

A NOVEL-TO-CINEMA ADAPTATION AT THE BOUNDARIES OF POSTMODERN AESTHETICS: AĞIR ROMAN

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Abstract: Metin Kaçan's novel *Ağır Roman*, published in 1990, examines the subculture of its era through demographic variables and emerges as one of the most prominent works of the underground genre in Turkish literature. Adapted into a film with the same title in 1997, directed by Mustafa Altıoklar, the work was met with considerable interest. The author skillfully portrays individuals consumed by their era within their worlds, realistically incorporating lower-class people living very different lives in the metropolis into the narrative. He characterises those who are unable to integrate into society, marginalised, rebellious, and involved in illegal activities, with an anti-modernist attitude. In this regard, both the novel and the film, providing content close to postmodern aesthetics, emphasise a break from reality, a pluralistic view, and elevate ordinariness against elitist attitudes. This study examines *Ağır Roman*, adapted from novel to film, comparatively within the framework of its postmodern elements and the mentioned disciplines. The analysis reveals that the demographic structure of those living in a narrow environment in both novel and film is constructed mainly in line with postmodern understanding. Discrepancies between the film and the novel, resulting from the process of adaptation, have a significant impact on the fictional narrative.

Keywords: Metin Kaçan, *Ağır Roman*, postmodernism, subculture, cinema.

Romandan Sinemaya Postmodern Estetiğin Sınırlarında Bir Uyarlama: Ağır Roman

Öz: Metin Kaçan'ın 1990 yılında yayımladığı *Ağır Roman* eseri, döneminin alt kültürünü demografik değişkenler etrafında ele alan ve Türk edebiyatında yeraltı türünün en öne çıkan romanlarından biri olur. 1997 yılında Mustafa Altıoklar yönetmenliğinde aynı adla sinemaya uyarlanan yapıt, büyük bir ilgiyle karşılanır. Çağın tükettiği bireyleri kendi dünyaları içinde başarıyla resmeden yazar, metropoller içinde bambaşka hayatlar süren alt sınıftan insanları gerçekçi şekilde kurguya dâhil eder. Genel manada toplumsal yaşantıda tutunamayan, ötekileştirilmiş, isyankâr ve illegal işlere bulaşmış kişileri anti-modernist bir tutumla karakterize eder. Bu açılarından postmodern estetiğe yakın bir içerik sunan roman ve film; gerçeklikten kopuşu, çoğulcu bakışı ve elitist tavır karşısında sıradanlığı öne çıkarır. Bu çalışmada romandan sinemaya uyarlanan *Ağır Roman* eserinin barındırdığı postmodern unsurlarla beraber ve belirtilen disiplinler etrafında karşılaştırmalı incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Yapılan tahliller sonucunda roman ve filmde dar bir çevrede yaşayanların demografik yapısının postmodern anlayışa büyük oranda uygun şekilde kurgulandığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Film ve roman arasında uyarlamadan

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kaynaklı farklılıkların da azımsanmayacak ölçüde kurguya etki ettiği yine çalışmada ulaşılan sonuçlardan biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Metin Kaçan, Ağır Roman, postmodernizm, alt kültür, sinema.

Introduction

Literature and cinema, branches of art centred on human beings, enable interdisciplinary uses with the reality they create in fiction. In technical terms, the fictional variables that are common to both literary and cinematic works, such as the cast of characters, time, space, plot, point of view, and multiple narrative forms, enable the emergence of intertextual uses thanks to being centred on the concept of the human being. The advent of breakthroughs in cinema, particularly with the advancement of technology, has enhanced the genre both theoretically and practically. The contribution of literature to cinema can be related to the content of the work. The scenario in cinema is created by transferring the fictional world created in literary texts into a visual format. This process is known as adaptation. In the dictionary, adaptation is defined as "adapting literary works to the technical possibilities of cinema, theatre, radio and television" (TDK, 2024).¹ The most fundamental aspect of the relationship between literature and cinema in practice is revealed through the process of adaptation. The primary aim of adaptation is to faithfully reproduce the fundamental essence of the source text in cinematic form. This is the most crucial responsibility of the screenwriter (Andrew, 1992, p. 423). It is evident that the screenwriter and director assume a pivotal role in adaptation works, leveraging their creative identities to shape the narrative. The director bears the responsibility of transforming the written text into a visual form, taking into account the artistic realities of the medium. The screenwriter, on the other hand, is tasked with condensing the source text while maintaining its essence and artistic value. While the author of the literary text is entirely autonomous in the construction of the narrative, the screenwriter and director are bound to the novel in the screenplay of the film that has been adapted from the novel. However, the extent of this adherence may vary according to the director and screenwriter's understanding of art, personal preferences, the characteristics of the cast, the conjuncture of the period, and audience expectations. Furthermore, the constraints inherent to the film industry, which emerge during the initial phase of adaptation, along with challenges related to visualising the work, storytelling and dramatic structure, and budgetary considerations, represent significant obstacles for screenwriters and directors in terms of creative fulfilment (Kirel, 2004, p. 131). Regarding their function, it can be readily asserted that adaptation films are advantageous in enhancing the recognition of the original text. The ability of cinema to reach large audiences easily and its current popularity as a genre compared to the novel can be seen as the main reasons for the aforementioned benefit. It would be erroneous, however, to restrict the scope of adaptation studies to literary works alone. In the current era, which is characterised by a preoccupation with consumption, virtualisation and digitalisation, it can be argued that computer games represent a further source of adaptation works. It

¹ All quotations extracted from Turkish sources in this study have been translated into English by the researcher.

is indubitable that postmodernism has had a profound impact on the advent of this phenomenon.

A terminological analysis of the adaptation genre reveals two principal classifications. The first of these is screenwriting according to the type of its source material, and the second is screenwriting according to its fidelity to the source material. In accordance with the classification of the source material, the types of adaptations can be further subdivided into those derived from theatrical works, literary works, film and television series remakes, and other forms of adaptation. In examining the techniques employed in screenplay adaptation, it becomes evident that these techniques can be grouped into three categories based on their fidelity to the source material. The first category is transposition/transformation or literal adaptation. In this technique, the source work is followed as closely as possible in terms of temporality, geography, characterisation, conflict resolution, and denouement. In the developing years of cinema, when the art form had not yet established a distinct language, this adaptation was the preferred approach, with source material drawn from theatrical plays. The second adaptation technique is commentary/intersection or faithful adaptation. While certain elements of the source material are retained, the sequence of events, the characteristics of some characters, the names of individuals, the setting, the time and place, and frequently the conclusion are altered. The principal objective of this technique is to rework the source text in a manner that aligns with the structural conventions of cinema while preserving its fundamental essence. The third and final adaptation technique in screenwriting is analogy or loose adaptation. In loose adaptation, only certain elements of the source work are taken, while fundamental aspects such as time, setting, characters, events, story flow, and the ending are entirely changed. It is the type of adaptation where the adapted screenplay has the slightest resemblance to the source work. (Yanat Bağcı, 2021, pp. 793-801). *Ağır Roman*, one of the most successful adaptations of Turkish cinema, can be classified as a literary adaptation in terms of its source material, while its fidelity to the source can be considered close to that of a faithful adaptation. *Ağır Roman*, a film that exhibits postmodern characteristics in terms of both technique and content, significantly impacted its release period. It represents an avant-garde stance in the Turkish art world, both in terms of its literary identity and status as a film.

The film starred Müjde Ar, Okan Bayülgen, Mustafa Uğurlu, Burak Sergen, Savaş Dinçel and Küçük İskender. The film, which received a total of five awards, set new box office records for its period and achieved a significant position in the history of Turkish cinema.

Ağır Roman is not merely a film; it also has a presence before Turkish audiences in other forms. A ten-episode television series adaptation of the work, titled "*Ağır Roman Yeni Dünya*" (2012), was also produced. However, it did not achieve the same level of popularity as the film. The series' narrative unfolds forty years later in the Cholera (Kolera) neighbourhood. Additionally, the work was presented by the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet in 2002. During this period, the novel was translated into German under the title "*Cholera Blues*" (2002) due to the interest it attracted. Consequently, the work was successfully established within the global literary and commercial landscape. Subsequently, the novel was staged in numerous countries and published in French in 2003.

This study aims to analyse the novel *Ağır Roman*, adapted from the novel of the same name to the cinema, by the postmodern understanding of art. The following sections will

examine the construction of the work in two different genres, the differences that arise from the adaptation, and finally, its suitability to the postmodern aesthetic.

1. Postmodernism and *Ağır Roman*

The advent of postmodernism, a pivotal moment in art history, is exemplified in Turkish literature from the early 1970s onwards, with notable contributions from Oğuz Atay. *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* (1973) is regarded as the inaugural example of the postmodern genre, published a year after *Tutunamayanlar* (1971-1972), which exhibited modernist elements. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état and the ensuing apolitical climate, the majority of Turkish writers gravitated towards modern and postmodern conceptualisations of art, resulting in the emergence of works that straddle the boundaries between modern and postmodern. In the corpus of Turkish literature created between 1980 and the 2000s, Metin Kaçan is one of the writers of the 1990s who exhibited postmodernist tendencies. Frequently employing postmodern techniques in his works, Kaçan situates people belonging to the lower class and their lifestyles at the centre of the novel through the use of anti-modernist discourses, the incorporation of the local language, and an emphasis on social status (Evis, 2021, p. 47). In consideration of the objective reality of the relevant years, the consumption culture created by capitalism, the human enslaved by the modern system, the lifestyle in the ghettos that are ignored in metropolises, and the highlighting of nostalgic and arabesque culture, it can be seen that these factors represent the main variables of the author's understanding of art. In the author's works situated within the context of underground literature, the use of slang, profanity, narcotics, nightlife, and illicit lifestyles is supported by postmodern techniques, thereby paving the way for the emergence of anti-modernist content. In his interview with Fuat Uğur, Metin Kaçan offers insights into his stylistic choices and the content of his work, which align with the observations presented here. "One might be justified in characterising this as a literary language that explores the unseen, terrifying, more intimate, more personalised, and unmeasured aspects of the streets and lives" (Uğur, 2013). The novels *Ağır Roman* and *Fındık Sekiz*, which reflect the author's personal experiences, depict individuals engaged in criminal and immoral activities residing in impoverished neighbourhoods in Istanbul. These novels present these individuals with unflinching objectivity, capturing their struggles and complexities. It is possible to evaluate both novels as exemplars of postmodern thought, wherein the ordinary, the outdated, the simple, and the ignored are brought to the fore in opposition to the elitist stance of modernism. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to evaluate these works as postmodern narratives in their entirety. As a result of some stylistic choices, including the forced use of intertextuality and a linear narrative structure, these novels exhibit both modern and postmodern characteristics. Nevertheless, *Ağır Roman* and *Fındık Sekiz* succeed in conveying their intended message to readers in accordance with the critical structure of postmodern thought. In an interview with Adnan Özer, Metin Kaçan states that his objective was to decipher the places and people of the city that are steeped in crime and that he was successful in doing so:

In *Fındık Sekiz*, after the completion of *Ağır Roman*, I removed the symbolic veil from the city and documented my observations. The characters I had previously depicted as pimps, assholes, and crooks in *Ağır Roman* were, in fact, residing in a luxurious part of the city. I removed the veil, and the individuals in question were

profoundly unsettled by this revelation. The language used by the Sufis in *Fındık Sekiz* was intertwined with the filtered slang of Kasımpaşa. When these two elements are viewed in conjunction, they are resisted considerably. Those situated in the locale of greatest gain and benefit were profoundly disquieted by *Fındık Sekiz* (Özer, 1999, pp. 9–10).

The effects of postmodern tendencies are evident in cinema with remarkable swiftness, as in literature. The formation of postmodern approaches in art has been apparent in cinema since the 1980s, manifesting elements such as polychronicity, intertextuality, pastiche, and fragmented fiction (İspir & Kaya, 2011, p. 84). Postmodern cinema, by frequently employing techniques such as imitation, pastiche, and parody regarding its technical aspects, gains originality through intertextual or interfilms uses (Şahin, 2023, p. 674). Particularly since the 1990s, Turkish cinema has also produced works that are aligned with the postmodern genre, including both individual works and adaptations. The advent of this phenomenon can be attributed to two factors: the proliferation of postmodern art and the techniques that have been developed as a result of technological advancements specific to the film industry. The defining characteristics of postmodernism in cinema can be elucidated as follows: “The postmodernist cinematic style evokes a nostalgic and conservative longing for the past, a merging of past and present, an interest in the real and its re-presentations, and an openness to pornography, the commodification of sexuality, and desire” (Büyükdüvenci & Öztürk, 1997, p. 23). Furthermore, the employment of stylistic techniques such as collage/montage, pastiche, and nostalgia in these films serves to reinforce their classification as postmodern (Koçak, 2012, p. 84). From a theoretical standpoint, with the adoption of poststructuralism and deconstruction methods by postmodernism, systematic, conventionalised, and homogenised discourse and content are abandoned. In contrast, a new yet unoriginal, fragmented, eclectic, unconventional expression and content is devised.

Metin Kaçan's *Ağır Roman*, which exhibits several postmodern characteristics, represents a distinctive contribution to the cinematic landscape of Turkey. The satire on the modern world is constructed realistically through intertextual techniques, which employ elements of polyphony, minimalism, fragmentation, and relativism, representing the dominant elements of postmodern art. The intertextual references, which are predominantly supported by elements of pastiche and irony, address the contemporary issues of the period. To illustrate, the critique of the political structure and corrupt public organisations is evoked through pastiche. At the same time, the criminal element in Istanbul's ghettos becomes a representation of the ironic discourse directed against the elitist attitude of modernism.

2. *Ağır Roman* in Fiction and Cinema

While postmodern techniques have been employed in literature and cinema globally since the 1970s, in Turkish art, this process has increased in quantity and quality since the 1990s. Despite the prevalence of postmodern elements in literature and cinema between 1970 and 2000, most works in this period failed to achieve a consistently high level of narrative excellence. In this process, novels or stories are written that exhibit a shift towards the modern in one or more aspects, resulting in a mixture of modern and postmodern elements. It is thus fitting to characterise the work of *Ağır Roman* in this manner. Furthermore, this is a common feature of Metin Kaçan's works.

Notably, numerous adaptations of Turkish literature have achieved a level of popularity that rivals that of the original novels. The earliest adaptation film in the history of Turkish cinema was the 1919 adaptation of Hüseyin Rahmi's Mürebbiye by Ahmet Fehim (Çetin Erus, 2020, p. 584). The quantitative increase in adaptation films is particularly evident following the establishment of the Turkish Republic due to the development of technological means. The most well-known of these are films such as *Susuz Yaz*, *Vurun Kahpeye*, *Zübük*, *Ağrı Dağı Efsanesi*, *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım*, *Hababam Sınıfı*, *Çalıküşü*, *Yaprak Dökümü*, *Dokuzuncu Hariciye Koşuşu*, *Mutluluk*, *Sarı Mercedes*, *Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar*, and *Yılanların Öcü*, which made a significant impact during their respective periods of release. A historical classification of Turkish film reveals that 19 adaptations were made from literary texts to cinema between 1919 and 1949, while 106 adaptations were made between 1950 and 1970. From the 1970s to the present day, numerous adaptations in the socialist, postmodern, and popular genres have been incorporated into the Turkish cinematic canon (Çetin Erus, 2020). Mustafa Altıoklar's 1997 film *Ağır Roman* surpassed other popular films of its time, achieving excellent box office success.

The aspect of adaptation that is most controversial for the reader or viewer is the degree of loyalty to the original text. In this regard, it will be initially examined the similarities between the novel and the film and subsequently addressed the aspects that were altered or updated in the film in a manner distinct from the original text. The elements of the novel and the film that remain unchanged or are faithfully reproduced are primarily the message to be conveyed, the thematic emphasis, the presentation of the atmosphere, and the general harmony in the typical characteristics of the cast of characters. In contrast, the discrepancies primarily pertain to the sequence of events, the duration of the character's involvement in the narrative, and the alterations in their behaviour, the majority of which are attributable to editing and casting decisions.

The novel's focus on individuals from the lower social classes reflects the arabesque culture of the 1970s. The author, who tends to favour a male-oriented cast of characters, incorporates female characters into the fiction as socially oppressed, marginalised, addicted or morally depraved. The prominent characters in Kaçan's works are people with substance use disorder, prostitutes, pimps, bullies, and murderers. These characters are detached from the general value judgments of society, live at extremes, and largely shape the fictional and thematic structure through these characteristics (Erbarıştıran, 2003, pp. 81-83). The majority of the characters, both central and supporting, serve as archetypal representations of their respective social classes. Consequently, most of the characters in the work are depicted as flat characters. For example, Gili Gili Salih, the protagonist of *Ağır Roman*, is a character who, through his identity crises, approaches a transition from a flat character to a round character but ultimately remains more of a flat character, not fully completing this development. Indeed, Salih's identity and sense of self are subject to change following the norms and values espoused by the society in which he lives. The norms Salih is in, his family, and the responsibilities he assumes indicate that he attempts to present a solid image to society through a false self-system (Şahin, 2016, p. 17). The tragic demise of Salih, who is driven to suicide by his experiences in fiction, appears to be an inevitable consequence of these futile and artificial existential pursuits. As a matter of fact, the underlying factor behind all types

of deaths and suicides is not just Salih's but the fact that the characters in *Cholera Street* are flat characters lacking self-integrity. Moreover, in *Ağır Roman*, suicide is viewed as an escape from the harsh realities, poor living conditions, betrayal, and the feeling of helplessness caused by injustice (Ergeç, 2021, p. 252).

The primary elements that align *Ağır Roman* with postmodern aesthetics are most evident in its content. The nostalgic content, the criticism of modernism, the focus on ordinary and rebellious characters, the banality of the spaces, and the pleasure-oriented lifestyle can be directly related to the consumer culture and anti-modernist stance that postmodernism is associated with. Furthermore, the work employs intertextual techniques, such as pastiche and irony, commonly utilised in postmodern art. The concept of intertextuality, which creates analogous effects in both literary and cinematic works, is characterised by a functional structure in techniques such as collage, montage, pastiche, parody, irony, allusion, and metafiction. The employment of pastiche is especially noteworthy in *Ağır Roman*. As Connor (2001, p. 261) notes, the defining feature of postmodern cinema is its embrace of a multitude of stylistic approaches, or pastiche. In *Ağır Roman*, the use of pastiche is not based on literary works but rather on the contemporary and salient events of the period. The Cyprus War, the oppression of the non-Muslim population, and the electoral process are all incorporated into the novel through the intertextual technique of pastiche.

As the general elections approached, the ruling party paved the streets with shadiness to win votes and deceive the voters. Cholera Street also received disgusting asphalt on its beautiful cobblestones. (...) Radio and TV broadcasted warning signals every ten minutes, saying, "Citizens, this is a general blackout; do not go out on the streets until further notice!" (...) The sophtas, who had had their eyes on the rip-off business since childhood, took courage from the blackout and knocked on the doors of the Covinos (Christians). The shopkeepers, who sniffed war, prepared sly plans under the candlelight and chatted about how they would kill the Covinos (Kaçan, 2024, pp. 49, 132, 133).

These intertextual elements in the novel are not sufficiently profound to influence the narrative or alter the characters' behaviour. Such instances serve to illustrate the prevalence of social corruption, self-interest, and malevolence within the context of the period in question. These examples serve to reinforce the thematic structure in accordance with the fundamental logic of pastiche. The novel employs the technique of irony, a common feature of postmodernism, to critique modernism. From the very title of the novel onwards, the names of people and places are imbued with an ironic discourse in terms of their impact on the thematic structure. Furthermore, the novel's primary setting, a small neighbourhood in Istanbul, becomes a parallel example of the increasing ghettoisation that came with the postmodern era. The novel's setting in a metropolis notwithstanding, the cast of characters' status as ordinary individuals and even criminals can be seen as an ironic critique of the uniform, systematic, and elitist lifestyle that has emerged in the modern era. Upon examination of the novel's ironic nomenclature, it becomes evident that the term "ağır" (heavy) in *Ağır Roman* stands in stark contrast to the ordinariness of the characters and events depicted. The term "heavy," which suggests that the modern world oppresses ordinary, simple people, acquires an ironic connotation in this context. In contrast, the prominence of "cholera" in "Cholera Street" indicates that the neighbourhood is afflicted by a pervasive illness, symbolising the detrimental impact of the modern world order on the human condition. Using animal names as nicknames for individuals within the cast, rather than using their surnames, again signifies their lack

of social respect or acceptance, turning into ironic commentary. The animal nicknames bestowed upon the characters, such as Zehra the Cougar, Orhan the Fox, and Hamit the Elephant, bear a striking resemblance to the characteristics ascribed to them. For example, Zehra the Cougar is a former bargirl who has endured significant hardship. She dedicates her life to women's education in Cholera Street, providing them with the knowledge and skills they require to navigate the challenges of their lives. "The husbands of these women, aware of Zehra's vixenish nature, were unable to object to her visits to their homes" (Kaçan, 2024, p. 58). The author establishes a connection between Zehra's "vixenish nature" and the power of a puma in the same way that they do with Orhan the Fox. Orhan the Fox, who is homosexual, begins working in a brothel of his own volition, declining to permit self-interested individuals to exploit his body disrespectfully for the sake of satisfying his sexual desires. Under this concept, Orhan is assigned a sobriquet befitting the epithet "cunning" ascribed to the fox.

In *Ağır Roman*, Metin Kaçan "effectively conveys the phenomenon of slums and cultural degeneration, which is the result of a distorted economic development, in a striking, cynical, and playful manner" (Arslan, 2009, p. 142). The rules of this game are based on disorder, chaos, and relativity, which are hallmarks of postmodernism. All established public moral rules and values created in the history of humanity before the advent of modernism are rendered moot and devalued in this game (Yeter Şahin, 2019, p. 354). However, the game played in *Ağır Roman* has no definitive winner. The residents of Cholera Street, who build their own order based on their internal dynamics, get lost in contrasts such as conservatism-religious exploitation, good-evil, honest-deceitful, and rich-poor. The neighbourhood residents exhibit a rebellious or unresponsive attitude toward universal values such as politics, religion, social status, and education, which they adopt as a means of resisting the impositions of the status quo. Conversely, these concepts are rendered meaningless and vanquished as a consequence of ironic discourse or tragic occurrences involving individuals or occurrences. Especially in consumer-based societies, the negative effects of space on individuals are exemplified in the novel through Cholera Street. In both literary and sociological terms, it is well known that a bidirectional influence characterises the relationship between place and human beings. While variables such as social norms, traditions, belief systems, and historical background determine the overall structure of space (Çağlak & Satır, 2020, p. 319), the prevailing atmosphere that permeates the space, in turn, shapes new generations in its own image. In this regard, the overall structure of Cholera Street and the tragic lives led by its residents amidst dead ends are particularly significant. The lifestyle of Cholera Street is characterised by arabesque, introverted, primitivism and a certain degree of nostalgia. In such an environment, authority, power, and respectability are attained through behaviours such as violence, sexual dominance, nonconformity, and adherence to established norms. The greatest success of the novel and film is the creation of an atmosphere that parallels the described lifestyle. Moreover, the author asserts that adapting his works to different branches of art is not an issue, provided that it effectively reflects the atmosphere. Indeed, he considers it beneficial in terms of increasing recognition and readership (Şahin Hamidi, 2019). One of the key factors contributing to the success of an adaptation is the ability to convey the atmosphere of the original text with realistic depictions. The jargon used by ordinary people ensures the sense of reality

in the presentation of people and events, the processing of possible but infrequent events, and always keeping the action or tension at a high level.

The theme of sexuality, which occupies a central position in both the novel and the film, serves to exemplify a lifestyle oriented towards the moment and the pursuit of pleasure, which is a characteristic perspective of postmodernism. The brothel in the neighbourhood, homosexual relationships, forbidden loves that result in the dissolution of marriages and even deaths, and even adultery in immoral relationships demonstrate that sexuality is primitive and pleasure-oriented. The residents of the neighbourhood's acceptance of these situations and events can be seen as a primary justification for the tragic aspects of the work. Additionally, the postmodernist perspective, which challenges established ideas, represents a reactionary stance towards the institution of the family with distorted relationships. The initial sentence of the novel, which is also presented at the outset of the film, serves to foreshadow the presence of drugs, prostitution, and an uneducated environment in Cholera Street:

Eda, the top whore of Cholera Street, released the water she washed her crotch with after a customer into the void with a stylish move from the window frame of the brothel made of scrap metal. The pimps, who had sold their fake silk shirts to the nobility of the wind, laughed like whales as they waited for the pills they had swallowed to work, saying to Gili Gili Salih, who was soaked with Eda's water, "Buddy, you won't have to worry about a wife for the rest of your life, all the chicks will fall at your feet and worship you" (Kaçan, 2024, p. 11).

The portrayal of deviant relationships, illicit loves, and unions that culminate in death, along with the normalisation of these situations within the context of the neighbourhood, illustrate that sexuality in both the novel and the film serves a functional role in the context of fiction. The novel employs a variety of sexual relations, many of which are regarded as immoral, to establish a pervasive ambience. The life of Orhan the Fox, who is introduced as a homosexual, demonstrates that these sexual differences are manifested in the novel through action: "Foxy, the poor legit faggot who doesn't hide his sexuality! (...) Foxy found it more appropriate to give to the street children in the crumbling brothel of Cholera instead of giving to the horny bugger drivers by being squeezed on the corners. Moreover, he would willingly receive the fruits of his labour without being raped" (Kaçan, 2024, pp. 120-121).

In a district where illicit activities are prevalent, the use of illicit substances is also highly probable. Especially the rise of consumer culture, the decline of spiritual values, and shortcomings in the education system contribute to the prevalence of substance addictions. The fact that the age and rate of drug use have reached alarming levels in the postmodern and even post-postmodern age is significant in this respect. The film and the novel both demonstrate the use of and consequences resulting from the use of drugs. The use of marijuana and pills is presented as a regular aspect of nightlife and is even presented as a means of making money and maintaining a gangster lifestyle:

Gili relaxed on his back in the gambling den, where he proved his superiority by performing a new move daily and thought about his gift for Tina. In the middle of the night, when he was drugged and became a prophet, he popped in on the street. His friends who saw Gili on drugs said, "It's unbelievable; this is the first time I've seen our brother on drugs." (...) While life continued at its usual pace on Cholera Street, Ali the Barber was in his shop where he sold drugs, thinking with a contorted face and angry eyes. Having achieved fame, glory and money, Ali was turning the time around himself (Kaçan, 2024, pp. 86, 124).

In *Ağır Roman*, as with sexuality, drugs serve as a symbol of power and rebellion against the status quo. There is a correlation between drug addiction and involvement in criminal activities such as murder, prostitution, and torture. The portrayal of drug addiction as a social problem in the novel is realistic and multifaceted. In contrast to the novel, the film depicts the frequent use of cocaine, paint thinner, and other substances. However, pill use is not given much emphasis in the film. Additionally, it can be said that substance use plays a functional role in both mediums, enhancing the atmosphere and lending credibility to the events.

From the outset to the conclusion, the novel and the film both present a wealth of content that offers direct and indirect criticism of the public institutions established and systematised by the modern world order. Both the novel and the film depict the police and prison, which represent the concept of justice, and the school, which signifies education, as corrupt or far from the severe, consistent, functional, and benefit-oriented structure they should be. For instance, the involvement of police officers in criminal activities at all levels fosters a sense of animosity towards the state and a lack of confidence in the justice system. In the novel, the portrayal of the police as torturers and manipulators, in collaboration with drug traffickers and engaged in the unjust arrest of individuals to gain favour with superiors, is presented as a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of social and public corruption. The novel provides a detailed account of the police chief's exploitation of women, his enjoyment of torture, and his cooperation with criminal gangs: "The coppers began to take Ali around the torture rooms of the police station in order to make him confess to a crime he did not commit. Unable to achieve results with drafts, bottles, and wall hangings, the coppers locked Ali in a cell and resorted to starvation. They had learned that Ali had a hearty appetite" (Kaçan, 2024, p. 125).

In the film, the portrayal of the police engaging in torture, involvement in illicit activities, and collaboration with gangs is situated within an ideological critique. Nevertheless, at this juncture, the script diverges from the original source material. The absence of religious figures in the film alters the rationale behind the torture scenes. Reis, who is utilised as a means of intimidation against communism (despite the absence of such a threat in the film), becomes the primary agent of torture and a pawn in the hands of the police. Similarly, in the film, Reis not only tortures ordinary people himself but also plays a role in facilitating police torture. Both the author and the screenwriter, in alignment with the anti-modernist stance of postmodern thought, vividly demonstrate the established public structures -destined to decay over time- through these examples in *Ağır Roman*. Consequently, this depiction becomes particularly meaningful as it highlights the unhappiness of individuals consumed by the modern world system.

The ambiguity, openness to interpretation, and relativism that are hallmarks of postmodernism are evident in the characters in *Ağır Roman*, who are unable to withstand the circumstances in Cholera Street and turn to other lives where the aftermath is not revealed. The novel provides no information regarding Barber Ali's subsequent fate after he departs the house, becoming mentally unstable as a consequence of the police torture he endures. A similar fate is observed in the case of the minorities who were compelled to sell their properties and savings for an insignificant amount due to pressure and threats during the war and then left Cholera:

Ali, glancing towards where the rain was falling harder, which had started to drizzle lightly, shouted, "I have to go there, friends. My real friends are waiting for me there," before he strode briskly towards the Black Dungeon Cemetery (...) Under the protection of gangsters, the Covinos left Cholera with small suitcases and trod the dark roads of the future. As they left, when they looked at the neighbourhood and their homes where they had spent years, they saw the laundry hanging loose from its strings, the plaster detached from the building, and the fish hanging up to be dried! (Kaçan, 2024, pp. 126, 133).

The fate of Ali and the non-Muslims, whose story concludes without a definitive resolution, allows readers and viewers to engage with the work in a manner that aligns with the principles of ambiguity, relativism, and openness to interpretation associated with postmodern aesthetics within the theoretical and practical applications of these principles. The exclusion of the experiences and perspectives of non-Muslims from the film accentuates the postmodernist effect observed in the novel to a greater extent than in the film. Moreover, the external voice, which intervenes in the film and reads passages from the text, creates interruptions in the fiction by disrupting the linearity of the fictional reality and creating ambiguities with its references to the novel on the intertextual plane, which brings the film closer to the multi-voiced structure emphasised by postmodernism.

3. Similarities and Differences between Film and Novel

When considering the similarities between the two works, the most notable aspect is the resemblance in the general framework between the two genres. *Ağır Roman* is a novel that portrays alternative and predominantly distorted lifestyles on Cholera Street in Istanbul during the early 1970s, per its own internal reality. The fundamental premise of both the novel and the film is a realistic depiction of illicit and unethical activities on Cholera Street through the lens of flat characters. The work's autobiographical features, its incorporation of political events of the period, its portrayal of Cholera Street in accordance with the Tarlabası and Dolapdere districts where the author lived or was acquainted, and the exterior shots in these neighbourhoods serve to reinforce the connection between the novel and the film and their respective representations of reality. Furthermore, the uninterrupted perpetuation of the fictional reality and the element of excitement and curiosity within this reality facilitate diverse reading experiences where fiction and objectivity are intertwined for the reader and the viewer.

The first notable similarity between the novel and the film is their introductions, which set the overall atmosphere of the work. The film features an off-voice that reads excerpts from the novel, closely following the original text. Right at the beginning, this voice shares several passages from the novel, giving the audience an overview of the story atmosphere:

Off-voice: -Who could ever caress time...

Off-voice: -As the sun slipped through the clouds, the colours of the rainbow made love on Cholera's rooftops. The chimes of church bells and the sounds of adhan mingled with a faint whiff of hashish, thickening the air.

Hush... While emperors puffed out the smoke of their fat joints like bosses, Adam Mickiewicz's poet soul clung to the haze, rising from his century-old museum and perching on the church's crucifix. The tough broads, aiming for a heavier hit, were rolling up some real hefty blunts.

This introduction serves as a strong example of how the general atmosphere is presented, highlighting the most notable similarity between the adaptation and the novel. Both readers and viewers are primed for the work's atmosphere they'll encounter. Cholera Street, a place where individuals from various nationalities coexist amidst crime and illicit activities, is portrayed in all its objective and symbolic dimensions through the narrator and off-voice.

It can be said that the visual elements designed for the work are designed to establish a shared emotional experience for both readers and viewers. The materials featured on the novel's cover and the film's poster, along with the actors' attire and appearance, serve as notable parallels between the two works.

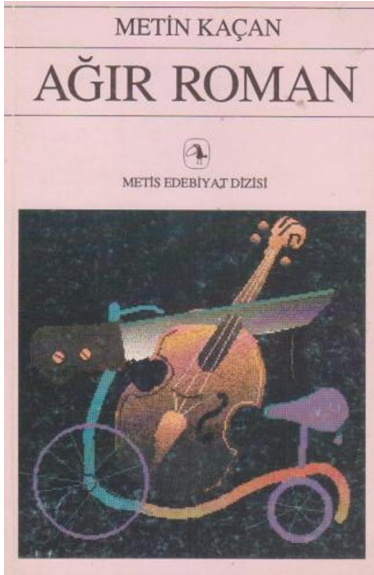


Image 1. *Ağır Roman* Book cover
(Metis Edebiyat, 2024)



Image 2. *Ağır Roman* Movie Poster
(Wikipedia, 2024)

Both images are represented by objects or characters that reflect the overall atmosphere of the work and highlight previously emphasised elements such as crime and illegal life. This situation, similar to the external voice, draws the readers' attention to the work and heightens their awareness of its content. Therefore, both genres aim to convey ideas to their interlocutors not only verbally or in writing but also visually.

Apart from the examples² discussed in previous sections concerning the limits of postmodern aesthetics, one of the similarities between the two works is the foregrounding of the patriarchal structure. A male-dominated discourse and content characterise the novel and the film. This social structure, which seems appropriate for the 1970s in which the work is set, becomes even more evident as it deals with illegal business and the lives of people living on the fringes. This mechanism, which appears

² These similarities emphasise the overall atmosphere, the cast, the handling of the theme of sexuality, and the use of intertextuality. In order to avoid repetition, the same points will not be mentioned under this heading.

problematic in terms of the concept of gender, appears to pacify women, confining them to narrow stereotypes such as housework and childcare and preventing them from developing a sense of self. Besides, the novel and film portray women as commodities, devalued through the objectification of their sexuality and the portrayal of their roles as bargirls and prostitutes, and transformed into tools used by men to demonstrate their power:

As the sun peeled off the clouds, the reveller sturdy women of Cholera started chatting with auto mechanics, carpenters, and turners in front of their houses that looked as if they would collapse with a shoulder blow. At the same time, they began to prepare joint filters for the craftsmen, whose hands trembled while welding so that they could smoke the hashish better. The peasant women were looking out of the windows like prisoners because they were frightened by the horror stories their husbands told about the neighbourhood (Kaçan, 2024, p. 12).

In addition to prostitutes, the peasant and gypsy women in the cast of characters are individuals who are unable to envision a profession or status in society. In this regard, both the film and the novel *Ağır Roman* merit attention as works that indirectly describe and criticise the plight of women devalued as sexual objects or prevented from attaining identity integrity in accordance with sociological data. Furthermore, the male-dominated social structure exerts a detrimental influence not only on women but also on men. While this negative effect is pervasive across the majority of male characters, its manifestation is particularly pronounced in the case of the protagonist. In particular, "*Ağır Roman* focuses on the destruction process of the individual who tries to find himself under the pressure of the masculine identity constructed through the masculine body. (...) Salih, who grows up with strong masculinity indoctrination, gives up his own self in line with this indoctrination and moves towards his own destruction while trying to take on another personality" (Çavuş, 2022, p. 657).

Examining the alterations made during the adaptation, in addition to those in accordance with the source text, will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. It is documented that Metin Kaçan, who collaborated with director Mustafa Altıoklar during the scripting process, expressed dissatisfaction with the final version of the film. Kaçan criticised the lengthy shooting time and the subsequent editing of most scenes, stating that it detracted from the film's overall atmosphere. The disagreements between Metin Kaçan and Mustafa Altıoklar, along with the subsequent legal proceedings concerning copyright issues, contributed to a further deterioration in the relationship between the writer and the director (Erdik, 2020). Setting aside the personal aspects of the situation, examining the critiques levied against the work following its adaptation reveals a focus on aspects such as content presentation, staging, and shooting techniques. As Erdik (2020) notes, several characters from the original text are carried over to the film adaptation, including Gili Gili Salih, Tina, Barber Ali, Arap Sado, Film Hamit, Reis, Zehra the Cougar, and Orhan the Fox. However, this is not the case with regard to the characteristics of these characters and the events. The majority of the actions depicted in the novel were not included in the film adaptation, and in the ones included, the individuals responsible for these actions were altered. Therefore, *Ağır Roman* undergoes a significant transformation when adapted for the cinema. This, however, corresponds to something different—more of a softening—than the divergence seen in most literary adaptations. The character of Gili Gili Salih, who is depicted as a complex individual encompassing a range of contradictory traits, including weakness, audacity, and dreaminess, is rendered somewhat artificial when he is positioned as the

epitome of absolute goodness. His lover Tina, a prostitute, undergoes a sudden transformation and becomes a woman of love, seeking retribution against Reis at the cost of her own life. Thus, the "good guys" lose, but the "bad guys" do not win.

To illustrate these points, while Reis functions as an opposing force in the film, he does not serve this role in the novel. Additionally, some of the tyrannies perpetrated by the sophtas, which are not depicted in the film, are also attributed to Reis. Orhan's employment at a brothel, discourses about the war, Reco's return to the neighbourhood, and Barber Ali's transition from his role as a chivalrous and honest shopkeeper to a criminal identity engaged in drug trafficking and even incorporating deceit into it are notable omissions from the script. The absence of these elements represents a failure to accurately depict the harsh, crime-ridden, and illegal lives on Cholera Street, resulting in a more superficial film than the novel. In addition to the aforementioned abbreviations, the transformation of the protagonists also serves to diminish the film's overall strength in comparison to the novel. For example, while Gili Gili Salih, portrayed by Okan Bayülgen, features as both the protagonist and the lead role in the original work, the significant alterations to his characterisation represent a pivotal divergence in the adaptation. While this situation may be perceived as unacceptable by readers of the novel, the manner in which Salih is portrayed within the context of the film's narrative does not present a problematic aspect for viewers. It is, therefore, inevitable that Salih will undergo a transformation by the alterations in the roles and occurrences depicted in the film. Furthermore, the portrayal of individuals in his immediate vicinity has also been instrumental in re-characterizing them under the alterations mentioned earlier. For instance, whereas Salih is depicted in the novel as a man grappling with identity confusion and ultimately becoming a gangster, the film portrays him as a figure of virtue and justice. In contrast, Tina occupies the dual roles of Salih's sexual partner and confidante. While her involvement in prostitution defines the primary objective of Tina's character in the novel, this aspect of her role undergoes a significant transformation in the film. Tina is depicted as free from the shame associated with prostitution and is portrayed as a woman of love in the narrative. She takes her own life and that of Reis on the grounds of her infidelity towards Salih, who has been betrayed. At a certain point, this scene becomes clichéd and resembles scenes from classical works where mistakes are punished, and the villains are defeated. However, when we consider the overall ambience of the work, it can be stated that the characters are transformed into idealised individuals who are excessively optimistic and perceptive in a neighbourhood characterised by criminality and immorality, in contrast to the novel. The film's structural divergence from the novel is particularly evident in its portrayal of Gili Gili Salih. In contrast to the novel, the film assumes a hybrid identity, encompassing melodrama, tragedy, film noir, and drama, as it depicts Salih's journey towards heroisation and idealisation (Akgün Koçmak, 2002, p. 514).

Another problematic aspect of *Ağır Roman* is the absence of the sophtas in the fiction, which is under the logic of faithful adaptation among adaptation techniques. The sophtas, depicted as an opposing force in the novel, are absent from the screenplay. This omission serves to confirm the existence of non-Muslims, illustrate the oppression they face, critically examine the relationship between religion and politics, and reinforce the prevailing atmosphere in the fiction. While the film and the novel are generally aligned

in terms of the "general atmosphere," the removal of these elements has undermined this achievement. The novel's most significant strength lies in its ability to portray the intricate tapestry of lives unfolding within a single neighbourhood, each character navigating their own unique dramas. Accordingly, the film has been distilled to Salih's drama, adopting a more concentrated perspective. In the novel, the criticism of politics is mainly superficial, focusing on the tumultuous right-wing and left-wing conflicts of the era. These issues are not delved into any significant depth, particularly regarding ideological discourse. In other words, the actions of self-interested characters, who are perceived as right-wing based on their appearance and expressions in a few scenes, to conceal their illicit activities and actions by collaborating with the authorities (police) represent the political satire in the work. Additionally, the war issue that concludes the novel has been entirely omitted from the film. In this respect, one of the most significant discrepancies between the novel and the film is that while the novel includes pivotal elements of ideological critique, the film either omits these elements or represents them in a different manner. The exclusion of these elements from the screenplay resulted in the work's alignment with a more accessible, popular genre, limiting its scope and preventing the transfer of the novel's aesthetic value to the film.

Remarkably, when a work of literature is adapted for the screen from a novel, the text will inevitably be shortened. Nevertheless, the aforementioned deficiencies are not acceptable from an aesthetic perspective. As a novel, *Ağır Roman* achieves originality and success through the atmosphere it creates and the bringing together of different characters. In light of these observations, it can be posited that the script, filming, and abridgements in the film were designed in accordance with a personal and populist approach, with variables such as box office returns, audience expectations, financial possibilities, and time limits taken into consideration.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the film techniques employed in adapting *Ağır Roman*. The film was shot in a manner that accentuates the rapid flow, distortion of images, and catchy simplicity in the advertising logic (Genco, 1998, p. 19). Besides, the film employs a clip-based narrative that, according to Akgün Koçmak (2002, p. 513), superficialises depth with a 1970s perspective. This situation may be associated with the fragmentation and minimalist approach emphasised by postmodern aesthetics. This is particularly apparent in the transitions between scenes in the film. The film features numerous scene transitions that are not aligned with a linear narrative structure. Nevertheless, these discontinuities do not reach the level of compromising the plot's overall coherence and linearity. The viewer is able to discern the connections between the disparate elements and remain engaged with the central narrative. This phenomenon is evident in both the novel and the film. One of the primary reasons why *Ağır Roman* cannot be classified as a postmodern narrative or film is due to its fictional structure, which preserves linearity and is based on events. The absence of metafictional elements, the distinctive point of view and the narrator -despite the autobiographical elements- prevents the novel and the film from being classified as postmodern in every aspect.

In terms of both its cinematic and literary manifestations, *Ağır Roman* made a significant avant-garde impact, both in terms of its content and its techniques. The text achieves memorability through its unconventional use of language and its rebellious presentation of the subculture's lifestyle, striving to align with its own reality and internal dynamics as much as possible. The postmodern inspirations it embodies are also a significant factor contributing to the success of both genres.

Conclusion

Kaçan is regarded as one of the most significant Turkish writers of the 1990s, effectively employing postmodern techniques in his oeuvre. The author's distinctive use of language and style sets him apart from his contemporaries, and his work displays striking originality in its portrayal of the marginalised lives of those residing in urban ghettos. The protagonists of Kaçan's works are drawn from a diverse range of individuals, including prostitutes, drug addicts, murderers, gangsters, convicts, and shopkeepers. The author's *Ağır Roman*, which was written in 1990 and contains references to the turbulent socio-political environment of the 1970s, was met with considerable interest at the time of its writing due to its proximity to underground literature. The text approaches the limits of postmodern aesthetics, engaging with modernism through a critique, celebrating mediocrity, and making intertextual references. As a consequence of these innovative aspects and its success, the work was adapted into a film seven years after its publication. The film *Ağır Roman*, a literary adaptation in accordance with its source text, adheres closely to the genre of faithful adaptation in terms of its fidelity to the source material.

Ağır Roman achieved a broad readership in the 1990s, a period when postmodernism was a significant influence on Turkish literature. The work offers insights into both postmodern theory and the nature of a work of art. However, neither the novel nor the film can be considered a postmodern work in its entirety. The novel's treatment of linearity in fiction, characterising the cast of characters, event-based fiction, and unified point of view and narrator diverge from the conventional postmodern narrative. Nevertheless, the postmodern elements that can be clearly observed throughout the entirety of the work make the novel and the film suitable for evaluation and comparison in this respect. The content-based elements that maintain the work's proximity to the purported postmodern aesthetic can be enumerated as follows: negative perceptions and experiences of the public structure, individual and social destruction resulting from politicisation, the disregard of universal moral values, a tendency towards the nostalgic, criticism of purely popular and arabesque culture, a consumption-based economic structure, and a perception of life focused on the moment and pleasure. Concerning technical intertextuality, in addition to pastiche and ironic discourse, the disconnected scene transitions that embody ambiguity and minimalism appear meaningful in the context of the postmodern understanding of art.

In light of the aforementioned analysis, it would be beneficial to initially delineate the analogous elements between the novel and the film. *Ağır Roman* is primarily a work in which the atmosphere is of paramount importance, and the elements of curiosity and suspense are sustained throughout. The principal factor contributing to the success of both the novel and the film is their capacity to sustain this vitality. The messages to be conveyed, the lifestyles of the members of the subculture, and their oppression in the face of life and the system are successfully presented to the reader/viewer in both the novel and the film. The intertextual techniques of pastiche and irony, frequently employed by postmodernists, are utilised to critique modernism. The presentation of the physical environment, the appearance of cultural variables, costumes, and the use of slang, profanity, and jargon are the primary elements utilised similarly and effectively in both works. The primary factors contributing to this success can be attributed to the artistic identities of the author and director, followed by the actors' performances, and

finally, the meticulous delineation of the boundaries between the expectations of the period and the interplay between reality and fiction.

The discrepancies between the novel and the film are primarily evident in the portrayal of events and the evolution of the character's attributes and actions. A number of events depicted in the novel are absent from the film adaptation. This situation can be considered an acceptable deviation for an adapted work. However, the alteration of events and the designation of new perpetrators may be regarded as the most significant discrepancy between the original text and the adaptation, as it has the potential to impact the narrative profoundly. Notwithstanding the author's authorship of the screenplay, the alteration in question denudes the central figures in the cast of characters of their dignity, rendering the change open to criticism. The idealisation of protagonists who create evil with their actions, despite their ostensibly good intentions, in a neighbourhood where evil is rampant ultimately undermines the novel's overall sense of reality and the pervasive atmosphere of malevolence that defines it.

Ağır Roman differentiates itself from the prevailing perception of cinema in its period with its shooting methods. In its period, with techniques such as short, fast scene transitions observed in music videos and commercials, close-ups (zoom), and the occasional inclusion of an indistinct external voice in the editing, it gained an avant-garde and even postmodern identity.

Ultimately, it can be stated that the similarities and differences between the two works are evident when considered independently of one another. Nevertheless, both have achieved notable success in their respective fields. Translated into different languages, awarded, and adapted into various genres such as cinema, TV series, and theatre, *Ağır Roman* can be considered a work that has preserved its originality and proven itself in the history of Turkish art.

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