

Transcending the Adaptation Paradigm: The Visual Memory of Literary Objects in Turkish Cinema¹

Uyarlama Paradigmاسını Aşmak: Türk Sinemasında Edebî Nesnelerin Görsel Belleği



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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical constraints of the adaptation-centered paradigm that has long shaped scholarly discourse on the relationship between Turkish cinema and literature. Moving beyond the framework of fidelity, it argues that literature operates not only as a textual source but also as a material presence and an iconographic structure within cinematic space. Written artefacts such as books, letters, notebooks, and reports emerge in Turkish cinema not as decorative props but as cultural figures that render individual memory,

collective remembrance, and identity negotiation visible. The visual articulation of these artefacts, when considered through Derrida's notion of the *trace*, Benjamin's conception of the *fragment*, Adorno's aesthetics of incompleteness, and Nora's idea of *sites of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*), reveals literature in film as a multilayered epistemic field. Methodologically, the study employs close textual and visual analysis to examine how these objects mediate the intersections of aesthetics, memory, and cultural history. Thus, the cinema–literature nexus is redefined through a critical framework that privileges the objecthood and iconographic agency of writing as the locus where cinematic and literary forms converge.

Keywords: Literature and Cinema Relations, Sites of Memory (*lieux de mémoire*), Aesthetics of Fragmentation, Literary Objects, Turkish Cinema

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türk sineması–edebiyat ilişkisine dair akademik söylemde uzun süredir egemen olan uyarlama merkezli paradigmın kuramsal sınırlarını tartısmaktadır. Çalışma, uyarlama kavramının ötesine geçerek, edebiyatı yalnızca metinsel aktarımın değil; sinemasal bağlamda maddi bir unsur ve görsel ikonografik formun üretim alanı olarak ele almaktadır. Yöntemsel olarak yazılı nesnelerin sine-

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madaki işlevi, yakın okuma ve görsel analiz teknikleriyle çözümlenmiştir. Kitap, mektup, defter ve rapor gibi nesneler Türk sinemasında, sıradan birer aksesuar olmanın ötesine geçerek bireysel hafızayı, toplumsal belleği ve kimlik müzakerelerini görünürlüğe kılan kültürel göstergelere dönüştürmektedir. Derri- da'nın "iz", Benjamin'in "fragman", Adorno'nun "tamamlanmamışlık estetiği" ve Nora'nın "bellek mekâni" kavramlarıyla birlikte okunduğunda, Türk sinemasında edebiyatın metinsel kaynak olmanın ötesinde, maddi, görsel ve kültürel bir arşiv inşa ettiği anlaşılmaktadır. Böylece sinema, yazının kendisini bir düşünme biçimini olarak yeniden üretir; görsel anlatı metinsel bellekle kesiştiği her noktada hem etik hem de estetik bir sorgulama alanı açar. Bu bağlamda çalışma, edebiyatın sinemadaki varlığını temsil düzleminden çıkararak, anlamın, belleğin ve biçimin kesişiminde işleyen dinamik bir yazı-nesne olarak değerlendirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat ve Sinema İlişkisi, Bellek Mekânları (*lieux de mémoire*), Fragman Estetiği, Edebî Nesneler, Türk Sineması

Introduction

The relationship between Turkish cinema and literature has shaped both practice and criticism since the earliest productions. Muhsin Ertuğrul's adaptations of stage plays in the 1920s, the melodramas of *Yeşilçam* in the 1960s and 1970s, and the festival films of the last three decades collectively reveal cinema's structural dependence upon literary intertexts.

Canonical surveys such as Nijat Özön's *Türk Sineması Tarihi* (1962) and Giovanni Scognamillo's *Türk Cinema Tarihi* (1998) reinforce this orientation by evaluating cinema through the authority of literature. Özön described the medium as "a literature-driven art from its inception" (1962, p. xx), an observation that captures both the depth of this dependency and the ambivalence it produced. Recent reassessments nuance that genealogy: by revisiting early auteurs such as Metin Erksan, İsmailoğlu (2025) shifts the axis from fidelity to practice, indicating that adaptation in Turkish cinema has operated as a field of formal negotiation rather than a ledger of textual debts. Upon closer examination of these artefacts, literature emerges not as an extrinsic origin but as a material presence embedded in the cinematic image.

Asuman Suner observes that "new Turkish cinema has been preoccupied with questions of belonging, identity, and memory" (2010, p. 4). This orientation clarifies the discursive conditions underwriting assumes a privileged semiotic role: a letter articulates affective uncertainty, a notebook records silenced histories, and an official document imposes bureaucratic authority. In a comparable manner, Savaş Arslan notes that Turkish cinema "negotiates between popular appeal and artistic aspiration through recurring tropes of memory and imagination" (2011, p. 12). Such artefacts may be interpreted as constitutive tropes within the cultural imaginary, mediating between individual affect and collective history. This perspective also finds confirmation in

the works of Yeşim Ustaoğlu, Reha Erdem, and Emin Alper, textual objects punctuate the visual narrative as markers of trauma, isolation, and surveillance.

This article undertakes an alternative analytical trajectory: it considers written artefacts function within Turkish films as visual and narrative devices, rather than as references to texts external to the cinematic frame. The analysis centres on *mise-en-scène* analysis, examining the ways in inscriptions regulate spectatorial attention, interrupt narrative temporality, and shape epistemic claims to truth. Cultural memory theory provides the theoretical scaffolding for this approach. Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as “institutionalised communication that is materialised in symbolic forms” (2011, p. 37). Within this conceptual framework, the presence of a letter in a melodrama or an autopsy report in a contemporary drama can be interpreted as a symbolic configuration of memory. Roland Barthes underscores that writing, situated within the visual field, functions as an image endowed with its own semiotic force (1977, p. 38). W. J. T. Mitchell identifies this condition as the “pictorial turn,” a shift in words acquire graphic and visual authority (1994, p. 11).

The case studies reveal the range of these dynamics across genres and decades. *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (*The Girl with the Red Scarf*, Yılmaz, 1978) hinges on a letter that crystallises moral choice, while *Vurun Kahpeye* (*Strike the Whore*, Yılmaz, 1964) employs written denunciations to dramatise ideo-

logical conflict. Ömer Kavur’s *Anayurt Oteli* (*Motherland Hotel*, 1987) deploys a diary as the textual core of psychological confinement. Zeki Demirkubuz’s *Yeraltı* (*Inside*, 2012) renders Dostoyevsky a visible presence, a book that becomes accusation (Yüksel, 2017, p. 40). Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Bir Zamanlar Anadoluda* (*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, 2011) culminates in an autopsy report, truth is simultaneously precise and ethically fraught (Aksakal, 2019; Kickasola, 2016). Özcan Alper’s *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, 2011) foregrounds the notebook as a fragile archive of political loss, while Emin Alper’s *Abluka* (*Frenzy*, 2015) mobilises official reports and surveillance records as instruments of paranoia. Viewed together, these films suggest that Turkish cinema does not merely re-narrate literary plots but reconfigures writing as a performative and epistemic device within its visual economy.

Methodologically, the article advances three complementary moves. To begin with, close film analysis highlights the staging of letters, books, notebooks, and reports. Another dimension concerns the iconographic reading of these artefacts as cultural signs that condense layers of meaning. An additional analytical dimension engages cultural memory theory, situating the findings within broader practices of remembrance and identity formation. This combination is particularly apt for Turkish cinema, writing consistently mediates between personal interiority and collective history. The main contri-

bution of this article lies in revealing that writing in Turkish cinema serves at once as narrative element, mnemonic object, and discreet witness to history.

Theoretical Framework

Across the longue durée of film studies, the relationship between cinema and literature has been predominantly articulated through the lexicon of adaptation. Fidelity has functioned as the constitutive axis of this discourse, shaping both international debates and Turkish criticism. Linda Hutcheon contends that adaptation is “a derivation that is not derivative, a work that is second without being secondary” (2006, p. 9). Robert Stam emphasises that fidelity discourse “reduces the relationship between film and literature to a moralistic binary of betrayal or faithfulness” (2000, p. 54). Within Turkish scholarship, Eren Yüksel argues that this paradigm “imposes conceptual limitations on both literary and cinematic criticism” (2017, p. 40). Foundational historiographic surveys such as Nijat Özön’s *Türk Sineması Tarihi* (1962) and Giovanni Scognamillo’s *Türk Sinema Tarihi* (1998) reinforced this orientation, narrating the development of national cinema through its borrowings from novels and theatre. The historiographic record indicates that the presence of literature has always been acknowledged, its material instantiations, letters, notebooks, reports, have rarely been examined as central cinematic elements.

Cultural memory studies introduce a distinct conceptual horizon. Jan Assmann defines cultural

memory as “institutionalised communication that is materialised in symbolic forms” (2011, p. 37). Aleida Assmann stresses that remembrance depends upon “figures of memory” that act as autonomous mnemonic constructs within collective identity (2008, p. 99). Extending the discourse on the visual archive, Çalışkan (2023) examines retro-dystopian imagery in recent Turkish cinema as an allegorical meditation on fragmentation and incomplete remembrance. Her analysis reframes the cinematic archive not as a repository of stability but as a field of temporal rupture, where memory survives precisely through its fissures. This reading resonates with the broader argument of the present study, in which visual discontinuity becomes the mode through which history and affect are rendered perceptible. Exemplary instances are evident in *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (*The Girl with the Red Scarf*, 1978), where the love letter operates as the hinge of moral deliberation, and in Özcan Alper’s *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, 2011), the notebook functions as an archive of political trauma. These textual artefacts defy reduction to props; they serve as mnemonic nodal points through private affect is translated into historical consciousness. Of special relevance is the way written objects migrate from intimate memory into collective history, thereby linking individual narrative with cultural identity.

Visual culture theory elucidates writing, situated within the cinematic frame, acquires distinct semiotic weight. Roland Barthes argued that “the

image no longer illustrates the words; it is the words which...are parasitic upon the image" (1977, p. 25). W. J. T. Mitchell, in his theorisation of the "pictorial turn," foregrounded the capacity of words to assume graphic and visual authority (1994, p. 11). A salient instance is observable in Zeki Demirkubuz's *Yeraltı* (Inside, 2012), Dostoyevsky's novel is staged as a material object, functioning iconographically as both accusation and mirror. In this context, the written page is re-signified as a charged visual presence, exemplifying literature's afterlife in Turkish cinema exceeds narrative adaptation and becomes part of its iconographic repertoire.

Historiography opens an additional analytic plane. Hayden White argued that historical discourse is always emplotted, mediated by narrative tropes rather than neutral fact: "There can be no 'proper history' is not at the same time 'emplotted' in one mode or another" (1987, p. xi). This historiographic dynamic is exemplified in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da* (*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, 2011), the autopsy report is simultaneously a factual document and a narrative device, binding law to ethical hesitation. Funda Serdaroglu (2024) contends that Ceylan deploys such documents to "suspend narrative time and redirect the spectator toward ethical reflection" (p. 8). Ertan Yilmaz (2015) highlights that Atif Yilmaz's melodramas transformed documents into "visual thresholds between emotion and law" (p. 62). Recent work on New Turkish Cinema reframes temporality itself as a cultural

device. Reading Ceylan and Demirkubuz through the optics of deliberate slowness, Güven (2025) clarifies durational form functions as a strategy of historical attention, intensifying the contact between image and memory rather than merely delaying narrative progress. These analyses foreground the extent to documents cannot be relegated to peripheral status but must be understood as integral structuring devices that mediate between history, authority, and spectatorship.

Complementary theoretical registers refine this framework. Feminist criticism has illuminated the gendered politics of inscription. Laura Mulvey's theorisation of the "male gaze" (1975) demonstrates women in melodramatic narratives often appear as readers or writers of letters while their voices are displaced by patriarchal authority. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990) clarifies that acts of writing on screen can enact or destabilise normative codes, turning inscription into a performative intervention. Postcolonial criticism adds another dimension. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity (1994) sheds light on Turkish cinema's negotiation of Western literary forms alongside local traditions, while Gayatri Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) resonates in films, letters or diaries constitute the only testimony of marginalised figures. Ecocritical scholarship also contributes. Lawrence Buell insists that "the environment is not merely a frame but an active presence in literature" (1995, p. 7), a claim that resonates with Turkish films

in landscapes are mediated through notebooks or reports, transforming writing into a record of ecological as well as cultural memory.

National criticism both confirms and complicates these perspectives. Agâh Özgür's extensive documentation illustrates filmmakers consistently turned to literature not only for stories but also for symbolic authority (2005). Contemporary journals such as *Sinecine* and *SineFilozofi* underline how Reha Erdem mobilises children's writing as allegorical voice, and how Emin Alper integrates official reports as instruments of surveillance and paranoia. Incorporating these insights anchors the framework within local debates and prevents it from appearing as an imported schema. The interplay between global theory and Turkish critical traditions demonstrates that textual artefacts in film must be examined as part of a transnational semiotic economy while also being read in relation to specific cultural histories.

The epistemological orientation guiding this inquiry develops out of these theoretical strands. Detailed readings of *mise-en-scène* trace the placement and function of textual artefacts. Iconographic analysis tracks the symbolic labour performed by such objects across genres. Cultural memory theory positions them within broader practices of remembrance and identity. This layered methodology is warranted by the films themselves: Turkish cinema persistently deploys textual artefacts at moments of narrative and ethical rupture, love letters in melo-

drama, notebooks in political dramas, autopsy reports in realist works. The purpose of this inquiry is not prescriptive closure but the delineation of a heuristic frame capable of capturing the multiple functions of writing on screen.

The discussion that unfolds formulates a set of provisional hypotheses. The critical problem shifts from fidelity to visibility: from asking whether a film betrays its source to interrogating the manner in which writing intervenes in the cinematic image. Within this reframing, the letter functions as testimony; the diary renders solitude visible. The report simultaneously constructs and conceals truth, while the book unsettles the spectator's gaze. These formulations remain subject to ongoing critical renegotiation and will inevitably require further contestation as additional films and contexts are incorporated.

The Letter: Epistolary Memory and Affective Trace

Within the iconographic repertoire of Turkish cinema, the epistolary object assumes a privileged position, not as a secondary plot mechanism but as a site where affect, testimony, and cultural memory are materially inscribed. Jan Assmann insists that cultural memory operates through "institutionalised communication that is materialised in symbolic forms" (2011, p. 37). In this conceptual register, cinematic letters resist reduction to mere communicative tools; they crystallise the threshold, private desire intersects with collective remembrance, particularly

at moments, oral utterance proves insufficient and inscription assumes the burden of articulation.

A canonical instantiation of the epistolary motif is discernible in Atif Yılmaz's *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (*The Girl with the Red Scarf*, 1978). The oft-cited line "Sevgi neydi?" ("What was love?") acquires permanence only through its materialisation as script. The camera isolates the inscription, elevating a brief utterance into an iconographic object. Barthes articulates that "the written word, framed, acquires the status of image" (1977, p. 38); Yılmaz's film renders this dynamic legible by converting language into visual form. Ahmed elucidates that affect "sticks" to objects, saturating them with intensity (2004, p. 11). The epistolary fragment in this melodrama absorbs longing, betrayal, and reconciliation alike. Berlant's theorisation of "cruel optimism" clarifies the paradox: attachments persist even when they impede, and the letter condenses precisely this ambivalence (2011, p. 2).

Preceding melodramatic repertoires demonstrate that the epistolary motif had long been inscribed in *Yeşilçam* cinema. In *Vurun Kahpeye* (*Strike the Whore*, 1964), denunciatory epistolary fragments circulate as vehicles of suspicion and violence. Giovanni Scognamillo underscores that "Yeşilçam often positioned the letter at the intersection of intimacy and betrayal, writing ignited collective drama" (1998, p. 156). Here, the textual missive functions as a semiotic catalyst, translating private accusations into collective turmoil.

The absent epistle acquires its most radical articulation in Ali Aydin's *Küf* (*Mold*, 2012). Basri, awaiting news of his disappeared son, structures his existence around correspondence that never materialises. The missing letter functions as an index of political trauma, exemplifying, Aleida Assmann identifies as "negative memory" (2008, p. 104). Nijat Özön observed that "Turkish cinema has consistently sought to visualise silence, making absence itself legible as presence" (1962, p. 211). *Küf* foregrounds this practice: absence becomes testimony. Derrida articulates the paradox succinctly: "the trace is not present but marks the presence of an absence" (1995, p. 84). In Aydin's film, the non-existent letter is precisely such a trace, a deferred archive of violence.

A distinct inflection of the epistolary emerges in Pelin Esmer's *Gözetleme Kulesi* (*Watchtower*, 2012), unsent confessional letters displace conventional circuits of address. Seher inscribes trauma into unsent texts, negotiating subjectivity through inscription without circulation. Butler's account of gender performativity clarifies this dynamic: writing constitutes subjectivity even when it remains suspended (1990). The *mise-en-scène* underscores the instability of these fragments through gestures of concealment and erasure, staging inscription as simultaneously fragile and insistent.

Mulvey interrogates classical melodrama situated women as readers or writers of letters, voices were redirected through patriarchal codes (1975). Esmer disrupts this paradigm. The unsent letters

generate a cinematic address oriented not toward a diegetic interlocutor but toward the apparatus of the camera itself. Testimony, in this reconfiguration, bypasses patriarchal circuits, enlisting the spectator as its addressee.

The socio-epistolary dimension is most salient in Emin Alper's *Kız Kardeşler* (*A Tale of Three Sisters*, 2019). Correspondence between rural daughters and their urban foster families forms a precarious textual archive of inequality. As Agâh Özgür contends, "documents in Turkish cinema often function as bridges between private fates and collective narratives" (2005, p. 217). These fragile inscriptions mediate between periphery and centre, exposing asymmetries of gender and class.

Additional works within contemporary Turkish cinema extend this economy. In Çağan Irmak's *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, 2005), letters mediate intergenerational affective economies, organising mourning across temporal registers. In Reha Erdem's *Hayat Var* (*My Only Sunshine*, 2008), fragmented notes constitute a tenuous continuity amid systemic neglect. In Ömer Kavur's *Anayurt Oteli* (*Motherland Hotel*, 1987), diaries converge with unsent letters, producing a textual debris that externalises psychological collapse. In each instance, writing inscribes fragility as aesthetic and mnemonic construct.

Approached through a comparative optic, the corpus intimates that the epistolary object defies assimilation into conventional narrative function.

It is more productively conceptualised as archival residue and spectral trace, oscillating between opacity and disclosure, intimacy and exposure. In *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım*, the letter anchors moral deliberation; in *Küf*, its absence signifies political violence; in *Gözetleme Kulesi*, unsent inscriptions destabilise patriarchal codes; in *Kız Kardeşler*, correspondence marks inequality; in *Babam ve Oğlum*, letters sustain mourning; and in *Anayurt Oteli*, textual remains materialise psychological disintegration.

Derrida insists that the archive is constituted as much by absence as by presence (1995). Mitchell elucidates why words, once situated within the visual field, acquire iconic status (1994, p. 11). In Turkish cinema, letters exceed the utilitarian register of communication; they function as mnemonic icons, deferred inscriptions binding affect, memory, and power within the cinematic image.

In the iconographic economy of Turkish cinema, diaries and notebooks are constituted as privileged sites of inscription, loci where solitude, affect, and cultural memory converge. They are most productively conceptualised as mnemonic dispositifs that resist domestication into mere narrative function. Aleida Assmann identifies such forms as "figures of storage that secure continuity across temporal ruptures" (2008, p. 99). Translated into cinematic space, these artefacts refract private interiority into collective remembrance, binding the transient to permanence.

The allegorical potency of the diary receives exemplary articulation in Ömer Kavur's *Anayurt Oteli* (Motherland Hotel, 1987). Zebercet's scattered notations operate not as coherent record but as textual residue of psychic disintegration. Inscription is configured as an iconographic gesture: dim interiors and lingering images elevate handwriting into a visual emblem of entrapment. Stewart writes that "the diary marks the subject's desire to arrest time through inscription" (1993, p. 88). Here, the act of arresting time becomes the very index of collapse. As Asuman Suner observes, "Kavur's cinema transforms interiority into allegory, solitary writing becomes both symptom and narrative structure" (2010, p. 112). A similar economy of inscription is developed in Zeki Demirkubuz's *Masumiyet* (Innocence, 1997). Notebooks surface as Eren Yüksel terms "epistolary ruins, traces of an address that never finds its destination" (2017, p. 45). Such fragments mark estrangement itself, script stranded between address and silence.

Trauma's portability assumes its most insistent articulation in Özcan Alper's *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (Future Lasts Forever, 2011). The protagonist records testimonies of the disappeared, inscribing grief in a register that remains unresolved. Caruth theorises trauma as "not locatable in the simple violent event but in the way its very unassimilated nature returns to haunt" (1996, p. 4). Alper's sustained close-ups reconstitute handwriting as a cinematic surface of haunting. Jan Assmann contends that cultural

memory persists through "repetition and re-inscription in symbolic forms" (2011, p. 37). The notebook enacts precisely this principle, reinscribing silenced histories into cultural consciousness.

Generational transmission is refracted in Çağan Irmak's *Babam ve Oğlum* (My Father and My Son, 2005), where diaries and letters mediate mourning across temporal registers. Berlant insists that "affective attachments organise the subject's sense of the world even in their fragility" (2011, p. 23). The familial notebook sustains this fragile organisation, transmitting grief as intergenerational practice. As Nijat Özön notes, "letters and diaries in Turkish melodrama function less as literary echoes than as vehicles for affective transmission" (1962, p. 187). Irmak's film makes this visible, staging inscription as conduit of transgenerational affect. Hope under precarity is textualised in Mustafa Kara's *Kalandar Soğuğu* (Cold of Kalandar, 2015). The miner's notebook refracts aspiration into fragile script, echoing de Certeau's notion of everyday writing as "tactics by the weak make use of the strong's system" (1984, p. 37). These modest inscriptions narrate possibility even as environment undermines them.

Childhood vulnerability is staged textually in Reha Erdem's *Hayat Var* (My Only Sunshine, 2008). The child's scattered notes exemplify what Stewart calls "miniatures of longing" (1993, p. 71). Torn folios refuse archival coherence, functioning instead as affective shards, neglect is made legible. Sedgwick writes that affect is often discernible "in

the seams and interruptions of language" (2003, p. 19). These diary fragments constitute precisely such seams, rendering marginality visible through inscription. Estrangement is iconised in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *İklimler* (*Climates*, 2006). Scribbled notes are figured as what Berlant terms "affective atmospheres" (2011, p. 59). Script is not communication but visual emblem, staging fracture

Across this constellation of films, one discerns an epistolary economy in diaries and notebooks archive trauma, inscribe solitude, transmit mourning, and refract aspiration. Mitchell theorises that "words, when situated within the visual field, acquire iconic status" (1994, p. 11). In *Anayurt Otel* and *Masumiyet*, diaries expose collapse and failed address; in *Gelecek Uzun Sürer and Babam ve Oğlum*, notebooks perform the work of archiving absence and transmitting grief; in Kalandar Soğuğu, *Hayat Var, and İklimler*, inscription refracts precarious hope, childhood, and estrangement. Derrida elaborates that "the trace is not present but marks the presence of an absence" (1995, p. 84). Turkish cinema's deployment of diaries and notebooks illuminates precisely this paradox: fragile inscriptions that resist narrative domestication, persisting instead as unstable yet indispensable mnemonic icons.

Book and Reading:

The Visualization of Ideas in Turkish Cinema

Positioned at the threshold of narrative form and visual iconography, books in Turkish cinema are

figured not as neutral props but as unstable sites where solitude, aspiration, mourning, and cultural recognition are made visible. Their presence refracts abstract thought into material image, converting philosophy and memory into cinematic iconography. Roland Barthes described this transformation as the "script-image," the moment in writing ceases to be merely semantic and becomes spectacle (1977, p. 39). Through such configurations, the cinematic codex materialises both the authority and the fragility of intellectual life. As Savaş Arslan has remarked, "books in Turkish films frequently embody the tension between aspiration and futility" (2011, p. 88). The following analysis delineates four interwoven trajectories: estrangement, recognition, mourning, and aesthetic speculation.

The accusatory presence of literature acquires striking force in Zeki Demirkubuz's *Yeraltı* (*Inside*, 2012). Dostoyevski's volumes inhabit the mise-en-scène not as texts to be read but as visible indictments of estrangement. Eren Yüksel notes that "Demirkubuz displaces fidelity debates by foregrounding the book's objecthood in the frame" (2017, p. 42). The codex in *Yeraltı* crystallises alienation, staging the paradox of cultural aspiration as existential inertia.

A related iconography is articulated in *Kıskanmak* (*Envy*, 2009). Reading there becomes an exercise in sterile isolation, a gesture that sanctifies literacy but simultaneously exposes its futility. *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997) intensifies this trajec-

tory. Its abandoned volumes operate as Yüksel terms “epistolary ruins, traces of an address that never finds its destination” (2017, p. 45). Literature thus appears as residue, a relic of failed address that refracts solitude into visible form.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Uzak* (*Distant*, 2002) reconfigures the library as mausoleum. Shelves of Tarkovsky and philosophy signal cultural capital, even as they disclose inertia rather than vitality. As Asuman Suner observes, “New Turkish Cinema persistently stages the disjunction between intellectual aspiration and emotional paralysis” (2010, p. 56). Books here encapsulate this contradiction: icons of knowledge that expose the futility of intellectual posture.

The manuscript as social object finds acute expression in Ceylan’s *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*, 2018). The protagonist’s book circulates through encounters with patrons and publishers, embodying, Bourdieu described as the precarious struggle for symbolic capital (1993). The manuscript oscillates between promise and impossibility, turning authorship into a spectacle of fragile ambition.

A related register surfaces in Yeşim Ustaoglu’s *Güneşe Yolculuk* (*Journey to the Sun*, 1999) and *Bulutları Beklerken* (*Waiting for the Clouds*, 2004). Concealed volumes materialise ethnic memory, embodying what Jan Assmann calls “material carriers that resist oblivion” (2011, p. 37). Their concealment enacts erasure, their survival refracts resilience. Giovanni Scognamillo observes that

Turkish cinema often frames books as “objects of both peril and salvation” (1998, p. 162). Ustaoglu’s films visualise this paradox, inscribing identity into fragile textual artefacts.

The familial archive assumes palpable density in Çağan Irmak’s *Babam ve Oğlum* (*My Father and My Son*, 2005). Books and diaries mediate grief across generations, converting mourning into ritual of continuity. Lauren Berlant writes that “affective attachments organise the subject’s sense of the world even in their fragility” (2011, p. 23). The familial codex performs this organisation, transmitting grief as intergenerational affect. Nijat Özön once remarked that “letters and diaries in Turkish melodrama function less as literary echoes than as vehicles for affective transmission” (1962, p. 187). Irmak’s melodrama gives this observation cinematic force, inscribing mourning as cultural practice.

Reha Erdem’s *Kosmos* (2009) configures books as talismanic artefacts. Reading there becomes liminal ritual, simultaneously sanctifying and estranging knowledge. The codex mediates between spirituality and intellect, dramatizing the precarious relation of belief and reason. Books sanctify thought precisely in the gesture that destabilises it. The aesthetic dimension of the codex is elaborated in Derviş Zaim’s *Cenneti Beklerken* (*Waiting for Heaven*, 2006). Manuscripts in Ottoman calligraphy are staged as objects of contemplation, configuring writing as spiritual practice. *Rüya* (*Dream*, 2016) extends this trajectory, situating books within archi-

tectural imagination, philosophy, craft, and continuity converge. Both films configure the codex as cultural persistence in material form, embedding thought into visual practice.

Ceylan's *İklimler* (*Climates*, 2006) presents volumes of philosophy as icons of estrangement. These volumes dramatise ambition's drift into futility, inscribing the paradox of intellectual desire as affective rupture. Barthes's notion of "the pleasure of the text as image" (1977, p. 40) elucidates this staging: books appear not for absorption but as visible signs, enacting the fragility of aspiration. Considered in its totality, the corpus discloses not a unified paradigm but a shifting archive in books operate as fragile icons of thought, memory, and estrangement. Demirkubuz and Ceylan figure the codex as emblem of solitude and failure; Ustaoğlu and Irmak configure it as archive of identity and grief; Zaim sanctifies it as aesthetic meditation. Mitchell argues that once writing enters the visual field, it "acquires iconic status" (1994, p. 11). Turkish cinema substantiates this insight, rendering books unstable icons of aspiration and vulnerability.

Cinematic books interrogate the unstable boundary between cultural authority and existential fragility. They dramatise ambition's precarity, transforming manuscripts into burdens as well as promises. They preserve suppressed identities even as they disclose the tenuousness of survival. They transmit grief while refracting mourning into communal practice. They sanctify knowledge precisely in the

gesture that destabilises it, laying bare the ambivalence of cultural authority. Derrida elaborates that "the archive is marked by absence as much as presence" (1995, p. 84). Turkish cinema's recurrent staging of books illuminates precisely this paradox, inviting sustained reflection on textual artefacts persist as icons oscillating between authority and precarity, aspiration and disillusionment.

Poets, Poetry, and Poeticity: Visualising Literary

Memory in Contemporary Turkish Cinema

Within the symbolic economy of Turkish cinema, poetry is not reduced to decorative reference but emerges as a constitutive modality through images and sounds are refracted into cultural memory. It renders solitude perceptible, configures trauma as fractured temporality, and negotiates identity as fragile yet enduring form. Julia Kristeva has argued that poetic language unsettles discourse, opening meaning to displacement and fragmentation (1980, p. 133). To mobilise poetry within cinema is to activate precisely this instability, what Paul Ricoeur terms "a configuration of memory and forgetting" (2004, p. 57). The films considered here inscribe poetry not as an external resource but as an aesthetic principle that restructures cinematic imagination.

In Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*, 2018), authorship is staged through the precarious journey of a young writer, manuscript circulates across encounters marked by humiliation, indifference, and fragile recognition. Lyrical solil-

oquies are juxtaposed with Anatolian landscapes, embedding poetic rhythm into spatial iconography. As Asuman Suner remarks, “Ceylan’s cinema persistently transforms interior dilemmas into allegories of cultural belonging” (2010, p. 74). The figure of the poet is here transposed into the rural milieu as witness to invisibility, embodying, Jonathan Culler identifies as the paradox of lyric: a singular utterance that nevertheless aspires to universality (2015, p. 28). The cinematic text thus reframes the poet as both bearer of voice and emblem of estrangement.

Müjdat Gezen’s *Şair* (*The Poet*, 2016) orches- trates poetry not as ancillary reference but as structural rhythm shaping the entire narrative. The poet oscillates between lyric solitude and communal responsibility, dramatising the ambivalence of cultural legitimacy. Pierre Bourdieu’s theorisation of the literary field clarifies this contradiction: poetry operates simultaneously as solitary invention and contested currency within symbolic hierarchies (1993). The film materialises this tension by shifting between exalted lyricism and gestures of exclusion, underscoring literature’s precarious status as both vocation and social practice. Savaş Arslan’s insight that Turkish cinema often aestheticises failure (2011, p. 92) resonates here, as *Şair* transforms marginalisation into lyrical gesture.

Ali Aydın’s *Küf* (*Mold*, 2012) configures trauma through fragmentary inscription rather than coherent narration. The father’s notebooks, marked more by erasure than record, materialise

grief as elegiac residue. Long takes of waiting transpose temporality into lament, staging trauma as Ricoeur describes as “wounded time” (2004, p. 85). Cathy Caruth observes that trauma returns belatedly, resisting integration (1996, p. 4). In *Küf*, silence is rendered as testimony, and the empty page delineates unspeakable history. The film refracts absence into visibility, refusing closure and preserving grief as unresolved condition.

Özcan Alper’s *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, 2011) configures Anatolian laments as sung testimonies resisting oblivion. Jan Assmann defines such cultural forms as “material carriers that resist erasure” (2011, p. 37). Interwoven with devastated landscapes, the laments transpose individual sorrow into collective remembrance. The cinematic text positions the spectator in what Kelly Oliver terms “witnessing beyond recognition” (2001, p. 15), compelling ethical listening. Giovanni Scognamillo’s claim that Turkish cinema often stages literature and song as “repositories of silence and endurance” (1998, p. 142) is substantiated here, as *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* transforms lament into poetic archive.

Nisan Dağ’s *Bir Nefes Daha* (*When I’m Done Dying*, 2021) configures rap as contemporary lyricism. Rhyme and rhythm inscribe precarious urban existence into poetic cadence, rendering fragility audible. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick highlights, affect surfaces “in the seams and interruptions of language” (2003, p. 19). Rap in Dağ’s film dramatizes this principle: fractured speech materialises vulnerability, producing

poetics from rupture. Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism," attachments that sustain while simultaneously injuring, offers an illuminating framework (2011). Rap operates both as fragile attachment and survival strategy, sanctifying voice at the moment of disclosing fragility.

Azra Deniz Okyay's *Hayaletler* (*Ghosts*, 2020) extends this trajectory by mobilising rap and spoken word as performative resistance. Sara Ahmed notes that emotions "stick" to words, binding histories of struggle to contemporary utterances (2004, p. 11). Fragmented montage reconfigures rhythm as cinematic grammar, transposing poetics into structural principle. Here, language becomes protest song and montage itself acquires poetic cadence. The cinematic text does not merely depict resistance; it inscribes it formally, staging poetry as collective rhythm of dissent.

Poetics saturates cinematic form beyond verbal registers, infusing image, montage, and temporality. Gaston Bachelard argued that poetic images reconfigure spatial inhabitation rather than reproduce it (1964). In *Ahlat Ağacı*, expansive rural landscapes are articulated as allegories of aspiration and futility. *Küf* renders waiting as elegiac temporality, disclosing grief through repetition. *Bir Nefes Daha* and *Hayaletler* inscribe urban space with sonic cadence, reconstituting the city as archive of rhythm and protest. Eren Yüksel observes that Turkish directors often employ "poetic cinematography to trans-

late silence into visual density" (2017, p. 48). Such strategies confirm that poetics in cinema is not confined to textual citation but materialised within the architecture of image and sound.

Considered collectively, this body of films delineates a fractured archive in poetry renders solitude perceptible, configures trauma as testimony, and reconstitutes identity in unstable form. *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*, 2018) and *Sair* (*The Poet*, 2016) dramatise the precariousness of the poet; *Küf* (*Mold*, 2012) and *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, 2011) transpose laments into cultural memory; *Bir Nefes Daha* (*When I'm Done Dying*, 2021) and *Hayaletler* (*Ghosts*, 2020) inscribe rap as poetics of dissent.

The archive disclosed here is unstable yet indispensable: poetry affirms memory in the very moment it exposes its fragility. Grief is inscribed without resolution, silence reconfigured as rhythm, and absence made legible as testimony. Walter Benjamin suggested that fragments disclose truths inaccessible to totalities (1999, p. 178). Theodor Adorno argued that the fragment embodies modernity's refusal of false reconciliation (1997, p. 32). Derrida underscores that "the trace is not present but marks the presence of an absence" (1995, p. 84). Turkish cinema's persistent recourse to poetic registers substantiates these insights, producing cinematic poems that sustain affect, memory, and identity in fractured yet indispensable forms. The films

ultimately invite reflection on poetry not as vestige of literature but as epistemic force within cinematic aesthetics.

The Visual Memory of Literature: Cultural Archives of Objects

Refracted through Turkish cinema, literary artefacts, letters, notebooks, books, and bureaucratic documents, emerge as unstable yet indispensable figures of cultural memory. They negotiate intimacy, estrangement, mourning, and aspiration, rendering cultural experience visible in material form. Aleida Assmann conceptualises such figures as “cultural forms of storage” (2011, p. 123), while Roland Barthes underscores that once writing is displaced into the visual field it functions not as discourse but as icon (1977, p. 38). Brought into dialogue with Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* (1989, p. 7), these frameworks clarify cinematic writing is simultaneously an image and a memory site, a material surface, affect and history converge.

Atif Yılmaz’s *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (*The Girl with the Red Scarf*, 1978) offers a paradigmatic articulation. The love letter, unfolded in trembling hands and framed in luminous close-up, does not merely advance the plot; it materialises longing as visible residue. In Ali Aydin’s *Küf* (*Mold*, 2012), by contrast, the father’s notebook appears in prolonged static shots beside the railway line. The near-blank pages mark grief not by expression but by erasure. As Asuman Suner notes, “New Turkish Cinema persis-

tently translates absence into image, rendering loss through material iconography” (2010, p. 91). In both films, the artefact reframes affect as inscription, embedding silence and desire alike into visual form.

Zeki Demirkubuz’s *Yeraltı* (*Inside*, 2012) dramatizes the accusatory force of books. Dostoyevsky volumes, captured in harsh light and shallow focus, operate as indictments of intellectual futility. Eren Yüksel observes that Demirkubuz “foregrounds textual presence as objecthood rather than homage” (2017, p. 45). In Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Bir Zamanlar Anadolu’da* (*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*, 2011), the dictation of the autopsy report concludes the nocturnal search not with visual revelation but with bureaucratic inscription. The camera’s stillness insists on the slow emergence of words, substantiating Savaş Arslan’s claim that Turkish cinema cultivates “an aesthetics of belatedness” (2011, p. 106): truth arrives belatedly, mediated by writing rather than spectacle.

Further elaborations of this iconography are discernible in later works. In Ceylan’s *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*, 2018), the young writer’s manuscript negotiates between aspiration and futility, embodying Bourdieu’s literary field as contested terrain. Mustafa Kara’s *Kalandar Soğuğu* (*Cold of Kalandar*, 2015) situates a miner’s notebook against a harsh landscape, delineating fragile hope amidst scarcity. Özcan Alper’s *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (*Future Lasts Forever*, 2011) sutures notebooks and laments, orchestrating a convergence of personal grief and

collective remembrance. Across these works, textual artefacts delineate vulnerability, endurance, and aspiration, substantiating their function as cultural archives.

The theoretical strands interlock. For Barthes, text becomes icon; for Nora, the icon constitutes a site of memory; for Assmann, such sites guarantee endurance; for Derrida, every archive marks both presence and absence (1995, p. 12). Literary objects embody this paradox: letters sustain intimacy while exposing separation, notebooks testify yet falter into silence, books articulate aspiration shadowed by futility, reports stabilise truth, foregrounding its fragility. Giovanni Scognamillo observed that Turkish cinema recurrently stages literature “as object, embedding cultural history in visible residue” (1998, p. 162). Walter Benjamin argued that fragments disclose truths inaccessible to totalities (1999, p. 178), Theodor Adorno emphasised that the fragment refuses false reconciliation (1997, p. 32). The fragmentary status of these artefacts is not deficit but condition, their incompleteness the very form through memory endures.

Local criticism reinforces this reading. Suner’s focus on absence, Yüksel’s articulation of objecthood, Arslan’s emphasis on belatedness, and Scognamillo’s attention to cultural residue collectively elucidate that Turkish cinema constructs a distinctive visual memory of literature. This memory is fractured and ambivalent yet indispensable. The literary object functions as icon and trace, presence and

absence, testimony and silence.

Such paradoxes prepare the ground for the concluding chapter. By disclosing that literature persists in cinema not through fidelity to textual sources but through its material presence as image, Turkish films compel a reconceptualisation of the cinema–literature relation. The final chapter theorises this dynamic as a poetics of incompleteness, in cultural endurance depends less on textual transfer than on the cinematic inscription of literature as visible object.

Conclusion: Toward a Poetics of Incompletion

Situated at the intersection of cultural memory and cinematic iconography, the literary artefacts examined in this study, letters, notebooks, books, and documents, articulate their significance not through semantic legibility but through their material visibility. They inscribe longing, grief, estrangement, and aspiration, reframing the dialogue between cinema and literature beyond the limits of adaptation. Considered across this mnemonic economy, writing is enacted as objecthood, configuring an iconography of memory that is unstable yet indispensable.

The interpretive trajectory developed here underscores that cinematic writing cannot be confined to secondary ornament. At distinct cinematic junctures, a letter sustains intimacy, disclosing separation; a notebook appears as testimony only to falter into silence; books signify aspiration while

dramatizing futility; documents stabilise truth while simultaneously unveiling its precarious mediation. These artefacts, refracted across different works, negotiate between affect and archive, rendering visible the fractures through cultural identity is remembered. By delineating experience through incompleteness, they substantiate a poetics that privileges fragments and residues over coherence. Through the lenses of Benjamin and Adorno, fragmentation in Turkish cinema discloses itself as an aesthetic condition rather than a formal deficiency. Benjamin's dialectical image situates the fragment within the constellation of modernity, the interruption of form becomes the very site of meaning. For Adorno, as articulated in *Aesthetic Theory*, incompleteness constitutes the ethical core of modern art: a refusal of synthesis that preserves the tension between expression and critique. Within this configuration, the fragment represents absence but the persistence of form under the sign of discontinuity, a mode through cinema and literature render the visible porous to remains unseen and rememberable only through fracture.

The paradox finds resonance in theoretical conjunction. Derrida's notion of the trace, which inscribes presence precisely through absence, converges with Benjamin's claim that fragments reveal truths foreclosed by totalities, and with Adorno's conviction that the fragment resists false reconciliation. Considered in their mutual articulation, these perspectives reveal incompleteness not as lack

but as constitutive aesthetic condition. Turkish cinema stages this convergence with remarkable clarity: the literary object becomes both icon and residue, testimony and silence, presence and trace.

The implications of this perspective extend toward contemporary horizons. In the digital present, text messages, emails, and social media posts emerge as new epistolary forms, reconfiguring, memory is archived and circulated. Their cinematic inscription, already discernible in recent Turkish productions, reveals that literature persists in new guises: fragmentary, fleeting, yet culturally resonant. Thus conceived, the visual memory of literature is not bound to the analogue archive but continually re-inscribed across technological and aesthetic registers.

To theorise the cinema–literature relation requires a critical reorientation: from fidelity to objecthood, from narrative transfer to visual inscription. Enacted in the films analysed here is a poetics of incompleteness, an aesthetics of fragments that enact memory precisely by refusing closure. Incompleteness should be recognised not as deficiency but as the modality through cultural memory survives in cinema. The logic of fragmentation extends into, called the cinematic condition of the trailer, the medium turns its gaze upon its own incompleteness. The trailer operates as a paratextual threshold, exposing the interval between revelation and deferral that defines cinematic temporality. It renders anticipation visible as a formal principle

and, discloses the economy of desire that sustains the image. Rather than remaining a peripheral form, the trailer embodies cinema's self-reflexive awareness of its fragmentary nature. Within Turkish cinema, this sensibility exceeds promotional paratexts and enters the internal rhythm of the films themselves, interruption and suspension evolve into modes of reflection on history, memory, and spectatorship. Fractured, unstable, and partial, these objects nonetheless render visible the endurance of literature in film, compelling us to reconceptualise text and image as interwoven within a visual archive of memory.

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