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Masculine Melancholia in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu"

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu"nda Erkek Melankolisi

Monica Katiboğlu¹  

¹ İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Fakültesi, Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü, İstanbul, Türkiye



Abstract

This article examines how Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's 1914 short story "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" ("Fear of Being Alone") stages a crisis of masculine subjectivity as a problem of narrative form. Although critics have often read the story through the lens of European literary influence, particularly through that of Guy de Maupassant, this article moves beyond such readings by foregrounding the formal contradictions that structure the narrative. Drawing on Philip G. Hadlock's conception of masculine melancholia, a structural condition built into how gendered identity is narrated in patriarchal culture, I argue that the story illustrates not a failure of masculine coherence, but the impossibility of its narrative resolution. Through a close reading of the protagonist's inability to name his psychological condition, his fantasy of being stabilized in language, and the projection of incoherence onto a woman, I show how the story both exposes and conceals the melancholic structure of masculinity. Rather than signaling derivativeness, the story's affinities with Maupassant mark a shared literary-epistemological impasse in which narration becomes the site of a masculinity that cannot narrate itself coherently. I reposition Yakup Kadri's short story as a compelling example of modern Ottoman/Turkish fiction's confrontation of masculinity as both a thematic and formal crisis. In this light, the short story can be read alongside a broader constellation of modern Ottoman/Turkish literary texts that grapple with the contradictions of masculinity as a formal condition of narration itself.

Öz

Bu makale, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun 1914 tarihli "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" adlı kısa hikâyesinde erkek öznenin krizinin anlatı formu düzeyinde sahnelendiğini ileri sürmektedir. Hikâye, çoğunlukla Avrupa edebiyatının, özellikle Guy de Maupassant'ın, etkisiyle okunagelmıştır. Ancak bu çalışma, etki merkezli okumaların ötesine geçerek anlatıyı yapılandıran biçimsel çelişkileri öne çıkarmaktadır. Philip G. Hadlock'un ataerki kültürde toplumsal cinsiyet kimliğinin anlatımına içkin bir yapısal durum olarak tanımladığı "erkek melankolisi" kavramından hareketle, hikâyede erkek kimliğinin bütünlüğünün bir başarısızlık değil, onun anlatısal olarak çözümlenmesinin imkânsızlığı olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Kahramanın psikolojik durumunu adlandıramaması, sabitlenme arzusunu dile getirmesi ve anlatısal tutarsızlığın bir kadın figürüne yansıtılması gibi anlatı unsurları, erkek kimliğinin melankolik yapısını hem açığa çıkarır hem de örter. Maupassant ile kurulan edebî yakınlık, bir türevin göstergesi olmaktan ziyade, anlatının erkek kimliğini tutarlı biçimde kuramadığı ortak bir yazınsal/epistemolojik çıkmaza işaret etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Yakup Kadri'nin söz konusu hikâyesi, modern Osmanlı/Türk edebiyatında erkek kimliğinin hem tematik hem de biçimsel bir kriz olarak ele alınışına dikkate değer önemli bir örnek olarak konumlandırılmaktadır. Bu bakımdan hikâye, anlatının bizatihi biçimsel bir koşulu olarak erkekleğin çelişkileriyle hesaplaşan daha yaygın bir modern Osmanlı/Türk edebî metinler kümesiyle birlikte okunabilir.

Keywords

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu · psychoanalysis · narrative form · masculine subjectivity · masculine melancholia

Anahtar Kelimeler


Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu · psikanaliz · anlatı biçimi · erkek özne · erkek melankolisi



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 Corresponding author | Sorumlu Yazar: Monica Katiboğlu monica.katiboglu@bilgi.edu.tr



Introduction

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's short story "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" (1914) has long been overshadowed by his novels in Turkish literary criticism. When critics do attend to his short fiction, they often frame it through the lens of European literary influence, with particular emphasis on Guy de Maupassant's impact on Yakup Kadri's narrative technique and psychological themes. In his anthology, for instance, Ömer Lekesiz cites Ali Kaş's detailed comparison of the two authors' narrative mechanics.¹ Likewise, Niyazi Akı underlines technical parallels between the two authors and interprets the presence of "pathological types" (*psikopat tipleri*) as evidence of Maupassant's narrative imprint.² This line of interpretation has culminated in Abdulhalim Aydın's comparative study, focused entirely on Maupassant's "Lui?" and Yakup Kadri's "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu," in which Aydın argues that Yakup Kadri's short story is an unsuccessful "imitation" (*taklit*) of Maupassant's short story, attributing its narrative shortcomings to the absence of the lived psychological crisis that, in Aydın's view, makes Maupassant's story so impactful.³

While these comparisons have certainly shed light on Yakup Kadri's short story, they overlook how the psychological disturbance they attribute to foreign influence functions within the story as a narrative problem in its own right. Admittedly, Yakup Kadri himself acknowledged Maupassant's influence on his short story style: "Bunu bilhassa yapmış değilim; bu Maupassant'ın tesiridir ve onun gibi yapmak isteyişten ibarettir. Çünkü aynı tipler memleketimizde de vardır" ("I did not do this deliberately; it is Maupassant's influence and amounts simply to a desire to write like him [lit., 'to do as he does']. For the same types exist in our country as well").⁴ There was certainly a point of recognition between Maupassant's characters and the character types that Yakup Kadri observed in his own environment. Yet I suggest that this recognition lies beyond any notion of borrowed themes and character types; it signals a deeper structural affinity. What resonates across both authors' works is a shared preoccupation with the internal contradictions of masculine subjectivity, which become visible in the act of narration. Yakup Kadri's story, written in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, participates in a constellation of fictional texts (including his own novels) through which questions of masculinity are raised as a problem of authority and coherence.⁵

In contrast to previous critics who have interpreted psychological disturbance in Yakup Kadri's protagonists as evidence of thematic borrowing, Ali Serdar reads these disturbances as recurring narrative patterns that structure male subjectivity across Yakup Kadri's fiction, whether early or mature.⁶ Through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, Serdar identifies shared traits like emotional emptiness, personality disorder, and dysfunctional relations with women in male protagonists who struggle to form coherent selves and sustain intimacy. Even though Serdar's study is rooted in character psychology, his insights point to something more foundational: that male subjectivity in Yakup Kadri's fiction consistently collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. This recurring collapse invites further consideration of how Yakup Kadri's fiction engages with the deeper contradictions embedded in the patriarchal logic of gender itself.

It is primarily this kind of structural condition that Philip G. Hadlock terms "masculine melancholia." Drawing on Freud, Hadlock defines melancholia not as a state of personal grief but as a persistent, structural condition built into the way masculine identity is imagined and narrated in patriarchal culture.

¹Ömer Lekesiz, *Yeni Türk Edebiyatında Öykü* (Istanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 1997), 154.

²Niyazi Akı, *Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu: İnsan-Eser-Fikir-Üslûp* (1960; İstanbul: İletişim, 2015), 85. Indeed, Akı states specifically about "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu": "Lakin bu benzerliklerden daha mühim olan cihet, Maupassant'ın Yakup Kadri'yi fert psikolojisini ve bilhassa insanın şuurlu faaliyetini görmeye alıştırmasıdır" ("Yet more important than these similarities is the fact that Maupassant accustomed Yakup Kadri to attending to individual psychology, and especially to the workings of the human subconscious") (86).

³Abdulhalim Aydın, "Maupassant'ın Lui?si ile Yakup Kadri'nin *Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu* Adlı Öykülerinde Ruhsal Bir Hastalık Olarak Yalnızlık Duygusu," *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 28, no. 1 (2018).

⁴Quoted in Akı, *Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu*, 80.

⁵See Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1990), especially the discussion of paternal authority and generational rupture; and Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004), on the anxieties of male subjectivity in Tanzimat and early Republican literature.

⁶Ali Serdar, "Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun Romanlarında Cinsellik" (MA diss., Bilkent University, 2002).

This condition relies on long-standing assumptions about male primacy and female subordination. In his reading of Maupassant, Hadlock demonstrates how male narrator-protagonists appear to assert control and symbolic mastery, producing a particular connection between writing and masculine empowerment.⁷ But he also shows how this mastery is haunted by internal contradictions, especially the need to conceal the fragility or passivity that lies beneath the surface of masculine self-assurance.⁸ In this way, melancholia does not arise from a failure of empowerment, as one might expect, but rather from the illusion of empowerment itself. Writing, Hadlock argues, plays an important role in maintaining this illusion: it gives the appearance of mastery, even as it indirectly exposes the internal contradictions that make such mastery unsustainable.⁹

I turn to Hadlock in order to place Yakup Kadri's narrative within a broader literary logic in which writing both exposes and conceals the contradictions of masculine identity. I want to suggest that both Maupassant and Yakup Kadri arrive, though working through different historical and linguistic avenues, at a shared literary-epistemological impasse: narration becomes the privileged space where masculine instability is revealed but ultimately the narration inevitably renders the resolution of melancholia impossible. Viewed in this light, Yakup Kadri's "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" can be understood as illustrating how the illusion of a coherent masculine self gives rise to narrative that is compelled to speak, yet structurally incapable of resolving the contradictions it reveals.¹⁰ My reading therefore reframes what has often been construed as an imitative story as, in fact, a text that foregrounds the contradictions of masculine subjectivity itself. Through a close reading of the story, I show how the narrator's inability to name or articulate his psychological condition, his fantasy of being named by another, and the positioning of woman as screen function as narrative strategies that paradoxically expose and mask the fault lines in the masculine subject.

1. Melancholia and Gender

Before turning to the close reading of Yakup Kadri's short story, however, it is necessary to pause and specify what is meant here by melancholia as a gendered and narrative structure. Let me state immediately that this study does not treat melancholia as an emotional state or psychological disposition, as the term is conventionally understood. Instead, it treats melancholia as a structural condition embedded in formations of subjectivity and narration in patriarchy. In this vein, this section briefly identifies the gendered and historical conditions under which melancholia functions as a structural narrative dilemma. In his seminal essay of 1917, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud distinguishes melancholia from mourning in that in mourning, the grieving process leads one to let go of the lost love object while in melancholia, one cannot let go of it, and thus the grieving process cannot end. Since the lost object is no longer present, the negative feelings associated with loss, such as resentment, guilt, and self-reproach, are introjected and directed against the ego, causing the symptoms identifiable in the melancholic subject such as uncontrollable self-berating and withdrawal from the world. The lost object is internalized into the ego, which brings about a splitting of the ego, and the melancholic subject's self-reproaches take on a masochistic quality, where the ego becomes its own object of aggression.¹¹ Once internalized in this way, the grieving process persists indefinitely. What matters for the purposes of this study, however, is less the clinical description of these symptoms than Freud's conceptualization of melancholia as a form of loss that cannot be fully worked through or resolved.

⁷Philip G. Hadlock, "The Light Continent: On Melancholia and Masculinity in Maupassant's 'Lui?' and 'Une famille,'" *Style* 35, no. 1 (2001), 81.

⁸Hadlock, "The Light Continent," 82.

⁹Hadlock, "The Light Continent," 82.

¹⁰I want to stress that my interest lies not in comparing Yakup Kadri's short story to Maupassant's "Lui?" The problem with comparison of this kind is that it generally leads to posing the French story as "original," because there first, to which the Turkish "copy" must somehow measure up. In that critical model, the French story becomes the grid of intelligibility, masking the ways in which the Turkish story signifies in its own right.

¹¹In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud characterizes this self-aggression as sadism turned inward. The concept of "moral masochism" is introduced later, in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924).

Freud's account of melancholia, while rich in theoretical insight and psychoanalytic concepts, avoids addressing why he construes the melancholic subject as specifically male, which has attracted much attention from feminist critics. For instance, Juliana Schiesari argues that Freud's understanding of melancholia as belonging to masculine subjects only is, in fact, historical, extending as early as Ficino, where melancholia "appears as a specific representational form for male creativity, one whose practice converted the feeling of disempowerment into a privileged artifact."¹² Critically, Schiesari demonstrates through readings of canonical texts from Aristotle to Shakespeare that melancholia is a culturally authorized mode through which masculine subjects transform unresolved loss into intellectual or aesthetic superiority over the feminized other. Although Schiesari traces a historical genealogy that predates Maupassant, this genealogy helps clarify the literary tradition within which his narrators become readable as melancholic masculine subjects. This point is important because Hadlock implicitly relies on this tradition of viewing melancholia as a privileged masculine position in his conceptualization of "masculine melancholia" as a narrative condition of masculine subjectivity.

Melancholia, of course, takes historically specific forms depending on how masculinity and narrative coherence are organized in a given social order. It would thus be a mistake to claim melancholia as a transhistorical condition. What travels across contexts is less a matter of sentiments or themes and more precisely a structural dilemma whose form is locally produced and made meaningful. Although historical conditions do not explain the presence of the structural condition of masculine melancholia, they shape the interpretive framing within which masculine coherence is imagined through narration. In Yakup Kadri's case, as Murat Belge observes, fiction beginning in the 1920s operates within a historical context in which narration is burdened with the task to render social and historical processes intelligible.¹³ This expectation establishes narration's explanatory force as a historically salient value. Belge's citation of Yakup Kadri's reflection on his own writing as historically conditioned to "write the nation" exemplifies this context with unusual clarity: "Ben Proust gibi yazmak istiyordum, ama olmadı; koşullar beni Balzac gibi bir yazar yaptı" ("I wanted to write like Proust, but it didn't happen; circumstances made me a writer like Balzac").¹⁴ This formulation indexes a tension between desire (wanting to write in the style of Proust) and narrative obligation that Yakup Kadri comes to recognize retrospectively as shaped by historical conditions.¹⁵ Seen from this perspective, Belge's account offers a vocabulary for thinking about how narration is compelled to secure coherence in response to historically situated demands. In "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu," this tension is visible at an earlier moment and at the level of a subject's effort to stabilize himself through narration. Coherence remains the operative horizon of narration, yet it emerges only through instability. It is at this level of narration that the following reading approaches "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu," beginning with the scene in which Macit first attempts to narrate himself into coherence.

2. Naming as Melancholic Fantasy of Coherence

The story opens at a *yalı* ("waterside mansion") on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus, where four young men, or more precisely, the protagonist Macit and his three friends, recline in a salon overlooking the sea and

¹²Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 8.

¹³Specifically, Murat Belge states: "Kurulmakta olan 'modern Türkiye'ye, bu kurma çabasına,' onun da yazdığı romanlarla katkıda bulunması bekleniyordu. *Kiralık Konak* Çanakkale Savaşı ile bitiyordu. *Sodom ve Gomora* (1928) İstanbul'un işgali dönemini ele aldı" ("He was expected to contribute, through the novels he wrote, to the construction of the emerging 'modern Turkey,' to this very project of construction. *Kiralık Konak* [1922] ends with the Gallipoli War. *Sodom and Gomora* (1928) takes up the period of the occupation of Istanbul"). For these and additional examples, see Murat Belge, "Önsöz: Yakup Kadri Üzerine," in *Huzursuz Bir Ruhun Panoraması: Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun Edebiyat ve Düşünce Dünyası*, eds. Yalçın Çakmak and Özge Dikmen (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2022), 13.

¹⁴Belge, "Önsöz," 12.

¹⁵This split between desire and obligation, as expressed in Belge's quotation of Yakup Kadri, resonates with broader sociological critiques of modern masculinity. For instance, Victor Seidler argues that modern masculine subjectivity is organized around the moral authority of reason, producing a persistent fragmentation between lived experience, desire, and the discursive demands of a coherent, rational selfhood. See Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

the darkening pink hues of the sunset. The setting, with its fading light, drowsy atmosphere, and physical languor, evokes a scene of relaxed intimacy: "yorgun, tembel, kanapelere, şezlonklara uzanmışlardı" ("they were tired, languid, lounging on sofas and chaise longues").¹⁶ But this serene atmosphere quickly gives way to tension when Macit announces that he must leave to return to Ernestine. His friends' incredulity occasions Macit's detailed explanation as to why he is unable to separate from her and therefore must endure her *hırçın* ("ill-tempered") and *asabi* ("irritable") nature. It is in this setting that Macit's melancholia unfolds through the act of telling his story.

This opening scene is organized around the promise of explanation: as his friends want to know his psychological condition that attaches him to Ernestine, Macit promises them (and by extension, the reader) insights into the origins of his psychological disturbance, the very rationale for narrating his story. This offer sets up what Roland Barthes describes as a "narrative contract,"¹⁷ a pact in which the narrator pledges insight into his mental state. But the story proceeds to frustrate this promise at every turn. What becomes immediately clear is that Macit struggles to name his condition with certainty. Groping for words to describe it, he stammers out, "bu hastalık, bu humma, bu cinnet ne dersiniz deyiniz" ("this illness, this fever, this insanity, call it what you will").¹⁸ At a surface-level reading, this clearly suggests diagnostic ambiguity. But on a deeper level, this is an open-ended formulation that marks a symbolic failure—a failure of naming, and with it, of stabilizing the self within language.

This failure is not incidental; it is structural. His narrative is organized around two events that show how the desire to know is entangled with failure and misrecognition. The first event concerns his inability to separate from Ernestine, a Parisian prostitute whom he hardly knows and about whom he has conflicting feelings. Ernestine becomes, as I show below, both the object of his desire and a mirror onto which he projects his epistemic illusion, understood here as the belief that his experience can be made coherent through explanation, and gendered anxiety. Macit's friends, who are like-minded young men, fail to understand why Macit is unable to separate from Ernestine, a woman they find a "monstrosity" (*ucube*), and thus Macit must attempt to explain to them his psychological malady in relation to her. The second event involves his hallucinations experienced during his stay in a hotel abroad in Paris, where spatial dislocation triggers a terrifying encounter with distorted images of himself in the mirror that Macit cannot integrate. Put differently, Macit's hallucinatory experience destabilizes his attempts to assert a stable "I." Together, these two events produce a narrative that illustrates its own inability to resolve the masculine subject's internal contradictions.

The internal contradictions that Hadlock describes as central to masculine melancholia, that is, the structural contradiction embedded in the patriarchal subject, take a spatially mediated form in Yakup Kadri's short story. For Hadlock, melancholia is triggered when the illusion of symbolic mastery begins to break down. In "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu," this breakdown is catalyzed by a moment of geographical dislocation: Macit's departure from Istanbul marks the beginning of a narrative that cannot sustain coherence. His narrative is prompted by a scene of geographical displacement, which brings to the surface the latent psychic contradictions already embedded in his masculine subjectivity. This breakdown is made visible through Macit's transition of geographical location and how the representation of his location goes from evoking stability to instability. After the very brief introduction by a third-person narrator who sets the scene, Macit's first-person narrative starts with his awareness of his own alienation, an awareness that is triggered by his feeling of uprootedness when he leaves Istanbul for Paris on a passenger ship. His departure from Istanbul

¹⁶Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam* (Istanbul: Remzi, 1943), 86. All quotes in this study are taken from Yakup Kadri's 1943 edition.

¹⁷As Roland Barthes argues, narrative operates through a shared semiotic structure that establishes expectations between text and reader. This is a kind of narrative contract that promises interpretive coherence or resolution. Yet, as Hadlock shows in his reading of "Le Horla," and as I argue in my reading of "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu," that promise is structurally undermined by the very narrative that seeks to fulfill it. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) and Philip G. Hadlock, "Telling Madness and Masculinity in Maupassant's 'Le Horla,'" *L'Esprit Créateur* 43, no. 3 (2003).

¹⁸Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 89.

initiates the crisis as he watches the “domes” (*kubbeler*) and “minarets” (*minareler*), the familiar cityscape of his home city, disappear from view:

Bütün bunlar, bu sislenen, bu gittikçe silik bir levha halini alan ve bazı yerleri küçülerek kaybolan şeyler, bu önümde kaçan, bu önümde uzaklaşan ve bir şüphei rüyetle artık kesif bir bulut haline giren kütlei müphem benim bütün bir mazim, benim bütün bir benliğim idi; benim bana ait neyim varsa hepsi, hepsi orada meftundu: Evim, dostlarım, sevdiklerim... Hepsi... Ve ben uzaklaşıyordum. Sizi temin ederim ki o gün bana bir adem hissi geldi, etrafımda bir boşluk açıldı: Derin, siyah bir boşluk... Ve ben bundan tecerrüt edemedim. Bu boşluk Avrupada Paris'te daha ziyade derinleşerek vahim ve müellim, Ernestine'e rastgeldiğim geceye kadar beni bırakmadı.¹⁹

(All of this, these things that grew hazy, these things that gradually turned into a faint tableau and vanished in places that they diminished, these things that fled before me, that receded from my sight, and that, through a blurred vision, congealed into a dense cloud of ambiguity, were my entire past, my entire being. Everything that belonged to me, all of it was buried there: my home, my friends, those I loved... all of it. And I was moving away. I assure you that on that day I felt a sense of non-being, as though a void had opened up around me: a deep, black void. And I could not detach myself from it. That void deepened even further in Europe, in Paris, becoming grave and painful, and it did not leave me until the night I encountered Ernestine.)

What is immediately manifest here is that Macit's description of Istanbul functions as an anchoring scene in the sense that it is grammatically and emotionally invested in a fantasy of stability, attachment, and temporal continuity (he states that Istanbul is the place of his “past,” or *mazi*). Istanbul, as Macit retroactively frames it, is the place of his historical and affective identity, giving the sense that it poses as a prelapsarian space for him. This sense is amplified by his departure from Istanbul because the departure has an irrevocable impact on his sense of psychological stability. As he watches from the ship all that constitutes his identity slowly disappear, his self-certainty increasingly becomes shrouded in doubt as he feels disconnected from his homeland. What might be easily construed as “homesickness,”²⁰ by Macit's almost nostalgic longing for his sense of self before his departure, is instead a stripping away of the conditions that once allowed him to imagine himself as coherent.

This shift from Istanbul to Paris, and the instability it causes, is formally significant as it is manifest in the narration itself. His description of Istanbul imbued with his emotional attachment to it and its history contrasts sharply with his description of Paris, the modern capital of the world, emptied of affect and producing sensory overload: “etrafımızda bir çok halk, otomobiller, elektrikli tramvaylar, otobüsler vardı. Bir çok gürültüler işitiyordum” (“There were many people around us, automobiles, electric trams, and buses. I could hear a lot of noise”).²¹ The Parisian crowds and the transitory hubbub of the streets throw Macit's personal stability into even more uncertainty. The experience of the fragmentary and present-centric mode of Paris gets emphasized in Macit's attempt to recall his physical trajectory from customs to his hotel evoking narrative disorientation:

Bu, evvelâ, gayet kalabalık, gayet gürültülü, gözleri, kulakları, dimağı yumruklayan bir gümrüktü. Sonra yıldırım gibi bir tren; mühip bir gar, daha sonra, muhteşem, müzeyyen, yüksek bir takım binalar, geniş, temiz, şaşıaadar caddeler... Oturan, kalkan, koşan, bağırان bir sürü halk... Ebkem bir insan uğultusu, mermer merdivenli, beyaz bir otel, temiz bir yatak odası.²²

(First, it was an extremely crowded, extremely noisy customs hall, a place that pummeled the eyes, the ears, the brain. Then a train like lightning; an imposing station, and then a set of magnificent, ornamented,

¹⁹Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 88.

²⁰Aydın, “Maupassant'ın *Lui?si*,” 20. As Aydın points out, Macit insists that his malady is not homesickness.

²¹Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 89.

²²Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 90.

tall buildings, wide, clean, glittering avenues... Crowds of people sitting, rising, running, shouting... A mute human roar, a white hotel with marble staircases, a clean bedroom.)

Here, Macit's epistemophilic drive, that is, his masculine compulsion to map, categorize, and master space, is thwarted at every turn.²³ His description of Paris offers no coherent spatial mapping, only a series of disjointed sensory impressions, typographically marked by ellipses, colons, and parataxis. Indeed, this incoherency is expressed at the level of the narrative itself. Completely different from the depiction of Istanbul, which was slowly and steadily disappearing from view and expressed in complete thoughts, the language style with excessive punctuation in the fragmentary depiction of Paris heralds a concern about his mental state. There is a sense of danger concerning his state of mind because he himself begins losing control of it, as Macit acknowledges the spatial dislocation leads to the dissolution of the self when he says, "ben 'beni' kaybediyordum" ("I was losing 'me'").²⁴ The spatial displacement, then, renders melancholia legible precisely where the illusion of epistemic mastery collapses—though the desire for it persists.

Macit's vulnerability, stemming from his inability to master his surroundings in Paris, takes the form of a mirror scene that articulates a confrontation with the impossibility of epistemic mastery once he arrives to his hotel room. As I have already noted, his melancholia can be glimpsed through his failure to produce the symbolic coherence he initially promises. This failure assumes a hallucinatory form where his self-perception disintegrates into linguistic doubling and instability. Already, his statement above, "ben 'beni' kaybediyordum," suggests a psychic and linguistic split: Macit appears both as a speaking subject and as the object of linguistic address. The narrative rapidly intensifies the destabilization of Macit's identity, driven by his increasingly desperate attempts to anchor himself through language. In his hotel room, his first sight is his own reflection in the mirror, which triggers an immediate and inexplicable fear, causing him to look away. But the encounter with his image prompts him to ask probing, recursive questions: "Ben kimdim? Burası neresiydi?" ("Who was I? Where was this place?").²⁵ These questions suggest that the hallucination Macit experiences in the mirror is a narrative expression of his inability to explain his psychological condition. Put differently, Macit's questions imply that he can no longer locate himself within a stable sense of identity or place. In Hadlock's terms, both the failure to explain and the hallucination are formal symptoms of a deeper symbolic impasse: the melancholic contradiction between the desire for epistemic mastery and the structural impossibility of achieving it.

When Macit sees himself in the mirror again, he experiences the full force of this contradiction: "Aynada hayalim bana bakıyordu ve ben 'bana' diyordum ki: 'Macit! Sen burada, Paris'te bu büyük şehrin bir otelinde, bu otelin bir aynasındasın!' ve gülüyordum, ve sonra, bu gülüşte bir deli sesi bularak kendimden korkuyordum" ("In the mirror my image was looking at me, and I was saying to 'me': 'Macit! You are here, in Paris, in a hotel in this great city, in the mirror of this hotel!' and I was laughing, and then, finding in that laughter the voice of a madman, I was afraid of myself").²⁶ His own reflection responds with a "crazy voice" (*deli sesi*), transforming what should be a scene of identification into one of uncanny doubling and self-alienation.²⁷ This act of naming himself attempts to stabilize his identity through language (what Lacan would call the symbolic realm). But instead, this self-address exacerbates his fear and sense of estrangement. This crisis culminates in Macit's overwhelming fear of losing control of his voice and body. The "crazy laugh" turns into uncontrolled movements of his body (he goes on to explain that he loses control of his hands after he runs out of his hotel room to escape being alone and tries in vain to find comfort in having dinner with the other hotel guests).

²³Drawing on psychoanalytical theory, Hadlock defines the Freudian concept epistemophilia as "the quest for knowledge through bodily desire and knowing as bodily desire." Hadlock, "The Light Continent," 81.

²⁴Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 89.

²⁵Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 90.

²⁶Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 91.

²⁷Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

After his terrifying experience in the mirror, Macit turns toward the fantasy of being named by another as the resolution of his melancholia, or what he specifically terms "salvation" (*rehaâver*).²⁸ Indeed, he insists that being hailed by name would reconstitute his self-certainty. But the narrative treats this fantasy as a provisional solution because it is only a way of covering over the psychological and symbolic incoherence that structures his malady. This is manifest in Macit's declaration: "tanıdığım bir ses ismimi söyleyiverse; sadece: 'Macit!..' diye bağırıverse, birden kendiliğime avdet edecek ve varlığımdan emin olacaktım ve birden bu etrafımdaki boşluk dağılacaktı" ("if a familiar voice were only to speak my name, if it were only to cry out, 'Macit!..', I would suddenly return to myself and be certain of my own existence, and in an instant the emptiness around me would disperse).²⁹ Macit's belief in the stabilizing effect of being named, as I will show, does nothing to resolve internal contradictions of the masculine subject; it only sustains the illusion of coherence by displacing its failure onto the symbolic act itself. Naming will turn out to be a covering structure that momentarily wards off the void without resolving the problem. In order to see this clearly, we must consider the role of the other in calling his name.

3. Woman as Melancholic Screen

Macit's fantasy of being named exposes his vulnerability, but this vulnerability is specifically linked to passivity because his insistence on a stabilizing address renders him a subject who does not act so much as wait to be constituted by the other. This fantasy, however, cannot be acknowledged within the logic of masculine identity, which must disavow its own passivity and vulnerability. As Hadlock posits, masculine melancholia is structured around the repression of such passivity and vulnerability, which must then be projected onto an external figure, a woman (or feminized other) who becomes the screen for what masculinity cannot internalize without undoing itself.³⁰ In Yakup Kadri's story, the exposure and then disavowal of male passivity finds expression in stages. First, he attempts to address himself in the mirror: "'Macit! Macit!' diye sesleniyordum ve kendi sesim bana yabancı, korkunç geliyor, bana herasâlut raşeler veriyordu" ("I was calling out, 'Macit! Macit!' and my own voice sounded strange and terrifying to me, giving me sudden shudders").³¹ Addressing himself in the mirror turns out to be a failure; his voice sounds foreign and terrifying, which only increases his sense of losing control of himself. His turn to the hotel maid who enters his room offers no relief; her address, "monsieur" (*mösyö*), the customary title used to address any man in French, is "catastrophic" (*fecaat*) for him because it fails on several levels. Instead of stabilizing him within the symbolic, it intensifies his sense of estrangement. But more importantly, this address is purely functional, devoid of the affective or erotic investment that Macit's narrative implicitly demands.

This demand for desire is made clear in Ernestine's address. It is only Ernestine, the Parisian prostitute, who inquires about his name and addresses him erotically, which he claims brings him relief. After a few nights of being gripped with the fear of going "crazy," Macit cannot bear his increasingly terrifying experience of his hallucinations and finally runs out into the street at night, and after much roaming, he becomes lost. This is the moment where Ernestine happens on him for the first time and, taking pity on him for being foreign and lost, she accompanies him back to his hotel. In his hotel room, she asks for his name. When she learns it, she parrots his name back to him: "'Macit! Macit!' Bir kaç defa bu kelimeyi tekrar etti. Sonra garip bir heyecan ve tehalükle boynuma atıldı: Macidim, Macidim diye bağırdı ve beni yüzümden, gözlerimden ve bıyıklarımın öpmeğe başladı" ("Macit! Macit!' She repeated the word several times. Then, with a strange excitement and urgency, she threw herself around my neck. 'My Macit, my Macit,' she cried, and began to kiss me on my face, my eyes, and my moustache").³² Ernestine's address, saturated with desire, gives the

²⁸Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 92.

²⁹Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 92.

³⁰Hadlock, "The Light Continent," 88.

³¹Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 92.

³²Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 95.

illusion of stabilizing his mental state, endowing him with a sense of self-certainty; for, it is precisely at this moment that Macit breaks his narrative to explain to his listeners that Ernestine had inexplicably "returned [him] to life" ("hayata avdet etmişim").³³ Naming here is clearly an erotic act: it is through her invested, desirous voice that Macit experiences himself as reconstituted. But, quite clearly, the erotics of naming lies in asymmetry because his passivity is momentarily masked by the affective power of her address, which repositions him not as one who needs rescue, but as one who is desired. In this way, the narrative reverses the power dynamics at play and disavows Macit's dependency by scripting her as the subject of desire. What appears as restoration is, in fact, the melancholic defense. It is a projection that conceals incoherence beneath the fantasy of being desired through naming.

What is implicit in the narrative is that portraying Ernestine as the one who desires transforms her into a screen onto which Macit projects his psychological disturbance, or more specifically, his passivity, dependency, in short, his incoherence. This dynamic, while articulated here through the psychoanalytic logic of melancholic projection, also resonates with a pattern Ali Serdar identifies across Yakup Kadri's fiction. As Serdar observes, Yakup Kadri's male characters forge problematic relationships with women, onto which they project their unresolved psychic tensions.³⁴ Macit's inability to sustain intimacy with Ernestine thus echoes a broader narrative pattern in Yakup Kadri's work, where male characters repeatedly fail in their relationships with woman. Serdar interprets this projection as a symptom of narcissistic wounding within the male protagonist.³⁵ I build on Serdar's insight by suggesting that the pattern Serdar identifies is not only symptomatic but also structural. That is to say, these projections are not only failures of psychic integration but melancholic strategies through which masculine identity sustains itself by externalizing its own fragility. Specifically, in Hadlock's sense, the melancholic male subject disavows these destabilizing traits by locating them in the feminized other, who becomes the screen onto which male passivity is projected and thereby cast off.

Ernestine is specifically an objectified woman of desire, who is presented as the "solution" to Macit's male crisis. In Suzanne Guerlac's reading of Georges Bataille's reconceptualization of Hegel's concept of recognition in gendered terms,³⁶ the resolution of a male crisis can only happen in an "erotic object [that] must not only be a woman, but a woman as object."³⁷ This means that the woman must be the ultimate demonstrator of the subjugation of women, as the available, non-threatening, and disposable other, i.e., a prostitute. Ernestine's status as prostitute clearly fulfills this function. But Yakup Kadri takes woman as object a step further because Macit's projection depends on her being doubly objectified. For Ernestine is not only an objectified woman of desire, she is also foreign, as a European woman, which adds alterity to the projection. After all, he cannot separate from her even after he returns to Istanbul. Her status as a European prostitute makes her structurally unknowable and culturally opaque, and this amplifies her capacity to serve as a surface of projection. In terms of gender, no male figure in the story, be it the nameless friend who escorts him to the hotel, nor the companions who listen to his story in Istanbul, can stabilize him. Nor can the hotel maid, who addresses him impersonally as "monsieur," which we might read as a refusal to perform the erotics of naming. Only Ernestine, the Parisian prostitute, provides the necessary configuration of eroticism, subjection, and alterity that allows Macit to imagine himself as coherent. That he cannot separate from her even after his return to Istanbul suggests that the melancholic fantasy she embodies is structural rather than temporary. Ernestine's function allows Macit's incoherence to be veiled because her eroticism masks his passivity.

³³Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 95.

³⁴Serdar, "Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun Romanlarında Cinsellik," 97.

³⁵Serdar, "Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu'nun Romanlarında Cinsellik," 38. Serdar describes Ahmet Kerim from *Hüküm Gecesi* with the specific phrasing "narcissistic wound" and links this psychological trauma to his personality disturbance.

³⁶See Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987).

³⁷Suzanne Guerlac, *Literary Polemics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25.

Paradoxically, Ernestine also masks Macit's infantilization and emotional fragility through a maternal register that is manifest from the start. If Ernestine as prostitute and Ernestine as mother figure seem contradictory, Julia Kristeva observes that melancholia gives rise to a series of contradictory identifications, such as "tyrannical judge and victim, unreachable ideal or sick person beyond recovery," that the imagination attempts to reconcile.³⁸ Ernestine embodies just such a contradiction. In this doubling of objectification, both erotic and maternal, Ernestine becomes the melancholic screen *par excellence*. She is a figure onto whom Macit can displace both his psychic dependency and his repudiated vulnerability as a way to maintain the illusion of masculine coherence. This becomes especially evident in the way that Macit's narrative portrays her as a maternal figure who fulfills his need for a mother's love and protection to heal his childhood traumas. In their first encounter, Macit describes himself as a child and Ernestine as mother-like.³⁹ Macit is, in his own words, something of an "orphan," as he has lost his mother as a young child. He tells his listeners that this is one of the two most traumatic moments of his life. He explains that the other most traumatic moment was his travel to Europe. These two moments of trauma coalesce. As he departs Istanbul, Macit describes himself as crying like "an orphan child" ("yetim bir çocuk").⁴⁰ When Ernestine first happens upon Macit in the streets of Paris and learns that he has lost his hotel, she exclaims, "Budala çocuk! İster misin seni otele kadar götürüyüm" ("Silly child! Do you want me to take you to your hotel?").⁴¹ Ernestine's first role for Macit is that of a savior of sorts, a mother-like role that puts him into the position of a child. Not only does she call him a child, but when she does, she changes her address to him from the formal (*siz*) to the familiar (*sen*). And finally, when she spends the night with him, he finds relief from his distress in her mother-like arms: "Tâ sabaha kadar ben, onun sinesinde yeni doğmuş bir çocuk huzur ile uyudum" ("Until morning, I slept peacefully in her bosom, like a newborn child").⁴²

Even if Macit appears to have solved his psychological disturbance, his attachment to Ernestine enacts the melancholic paradox: dependency must be continuously sustained, but without ever being openly acknowledged. The morning after the night they spend together, Macit watches Ernestine get ready in the mirror and is struck that she has lost all her charm that she had had the night before. And yet, when she reaches for the door to leave, he is seized by a violent desire to keep her with him indefinitely: "O dakikada bana ne oldu? bilmiyorum. Fakat birdenbire ruhumun derinliklerinde bu giden kadına karşı galebe çalınamaz anî ve acı ihtiyaç, anî, acı ve şedit bir ihtiyaç uyandı" ("What happened to me at that moment? I don't know. But all at once, deep within my soul, an irresistible, sudden, and painful need for this departing woman arose, a sudden, painful, and violent need").⁴³ His performative gesture—arms outstretched, theatrically imploring her not to go—is more uncannily self-aware than spontaneous. This aestheticization of dependency, its transformation into a scene, illustrates how the melancholic self preserves the illusion of autonomy. By staging its incoherence as romantic urgency, it converts vulnerability into the appearance of agency: a scripted form of possession that masks helplessness as desire.

The narrator's refusal to recount Ernestine's reply only underscores her function as a screen and implies that she will always be just that. That her answer to Macit's plea is elided from the narrative and that her voice is never heard again forecloses any possibility of agency. But even more importantly, her silence protects Macit's fantasy of rational coherence because it allows the narrative to preserve the illusion that his agency has been restored. It does so by transforming her into a function, and it is in this way that Ernestine becomes, in Bataille's terms, the "infinitely available object,"⁴⁴ not necessarily in the sense that

³⁸Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 167.

³⁹As Ernestine is first described by Macit and Şevket as *hırçın* and *asabi* (85), we might understand her not as the caring and nurturing mother, but as a difficult mother figure.

⁴⁰Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 88.

⁴¹Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 94.

⁴²Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 96.

⁴³Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 96-97.

⁴⁴Guerlac, *Literary Polemics*, 25.

she is compliant, but because the narrative strips her of the capacity to withhold. Because Macit's symbolic mastery takes the form of withholding her answer, his own narrative can remain unchallenged.

This dynamic, however, only means that Macit's melancholia sustains itself through an unresolved economy of projection and misrecognition. In other words, in order to preserve the illusion of rationality, Macit must continually displace his psychic dependency onto Ernestine, relying on her as a stabilizing other while simultaneously resenting her for it:

Her defasında, her ayrılmak istedikçe bana meş'um yalnız kalmak korkusu geliyor ve bu beni her teşebbüsten menediyor. Size yemin ederim ki değil, o kadına karşı kalbimde minimini bir aşk, ufacak bir muhabbet, bir temayül bile yok. Hattâ biraz ondan nefret ediyorum. Çünkü o benim gençliğimin ilâhî hırslarını, şehvetlerini, telezzüatını sıksa kollarının arasında ölüme mahkûm etti, gömdü. Fakat ne yapayım? Hep bunlara rağmen ayrılamıyorum. Bu benden daha kuvvetli... Yalnız kalmaktan korkuyorum. Daima o...⁴⁵

(Each time, every time I try to leave, the cursed fear of being left alone comes over me, and it prevents me from every attempt. I swear to you that in my heart there is not even the tiniest love for that woman, not the smallest affection, not even an inclination. I even hate her a little. For she has condemned me to death and buried within her scrawny arms the divine ambitions, desires, and pleasures of my youth. And yet, what can I do? In spite of all this, I can't leave her. This is stronger than I am... I'm afraid of being alone. Always her...)

On the surface, Macit's final words might be taken as a confession of vulnerability or even an admission of passivity, which would put into question the logic of Ernestine's function as feminized other who absorbs these very aspects. But, upon closer inspection, these words lay bare the melancholic structure in its most recursive and unresolved form. Macit insists that he feels no affection, "not even the tiniest love," and even goes so far as to claim hatred toward Ernestine. But this hatred is nothing more than symptomatic. His desire to leave her is immediately undone by a fear of being alone that he cannot master, and the repetition of "Daima o..." ("Always her...") becomes the melancholic refrain through which identity attempts, and fails, to stabilize itself. Melancholia is sustained, according to Hadlock, by epistemophilic contradiction instead of by resolution. The very purpose of Macit's story is to explain his condition to his friends, a condition that he himself wants to understand. But the story illustrates that this desire to know is fundamentally at odds with what that knowledge would expose: namely, his own passivity and vulnerability. It is in this way that this contradictory drive operates through narration: the narrative must move forward, not to resolve the contradictions of masculinity, but to sustain the fantasy that it is containable. This means that what appears as a confession is instead a mode of narration that conceals dependency even as it turns on it. In this way, Yakup Kadri's short story illustrates how incoherence is at the heart of masculine subjectivity through writing, which under patriarchy, cannot resolve what it must nevertheless endlessly articulate.

Conclusion

As I have shown, the narrative arc of "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" illustrates how male subjectivity is structured by the very narrative forms through which it seeks coherence. Macit's repeated attempts to articulate his condition, to stabilize himself in language through the fantasy of being named, and to position Ernestine as both erotic and maternal screen onto which he projects his own incoherencies, expose the melancholic grammar of masculine identity even as they work to conceal it. My close reading of the short story through the lens of masculine melancholia helps me shed light on how the short story illustrates a confrontation with the internal contradictions of patriarchal gender structures in the way that they are embedded in the very logic of narration. The story does so not so much by suggesting the failure of masculine empowerment than by pointing to its structural impossibility. This is a condition that writing makes both

⁴⁵Karaosmanoğlu, *Bir Serencam*, 97.

visible and conceals. From this perspective, the story's affinities with Maupassant's short story should be read less as evidence of derivativeness and more as signs of a shared literary logic that grapples with the narrative impasse of masculine subjectivity.

Drawing on Hadlock's conception of masculine melancholia, I have employed his insights in order to demonstrate how Yakup Kadri's story exposes the contradictions of masculine subjectivity embedded in the very forms meant to articulate them. In this sense, Hadlock's concept helps me accentuate a structural affinity rather than a genealogical debt with writers like Maupassant. It also helps me show that even in his short fiction, often considered secondary to his novels, Yakup Kadri was already engaging the literary and psychological structures through which modern masculine subjectivities were being confronted. "Yalnız Kalmak Korkusu" can thus be read alongside a broader constellation of modern Ottoman/Turkish literary texts that grapple with the contradictions of masculinity at the level of thematic context and, more importantly, at the level of the formal condition of narration itself.



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Author Details	Monica Katiboğlu (Dr. Öğr. Üyesi)
Yazar Bilgileri	¹ İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Fakültesi, Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü, İstanbul, Türkiye
	 0009-0000-9366-6562  monica.katiboglu@bilgi.edu.tr

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