more deliberately, discussing it only within the framework of queer representation through character development limits the search for finding alternative formations of queerness. The movie was shot in 1992 and is an adaptation of Osman Çallı's short story of the same name. Even today, *Düş Gezginleri* is a reference point for queer representation in Turkish cinema. In 2022, a panel with Lale Mansur (playing Havva in the movie) was organized as a part of the KuirFest (QueerFest) in Istanbul. However, some film critics scrutinize the relationship between Havva and Nilgün as mimicking a heterosexual relationship as they seem to share conventional gender roles. Ali Hakan, for instance, criticizes the movie by stating that as Meral Oğuz's character (Nilgün) embodies the role of the male protagonist who saves the woman from the swamp, *Düş Gezginleri* appears as yet another Yeşilçam melodrama.²⁶⁸ Akin to Ali Hakan's comments, in one of his interviews, Atıf Yılmaz reveals that although *Düş Gezginleri* is categorized as a lesbian film, he constructed the movie as a way to discover whether the power dynamic in a heterosexual relationship reoccurs within the context of a partnership between two women. He also says that in such a context, the educated one

²⁶⁷ Muñoz, "A Jete Out the Window," 155.

²⁶⁸ Ali Hakan, "Ne Çarpıcı Ne Nitelikli," in *Sabah Gazetesi*, December 6, 1992 cited in Özgüç, "Türk Sinemasında Lezbiyen İlişkiler," 183-4.

with the cultural capital holds the position of power.²⁶⁹ To signify Havva as the oppressed part of the relationship because of her lack of education and wealth, Atıf Yılmaz uses Nilgün's bisexuality problematically as it becomes a representation of greediness and being unable to commit.²⁷⁰ All of these assessments show that examining the film from the perspective of character representation fails to meet the criteria of queerness as it only re-constructs the heteronormative framework under a disguise of a lesbian relationship.

A comparison of *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezginleri* reveals that while adapting, Atıf Yılmaz uses the setting as a significant part of the adaptation process. Through an analysis focusing on the spatial relations of these texts, it appears that both texts also adapt the Sappho myth in their ways. Adaptation studies have shown that there are different approaches to analyzing adaptations. One of them is to see adaptation as a process that shows the adapting person, with the primary text emphasizing it as a process of making one's own.²⁷¹ In correspondence to that approach, Atıf Yılmaz makes these texts his own by adding Mediterranean cities into them as liminal and seductive places where female characters start to question their sexualities. *Dul Bir Kadın*, for instance, is set mainly in Bodrum, where Engin persuades Suna, starts to live with him, and defies the confinement of her life before him as a widowed woman living in the city. Bodrum is almost represented as one of the reasons for Suna's sexual awakening. Similarly, in *Düş Gezginleri*, Bergama is represented as a peripheral place

²⁶⁹ Fatih Özgüven, "Bizim Ulusal Sinema Yapmamız Mümkün Değil," in 'Rejisör' Atıf Yılmaz ed. Müjde Arslan (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2007), 198.

²⁷⁰ Sarah Corey, "All Bi Myself: Analyzing Television's Presentation of Female Bisexuality," *Journal of Bisexuality* (2), no. 17 (April 13, 2017): 190-205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2017.1305940>; In her article, "All Bi Myself: Analyzing Television's Presentation of Female Bisexuality," Sarah Corey claims that bisexual characters are often depicted as sexually greedy and unable to commit.

²⁷¹ Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning To Theorize Adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?" in *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-33, 20.

in opposition to Istanbul and the construction of city life, though in the source material written by Çallı, the exact place of the story is not explicitly defined. However, İzmir is mentioned as a place where Müveddet's (in the movie Nilgün's) mother lives. Hence, Yılmaz's choice of adapting Cumalı's and Çallı's text in a Mediterranean setting connects these movies.

On the other hand, Bergama in *Düş Gezginleri*, offers an escape from the judgments of the townsfolk as these two women belonging to different parts of society reconnect with each other. After their trip to the seaside and the historical ruins of Asklepion and Pergamon, Havva and Nilgün become lovers. In the scene where Nilgün tells the story of the Iliad and Odyssey, their hand-in-hand walking around the ruins intertextually homages to antiquity and the Sappho myth. Atıf Yılmaz emphasizes the importance of setting and environment while adapting films from literary works by saying, "When you are creating the characters, you need to ensure that they can live on their own. It is only natural. You should not force them to do something. If you can choose characters correctly and bring them together in the correct environment/setting, sometimes they start to live independently from your will."²⁷² In correspondence to Yılmaz's formulation, only through a Mediterranean perspective do these texts reveal their relationship with the Sappho myth and open themselves for a reading of queer Utopia. Therefore, in the remaining part of this chapter, I will discuss what a queer Utopia means in the context of the Mediterranean and how Atıf Yılmaz's vision creates a circulation of such Utopia while trying to expand the discussion with different texts produced regarding the Mediterranean.

²⁷²Pınar Tınaz Gürmen, "Atıf Yılmaz'dan Sinema Dersleri," in *'Rejisör' Atıf Yılmaz* der. Müjde Arslan (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2007), pp. 201-215, 205.

I have discussed *Don't Go to Kyrenia* above because I think a similar formation of queer futurity and Utopia occurs both in *Düş Gezginleri* and *Dul Bir Kadın*. For instance, in *Düş Gezginleri*, in parallel to Yaşın's poem, a tension between futurity, now, and past happens in the scene where Nilgün and Havva wander around the ruins of Ancient Pergamon. They plan a trip because the townsfolk start gossiping about them after Nilgün decides to save Havva from the brothel. Away from the *taşra* and city, the seaside and ancient ruins become an in-between space, allowing them to move and walk freely. In a specific sequence where they walk in one of the tunnels of the Asklepion, Nilgün starts to tell stories about Homer and Ancient Greece. Here, two things happen simultaneously: as Nilgün recites the history of Asklepion, the memory of the past (here Ancient Greece) is recalled to the audience's mind. However, the site of the tunnel isolates them from their temporal reality, and even just for a moment, a potential to imagine them in Ancient Greece appears while Nilgün and Havva's bodies still exist in the present time of the movie. The scene continues, and Anjelik/Havva says that she considered naming herself Cleopatra before choosing the nickname Anjelik. The movie then returns to a memory with a flashback to a childhood moment when Nilgün and Havva visit a museum with sculptures from Ancient Greece and laugh at the broken genitals of male sculptures. The scene ends with a question from child Nilgün: "Anne, kadınlar erkeklerden daha güzel değil mi?"²⁷³ That flashback creates a moment in the film where the histories of the ancient city and characters intertwine. Later as the timeline of the movie returns to the moment of present, Nilgün asks Havva: "Keşke bizi kimsenin tanımadığı yerlerde yaşasak. Ne güzel olurdu, değil mi?"²⁷⁴

²⁷³ "Mom, aren't women more beautiful than men?"

²⁷⁴ *Düş Gezginleri*, 35:22; "I wish we lived in places where no one knows us. That would be nice, wouldn't it?"



Figure 4.7: 00:34:05



Figure 4.8: 00:34:38

When the act of walking among the ruins and Nilgün's question combined, this scene creates a potentiality for queer futurity. In *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, Angela Jones defines the act of imagining queer utopias as: "the creation of spaces in the present that do not necessarily allow for complete emancipation or even happiness but are suggestive of the potentiality for the future; they give hope."²⁷⁵ Like Yaşın's

²⁷⁵ Angela Jones, "Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice," in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

poem imagining a never-ending rave scene in contrast to the threat of upcoming war, Nilgün's question also suggests a place where nobody knows them; hence, they live free from others' gaze and norms. They visit Pergamon and Asklepion because, in the little town where Nilgün is working, rumors about Havva and her spread quickly. After Nilgün brings Havva to her home, everybody in her surroundings warns her about being close to a prostitute. Therefore, the wishful thinking in that question occurs with the words "keşke" and the suffix "-sak" refers to a place where they are not known as a prostitute and a doctor, where they exist as themselves. The flashback to Nilgün's childhood asking her mother whether girls are more beautiful than Greek statues in the form of young men also hints at Nilgün's personal sexual history. Before the romance between these women starts, then, in the audience's mind, the juxtaposition that the place they imagine is maybe, in fact, in a future where they can be together indicates that Nilgün was attracted to women from a very young age. A similar formulation to Yaşın's poem happens with this rhetorical question being asked as these two women walk around the ancient city. While dreaming about Pergamon's past lives and allowing the momentariness of the now to subvert that past time through wishful thinking creates a queer Utopia there and then both for Nilgün and Havva. In Muñoz's definition of queer Utopia, the past is being read with a gaze belonging to the now, extracting a potentiality for imagining queer futurity.²⁷⁶ As a Mediterranean place, Bergama appears as a palimpsest where personal histories and memories of antiquity help envision a queer Utopia.

The queer element of the movie lies in the logic of spatiality, which does not have a place in the short story version but was added by Atıf Yılmaz himself. Such a

²⁷⁶ Muñoz, "Utopias Seating Chart: Ray Johnson, Jill Johnston, and Queer Intermedia as System," 126.

relationship is bound to be destroyed when Nilgün and Havva move to Istanbul because their life also start to become normative within the modernist structure of city life. After their trip to the ancient ruins, Havva and Nilgün become lovers, and because of the increasing pressure from the town's inhabitants, they decide to move to Istanbul together. However, like *Leyla ile Şirin*, the cultural and economic capital difference between Nilgün and Havva hinders their relationship. For instance, Nilgün's friends organize a party to celebrate her return to the city, and upon inviting Havva, she answers by saying that she does not even have proper clothes to wear for an event like that. Havva asks Nilgün to introduce her as Melike, showing her decision to leave her life back in the town, and Nilgün introduces Havva as her flatmate Melike. After they enter Faruk's house, Nilgün and Havva do not appear in the same shot throughout the sequence. While Nilgün mostly spends time with her group, a young man shows interest in Havva, and after the party, the couple has their first fight because Nilgün accuses Havva of encouraging the young man to flirt with her and laughing like a prostitute. As an upper-class member, Nilgün has the cultural capital to open a new clinic for herself. Havva, on the other hand, spends her economic capital to move in with Nilgün, and after leaving prostitution, she stays at home the whole day cleaning the house and cooking. While Nilgün quickly finds the man to integrate herself into city life, her acquaintances do not simply accept Havva. Her only friend becomes their neighbor Olay; however, Nilgün gets jealous of her, accusing Havva of infidelity, though in fact, she is the one cheating on Havva with Faruk, a man helping her to open her new clinic, and asking her to leave Havva behind.

In *Dul Bir Kadın* and *Düş Gezginleri*, Mediterranean spaces exist as liminal, offering sexual exploration and queer futurity. However, in *Düş Gezginleri*, upon acting the dream of living together, Istanbul becomes a space that separates Havva and Nilgün,

just like in *Leyla ile Şirin*. The class becomes an issue in both works due to Istanbul's landscape. Having many wealthy acquaintances and the economic capital, Nilgün has a wide range of mobility. However, after they move to Istanbul, the only place that Havva can go alone is by their neighbor Olay. Without any cultural, social, or economic capital in Istanbul, after leaving Havva, she goes back to the streets; and even Nilgün searches for her, driving around Istanbul and begging her to come back, she rejects Nilgün and at the end of the movie, stepping out from the car she walks away in the streets. That ending raises a question worth noting: Whose queer Utopias are depicted in Yılmaz's movies? Though Nilgün and Havva escape from the rumors of the townsfolk, the reason why Havva visits Pergamon, and Asklepion is Nilgün because she is the one suggesting the idea. Nilgün is the reason why Havva leaves prostitution behind in the first place. In *Dul Bir Kadın*, on the other hand, Bodrum becomes a space where desires arise because both Ayla and Suna can afford a vacation in Bodrum. When she returns to the city, Suna can defy the boundaries dictated to her thanks to her friendship with Ayla. However, upon losing her only friend in the city, Havva has no choice but to return to the streets. The possibility of a queer future with her fails since they reproduce the roles in a heteronormative relationship, and Havva cannot afford such a future anymore.

In this chapter, I discussed that the Mediterranean is an intertextual place that resembles adaptation in its fluidity and hybridity. In its Turkish context, bringing queer, adaptation, and Mediterranean diffuse the dichotomy between taşra and the center, Istanbul, which has long dominated Turkish cinema and literature. Although the use of the Mediterranean in the context of Atıf Yılmaz's film adaptations seems like a type of taşra, Mediterranean space differs because its queer intertextuality can break heteronormativity. However, that potential is only achievable with a specific

formulation combining reciting a past and an image from the now that deconstructs that past with wishful thinking envisioning queer futurity.



Chapter 5:

CONCLUSION

Istanbul has many definitions, as the birth city of comparative literature, the capital city of the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires, and the cultural capital of the Turkish Republic. When locating Turkish literature within the framework of world literature, Istanbul is a famous reference point. Turkish literature centering around Istanbul also creates a dichotomy concerning outside of the city, often defined in Turkish as *taşra*. This dichotomy reflects upon Turkish cinema and its representation in the international public sphere. Many Turkish films traveling between countries mainly deal with the tension between the center of Istanbul and the periphery. However, concerning the film sector and literary market, the mobility across borders and trans-continents is bound to regulations within national borders, including censorship. Therefore, constructing a concept of world literature focusing on what circulates beyond the borders is not the most inclusive and egalitarian methodology. For instance, queers of literature struggle to find a space within the national borders. Therefore, in this thesis, I focus on queer spatiality in Turkish literature and cinema; however, to avoid terrestrial borders and limitations, I draw upon Mediterranean studies and its key concepts such as transcontinentalism and regional specificity. Following queer adaptations in literature and cinema, I discuss the potentiality of imagining queer Utopias in the Mediterranean.

In the first chapter, analyzing queer spatiality in Mehmet Bilâl's *Osmanlı'da Bir Vampir Béla* shows that the spaces of exclusion in urban space concerning queers also appear in the literary imagination of Istanbul. For instance, sunlight is the most significant limitation for the protagonist, *Béla*. Hence, he is bound to the nightlife of Istanbul. While being a vampire excludes him from life and its public sphere, his queerness manifested through his hybrid nature as a combination of different identities,

including being a Romanian vampire and a *köçek* dancer, only surfaces in closed spaces such as *meyhanes* and hammams, which are also mainly male-centered spaces. As a result of Bela's transgression of the boundaries set by the Ottoman government, heteronormativity, and his creator Beybaba, he is punished by the loss of everyone he knows. In order to save Güneş, his janissary beloved, he finds no solution other than turning him into a vampire, cursing him for being a vampire. Though, at first, the novel seems to end with a moralistic re-establishment of the normative order, reading Bela as a queer adaptation expands the horizons of the text and shows a potential to both archive queer existence to imagine queer futurity set in Ottoman.

In the second chapter, again, I focus on the literary imagination of Istanbul from a queer perspective in Hülya Serap Doğaner's novel *Leyla ile Şirin*; however, this time in a near-futuristic Istanbul divided between the poor and the wealthy as *Eski Kent* and *Yeni Kent*. While the novel explores the potentiality of a sapphic relationship between two women having different socio-economic backgrounds and coming from different parts of Istanbul, the end of their relationship stems from their difference between economic differences. The spaces of the novel get smaller and smaller as Leyla, who faces her queerness, cannot situate herself within her old environments. In contrast to claustrophobia of the city space, the novel imagines a queer Utopia outside of the city. Therefore, differently from spaces of exclusion, through the use of *Küçük Kaygılar Mahallesi*, this time, exclusion appears as a political choice by rejecting the capitalist and normative framework dictated by city life.

Similar to *Béla* adapting vampire myth and the proposition of moth and the flame often used in Divan poetry and therefore defying not only national but also cultural and lingual borders, *Leyla ile Şirin* queers traditional folk tales of *Leyla ile Mecnun* and *Ferhat ile Şirin* and reconstruct two stories already traveling across borders of the

Middle East, and reimagines them in a queer future. Although in both novels, the spatial aspect seems to get smaller, a Mediterranean perspective focusing on the fluidity and hybridity of texts and their transcontinental and regional-specific features show that their act of queering also creates a sense of queer Utopia, or even a methodology to imagine new queer Utopias in the form of re-writing. Such collaboration between queer and adaptation and searching for a queer Utopia outside the city directed me toward Atıf Yılmaz's film adaptations.

Therefore, the third chapter, focusing on the movies *Dul Bir Kadın*, adapted from Necati Cumalı's *Bir Sabah Gülerek Uyan*, and *Düş Gezginleri*, adapted from Osman Çallı's short story with the same name, this thesis searches for the possibility of queer Utopia in the Mediterranean Turkey outside of Istanbul. In both movies, Mediterranean space appears liminal, triggering an excess of subversive desires defying sexual norms dictated by city life. Such reading can potentially direct the discussions between Istanbul and *taşra* toward a Mediterranean fluidity as it centers around the blurring lines of identities, borders, and boundaries. However, the question of who could afford such a utopia is vital to see the economic façade of the situation. The Mediterranean has a potential to alter our realities with the potentiality of queer futurity; however, it also bears the threat and danger of being a dystopia for the ones who could not afford it, such as immigrants and refugees. Nevertheless, the fictive worlds of literature and cinema also have the power to shape reality for better, more democratic, and inclusive futures. With this thesis, I hope to present an alternative way of doing world literature under the influence of the collaboration between queer, Mediterranean, and adaptation studies, defying national literature's territorial and terrestrial boundaries.

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