

Coded Criticism in “national” Literatures: Using *Ankara* as a key to *Yaban* and the Newspaper *Kampana* as a Key to *To Noumero*

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Abstract

This paper consider two relatively early and well known works set ostensibly in the events known in Turkish as the War of Independence and in Greek as the Asia Minor Disaster and considers the extent to which they reflect preoccupations of the time of their composition. The works are *Yaban* by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu, first published in 1932, and *To Noumero 31328* by Ilias Venezis, first published in serial form and then revised in book form in 1931 and 1945. It is submitted that comparison with Karaosmanoglu’s partly satirical partly utopian novel, *Ankara*, (1934) and with utterances of the contemporary Kadro movement of which he was part helps unlock the sense of *Yaban*. In the case of *To Noumero* it is suggested that the standard 1945 edition reflects the author’s response to the horrors of the German occupation¹.

¹ I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Bengisu Rona and Dr Yorgo Dedes for their very helpful comments and Sibel Kocaer both for commenting on my translations and for procuring facsimiles of *Kadro* and copies of articles otherwise unavailable in the UK..

Introduction

The events between 1919 and 1922, referred to in Turkey originally as Milli Mücadele (National Struggle) and later as İstiklal Harbi or Kurtuluş Savaşı (War of Independence) while in Greece as Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή (Mikrasiatiki Katastrofi - Asia Minor Disaster), were of the profoundest significance for both sides. The outcome of the war, victorious for the Turks and disastrous for the Greeks, consolidated the borders² of two independent states and concluded the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the independent Greek state which had both been in process for about a century. Turkey retained Anatolia but did not regain any of the Ottoman provinces of whose recovery some had dreamed, while Greece achieved the sway of a Greek state over the Greek populations of Asia Minor not by the intended realisation of the Megali Idea but by their removal to “old Greece” through the exchange of populations. The demographic changes in both states were dramatic. They were felt more in Greece as she had to accommodate a proportionately larger number of refugees within a smaller area. The arrival of the refugees and its impact has been and is still studied and discussed extensively in Greece but less so and more belatedly in Turkey. The contrast in attention has itself been remarked on³.

The literatures, substantial in bulk, of the War of Independence and of the Asia Minor Disaster (the very labels are telling) have themselves shaped the respective national narratives about the foundation of the independent national and “homogeneous” states of Turkey and Greece. Their composition begins contemporaneously with the events themselves and extends to our own day. Existing scholarship identifies an acknowledged canon of works and, dividing it into chronological periods, discerns some general patterns of evolution, notably, for instance, that in the Greek genre the nostalgia for the paradise of the lost homeland was a relatively late development. Nonetheless there has been little or no discussion of whether circumstances at the time of composition can contribute to an understanding of each work⁴.

To explore whether there is any value in such an approach I will look at two well known works, *Yaban* by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu and *To Noumero 31328* (“*To Noumero*”) by Elias Venezis. They both belong to the early history of their respective genres and superficially, at least, belong to the sub-type that presents national suffering, for each side of *our* civilian population at the hands of the *other*. Both works share the form of a first person narration which is meant to convey a lived experience; for good reasons, which are, nonetheless, extrinsic to the texts themselves and could not be suspected, if by some accident the texts alone had survived, *Yaban* has always been taken to be fiction –albeit the reader can see a lot of Yakup Kadri in the fictional hero Ahmet Celal - while *To Noumero* autobiography. In the expectation that readers of this paper are likely to be less

² But for the minor adjustments agreed subsequently with other Powers of Alexandretta and the Dodecanese.

³ Clark, 202

⁴ The issue is acknowledged in Köroğlu: 82-3 but the focus of this short paper is more concerned with theory than historical detail.

familiar with *To Noumero*, I will say a little bit more of an introductory or elementary kind about this work and its author.

The Authors

Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu was born in Cairo in 1889. He was the progeny of a leading family going back to the seventeenth century with lands around Manisa ; its untypical distinction even reached the notice of Byron who uses the name dramatically in stanza VII of Canto 1 of the *Bride of Abydos*⁵, a curious link between the poet of the Greek War of Independence and the novelist of its Turkish successor a hundred years later. By reason of geography the family had a connexion with Venezis’s homeland, Ayvalık. Some Christians appealed to the Karaosmanoğlu for protection against bandits in the early nineteenth century⁶, while Venezis’s older compatriot, the writer and painter, Photis Kontoglou, refers to them as bloodthirsty oppressors of the Christians⁷. When Karaosmanoğlu was six, his family re-established itself in Manisa from Cairo and he went to school there. Karaosmanoğlu himself points out to how alien he felt in Manisa as a child because the different Turkish he spoke drew ridicule from the locals⁸. In 1903 he went to secondary school in Izmir but in 1905 the family returned to Egypt, to Alexandria this time, where Karaosmanoğlu finished his secondary education at a French school. A few months before the Young Turk revolution in 1908 the family moved to Istanbul and Karaosmanoğlu entered the Faculty of Law of the Istanbul University but he never graduated. Although his literary endeavors had started in Izmir and he had become familiar with the Edebiyat-i Cedide (New Literature) movement⁹, his horizons were broader because of his upbringing: he spoke Arabic and had direct knowledge of French literature. Among his earliest publications were translations from the French in the Cairo newspaper *Türk* which was also the immediate source of his knowledge of the Young Turks. He is a prolific writer whose works during his long life represent the various phases of Turkish literature and Turkish literary genres. For example in 1909 he was the youngest of the signatories of the Fecr-i Ati(Dawn of the New Age)¹⁰ group in the company of, among others, Faik Ali, Refik Halit Karay, Mehmet Fuat (Köprülü), Ahmet Haşım and Ali Canip (Yöntem)¹¹. Because of his ill health he never participated actively in the military campaigns either of the First World War or the War of Independence. However, he became involved actively in politics and was repeatedly elected as representative in the Grand National Assembly¹². As will be discussed more extensively

⁵ Byron 1917: 260-61 *We Moslem reck not much of blood;/But yet the line of Carasman /Unchanged, unchangeable has stood/First of the bold timariot bands/That won and well can keep their lands.* Also Yücel 1957:12

Sakkaris: 23. *ο της Περγάμον Καραοσμάνογλου, ο ευφρόντατος και δια τούτο επιφοβέστερος Karaosmanğlu of Pergamon the most intelligent and for this reason the most fearsome*

⁶ Σάκκαρης: 44-45

⁷ Kontoglou: 21

⁸ Yücel: 16

⁹ Kurdakul: i. 27-34

¹⁰ Kudret: ii. 99

¹¹ Kurdakul 1992: 99-102

¹² Kurdakul: ii. 86

below he became prominently involved in the Kadro movement as responsible editor of the journal *Kadro* and when this incurred official displeasure and was closed down in 1934, he was packed off to Tirana as Turkish ambassador¹³. As well as original literary work he also translated authors as different from each other as Horace (1931) and Proust (1942) into Turkish. Karaosmanoğlu’s prominence in modern Turkish literature and history is beyond debate. He died in Istanbul in 1974¹⁴.

Elias Venezis (the pen name of Elias Mellos) was born in Ayvali in 1904¹⁵, the fourth of seven children. At that time Ayvali (Ayvalık of modern Turkey¹⁶) had an almost exclusively Greek population with only few Turks in administrative posts¹⁷. Both Ayvali and the neighbouring Moschonesia, modern Cunda or Alibey, were unfortunately among the areas whose population was among the greatest victims of the war and the uprooting which followed. Conditions had been disturbed since before the First World War and pressure on the Christian populations had led to a large proportion of them taking refuge in the offshore islands which were already under Greek control. The whole of Venezis’s family except for his father and his sister, Agape, moved to Mytilene in 1914 where Venezis studied in the High School. Although he was born into a comfortable middle class family, the hardships, which followed the exile of the family, obliged him to work in a bakery while still at school. In 1919 the family was reunited in Ayvali where Venezis completed his secondary education. As soon as he finished school he was appointed assistant secretary¹⁸ in the local Bishopric. It was in this period that he started his literary endeavours. His first published work appeared in 1920 in the periodicals *Néa Zōή* (New Life) of Izmir and *Λόγος* (Word) of Istanbul with the pen name Lelos Venezis¹⁹. Like many publications of the Greeks in Istanbul and Izmir of the pre war period, these works seem not to have left any impact on the mainstream of Greek literature²⁰. With the Turkish victory in September 1922 most of the family fled again but Elias and his future brother in law failed to do so. Both of them were seized by the Turkish authorities and sent to the labour battalions²¹. Venezis was in captivity for fourteen months; he was one of twenty three survivors out of three thousand men taken from Ayvali²². On release at the end of 1923 he was reunited with his family in Mytilini in 1923 and there met Stratis

¹³ Karaosmanoğlu: 1955.

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of his life and work see Yücel 1957 and Akı 1960. The former is the one approved by the author himself. See Jacobson: 96

¹⁵ Karvelis : ii. 33-34. Venezis is not an invented name as the author’s paternal grand father was called Dimitris Venezis, a native of Cephalonia who had established himself in Ayvali after 1821. Mellos was a nickname given to the author’s father. Venezis’s mother was from a landowning family originally from Mytilini. There are doubts about the date of birth of Elias Venezis. He was probably born in 1898 but when he arrived in Greece he had no papers with him like most of the refugees.

¹⁶ Ayvalık was known as Ayvali in colloquial Greek but was ‘translated’ into Kydoniai officially (kydoni being the Greek for a quince). It had been established as an exclusively Christian settlement in the late eighteenth century and was widely known for its cultural institutions and more specifically the Academy of Kydoniai. Extensive bibliography on the history of Ayvali in *Exodos*: I 93

¹⁷ *Exodos*: i. 93

¹⁸ *Exodos* i. 97

¹⁹ Karbales: ii 338. Also Valetas 1974:106-107

²⁰ Mackridge 2006: 236

²¹ Neyzi: 298, footnote 30 establishment of the labor battalions by the National Assembly in 1920.

²² Karvelis: ii. 336, footnote 4, for a detailed bibliography on Venezis’s capture.

Myrivilis and the literary circle of Mytilini known as Λεσβιακή Ανοιξη (Lesbian Spring). It was Myrivilis who encouraged him to write about his captivity in the Turkish labour battalions for the weekly newspaper, *Kampana* (“Bell”) which he edited. Serialisation started on 5th February 1924 after the concluding instalment of Myrivilis’s novel *Η ζωή εν τάφω* (*I Zoi en Tapho/ Life in the Tomb*)²³. With the publication of a book of short stories in 1928 and of *To Noumero* in book form in 1931, Venezis gained a reputation as an established novelist. In 1932 he moved to Athens and started working in the Bank of Greece while continuing to write (at that time it was far from universal practice for writers to be professional literateurs; for example the other major novelist of Asia Minor, Kosmas Politis, also worked for a bank and the great poet, George Seferis, was a diplomat). In 1939, almost a year before the involvement of Greece in the Second World War, he wrote *Γαλήνη* (Galini/ Calm) which in dealing with the settlement of the refugees in Greece is a sort of sequel to *To Noumero*. In 1943 he faced death again after arrest by the German occupation authorities and narrowly escaped execution only as a result of an energetic campaign by the intellectual elite of Athens and Archbishop Damaskinos. At the end of that year he published *Αιολική Γή* (Aioliki Gi/ Aeolian Earth) whose background is peacetime Anatolia and which was the first instance of the “lost paradise” genre. The limited wartime edition sold out in a fortnight but on republication after the war became his best known work and was translated into fifteen languages. The Second World War and the German occupation gave a fresh impetus to his work. His imprisonment by the Nazis was the inspiration for the play *Block C* of 1946. He produced, as will be discussed in greater detail below, a reworking of *To Noumero* and an experimental novel, *Εξοδος* (Exodos/ Exodus) which tried to capture the surreally random violence of the occupation. He continued to be an active writer, branching out into travel writing, biography and even a history of the Bank of Greece, until his death from cancer in 1973²⁴. He is among the most important representatives of the innovative literary movement known as “the generation of the thirties”²⁵.

Publication History

Yaban was first published in 1932 in Istanbul and has remained in print ever since. I have been able to compare an early copy (confusingly dated 1933 on the cover but 1932 on the flyleaf) with a recent printing of 2006 and have not noted any material linguistic divergences. I have not been able to obtain information about when the novel was initially written or about the whereabouts of the autograph, if it still exists. A recent edition reproduces a page of manuscript in the Arabic script but this is not conclusive evidence for composition before the alphabet reform because Karaosmanoğlu continued to use the old script²⁶.

The publication history of *To Noumero* is, as already indicated, more complicated and it also happens that the textual variants are more difficult to research. As already stated, the

²³ Valetas 1974: 112-114

²⁴ Valetas 1974: 95-125. A detailed review of his life in conjunction with his work

²⁵ Beaton 1994: 131

²⁶ *Yaban*: 7 photograph of Ottoman manuscript corresponding to parts from pages 130-131 of the book.

first version of *To Noumero* in the weekly newspaper, *Kampana*, on Mytilini appeared in 1924 under the title No 31328 with the numerals in Arabic (to represent the prisoner tag that Venezis was actually given). It was later published in Mytilene in book form in 1931. Venezis made a further revision during the war and the new form, published in Athens in 1945²⁷ has remained in print ever since. The author’s preface to the 1945 edition says that he worked over the text three times after finishing *Aeolian Earth* and also states that the 1931 edition was itself a reworking. Current printings of the 1945 edition contain about 294 octavo pages and on the basis of sampling can be estimated to contain between 55,000 and 60,000 words.

Unfortunately there are obstacles to tracing the author’s variants. There is no complete set of *Kampana* known to survive anywhere. The fullest available is in the Myrivilis archive in the Gennadeios Library of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. This includes twenty two instalments of *To Noumero* of which I have so far examined fourteen. Each instalment, which unlike those of Myrivilis’s *Life in a Tomb* does not carry a sequence number, occupies between about a third and a half of a broadsheet in four columns of twenty five to thirty five lines and contains a little over six hundred words. Publication began on 5 February 1924 and reached after twelve weekly issues the end of what is called the first part on 22 April. This last instalment corresponds to an episode related on p. 137 of contemporary editions, about a third of the way through the whole. A comparison of word counts estimates suggests, accordingly, that at least at the beginning of the narration the 1924 version was about a third the size of the 1945 version.

What is called the second part begins immediately in *Kampana* on 29 April 1924 and the Gennadeios holdings include nine more instalments. Unfortunately irregularities in the issue of *Kampana* in June 1924 and gaps in the Gennadeios holdings make the publication more difficult to trace. The Gennadeios has nothing after the issue of 21 September 1924 in which serialisation of *To Noumero* is still incomplete and is missing at least six issues before that date.

The 1931 edition is generally unobtainable; a copy is said to exist in Mytilene itself but I have not yet had an opportunity to consult it.

None of this would matter very much if the text, where one version can be compared with another, looks the same. But this is not the case. Where comparisons are possible between the *Kampana* instalments in the Gennadeios and the 1945 edition there are enormous divergences. It may be that more material will emerge from Venezis’s own archive, which was recently deposited by his heirs in the Gennadeios. But it will be some time before this is catalogued and made available for inspection. For the time being, while it can be reasonably surmised that much of the 1945 text differed from the 1924 original, it is impossible to say what belongs to 1931 and what to 1945.

Yaban

²⁷ Beaton 1994: 139, footnote 16

As already noted, it is not clear how long before its publication *Yaban* was composed. There is a possibility that it was in some sense conceived at about the time of its dramatic date. The purported editorial preface, with which the novel opens, refers to the work of the committee for the investigation of war crimes. Such a committee, on which Karaosmanoğlu served for a while with Halide Edip, did indeed exist. She herself relates in the preface to *Ateşten Gömlek* (Shirt of Flame)²⁸, first published in 1922, that she adopted the title of her novel from Karaosmanoğlu²⁹ while in her memoirs that Karaosmanoğlu was contemplating an Anatolian novel with the title “*Shirt of Flame*” and that she jokes that she will finish it before him³⁰. Moreover in an interview given by Karaosmanoğlu in *Milliyet* on the occasion of the death of Halide Edip, he said that he wanted to write *Ateşten Gömlek* but like any gentleman of that time (sic), he gave in to her request to use the title herself. Karaosmanoğlu says: ‘Bunun üzerinedir ki, zaferden sonra o *Ateşten Gömlek* ben de *Ankara* ile *Yaban* romanlarını yazmışım.’³¹. That Karaosmanoğlu may have thought of the form of the novel as early as 1921 is intriguingly suggested by the diary form (contrast the simpler narrative structure of her other war novel, *Vurun Kahpeye*) of Halide Edip’s *Ateşten Gömlek*, however ineptly handled by comparison with *Yaban*. It seems, nonetheless, unlikely that Karaosmanoğlu had simply pulled a finished old composition out of drawer in 1932 since he published three substantial novels in the interval and four years passed between the appearance of the last of these (*Sodom ve Gomore*) and *Yaban*.

Whenever the novel was conceived and composed, it is no less difficult to read it simply as a “war novel” than, as some have done, a harbinger of the so-called village literature³² or a plea for agricultural reform³³. This sort of approach puts one in mind of Nabokov’s scorn for people who open *Dead Souls* to obtain information about Russian provincial life in the early nineteenth century³⁴. *Yaban* is a very complex work of art that defies the categories of war novel or straightforward social realism.

The plot of the novel is in a certain sense very simple. The narrative purports to be the record in a lost notebook of an educated native of Istanbul, Ahmet Celal, who has moved to a village near a tributary of the Sakarya before the 1921 campaigning season, of his observations of life in the village, encounters with the Greek invaders and nationalist army as well as his personal feelings. At the end of the novel the narrator is missing presumed dead. The central sentiment of the novel is alienation and it is reinforced unsparingly by the consistent use of alienation techniques.

Even the reference and meaning of the title is ambiguous. From the preface one might think it simply refers to the hero, Ahmet Celal (and means little more than “L’Étranger”). But it is much more than this. *Yaban* is a word of Persian origin. As a noun it

²⁸ Although the literal translation is Shirt of Fire, the author herself refers to it as Shirt of Flame (Adivar 1928: 256)

²⁹ Adivar 1943: 3-4

³⁰ Adivar 1928: 256

³¹ Yücebaş: 119, *Milliyet*: 12.1.1964: *Büyük Dostum Halide Edip*

³² Dumont, 747-749

³³ Karaömerlioğlu, 134

³⁴ Nabokov, 15

means desert and wilderness. As an adjective it means wild and savage. In a provincial meaning it denotes the stranger or the world of strangers beyond the family or social circle. The author of the novel suggested in an interview given in 1970³⁵, which was plainly responding to the superficial similarity both in title and in the significance of alienation of Camus’s *L’Étranger* (which appeared about twenty years after *Yaban*) that the translation of “Yaban” as “The Stranger” does not give the full connotation of the word. He suggested that in addition to the meaning of outsider or foreign it carries the meaning of the barbarian too. Later he recommended that the word should remain as it is without being translated, followed by a note of explanation.

The reference of “yaban” is richly ambiguous. Ahmet Celal himself is a yaban in the provincial meaning and is referred to as such. But the title of the novel does not refer only to him. It refers also to the reality of Anatolia and its people. Clearly from the descriptions in the book, Anatolia is like a desert land and its people barbarians, in the ancient Greek sense of the word, the civilised world being the capital and the West. Also Anatolian land is cruel and hostile like a step mother. Interestingly Karaosmanoğlu in another interview commended the title of the Italian translation, “Terra Matrigna” (step-mother (or cruel) land)³⁶.

Yaban, according to what has been passionately and repeatedly described in the novel, can refer also to the Western world as the barbarians in the modern sense of the world this time: are there any more befitting words than savagery and barbarism to describe the attitude of the Western world and their Ottoman allies towards the Anatolian peasant and the Anatolian land? Both – people and land - were and still are, of course, the core of the Turkish motherland. Yaban, I believe, could refer to the savagery of the war and to the savagery of the neglect which Anatolia suffered.

The alienation devices are so deeply rooted in the structure of the novel that the author succeeds in making the whole narrative seem like a delusion. The plot unfolds in a circular repetitive manner on various levels. As far as time is concerned, there is clearly a succession of seasons that leads up to the climax of the novel at the time of the Greek advance to and retreat from the Sakarya in the late summer of 1921 but the references to actual historical events are interestingly spaced to suggest their remoteness from the life of the village. For example early in the novel there is a reference to the first victory at İnönü which is ostensibly prompted by the narrator saying without any specific chronological anchor that the Istanbul newspapers reached him. The second victory, which was in reality separated from the first by only a couple of months, appears dozens of pages later and the collapse of the London conference, which actually preceded the second victory, comes later still³⁷. This is not surprising as Ahmet Celal tells us that he has lost the sense of time and does not know what day of the week he is in³⁸.

³⁵Jacobson, 95, 97

³⁶Fidan, 8.

³⁷*Yaban*, 39, 96, 109.

³⁸*Yaban*, 31

Even the war, although decisive for the final twist in the plot when the retreating Greek army burns the village down, is mostly in the background. Although the village is on the route of the Sakarya campaign the armies do not make a substantial appearance until about three quarters of the way through³⁹ and the final atrocity occupies only the last few pages of the novel. Earlier its remoteness from the campaign and the indifference to it of the villagers are emphasised. Their view of the war situation and their country was outrageously distorted⁴⁰. Naturally there was no question of them being patriotic. Patriotism meant men going to war resulting in the loss of working hands at a period when they were most needed. Patriotism consequently, would lead to starvation⁴¹.

Mustafa Kemal was the cause of the continuation of the war hence they could not conceive of supporting him. As for the invading Greeks... Izmir was too far for them to consider as part of motherland and had it not been for Kemal's resistance, the enemy would have shown no interest at all in advancing towards them. The villagers are all too ready to believe the Greek propaganda that Kemal is their enemy and the Greek army the supporter of their caliph and regard Ahmet Celal's attempts to tell them the opposite with complete disbelief.

The depiction of the invading army is also worth noting. It is when the army is in disorganised retreat that the atrocity happens, as is to be expected, not when it is advancing as an organised force. Unlike Halide Edip in *Vurun Kahpeye*, Karaosmanoğlu does not make a caricature of the Greek officers⁴²; in his hands they are rather slimy and disingenuous instead of outright monsters. Except for Hasan⁴³, there is no sign of dead or wounded when Ahmet Celal induces an officer to inspect, only a degree of aggressive rudeness which makes him more bitter than a massacre would⁴⁴.

The greatest divergence from the conventions of war literature is in the presentation of Ahmet Celal as an antihero. Although he fought in the Çanakkale he is now a cripple. Although he dreams of confronting the Greeks and dying at their hands, this does not happen⁴⁵; instead he is almost killed by a stray Turkish bullet⁴⁶. Both Greek and Nationalist officers who pass through the village think he is almost mad⁴⁷. He refuses to accompany the Nationalist forces in the direction of Ankara imagining that his presence

³⁹ *Yaban*, 146

⁴⁰ *Yaban*, 41.

⁴¹ *Yaban*, 54: -Öyle, ama, şimdi tam iş zamanı. Hep öyle yaparlar. Bebeğimizi tam iş zamanında alırlar. Coincidentally and as an argument in favor of the credibility of what Karaosmanoğlu describes see *Exodos* 250. When the narrator, a 1922 refugee from Çanakkale following the advice of the English went to the village of Kalafatlı to warn the villagers that they should leave immediately, he was met with their refusal: it was harvest time and they could not afford to go!

⁴² Adivar, 1995, 71-72

⁴³ *Yaban*, 177

⁴⁴ *Yaban*, 185.

⁴⁵ *Yaban*, 123

⁴⁶ *Yaban*, 129

⁴⁷ *Yaban*, 130, 57

will be like that of a tailless dog he remembered from his desert campaign⁴⁸. His reaction to a group of enemy soldiers provokes laughter⁴⁹.

One of the most powerful themes in the book is the divide between Ahmet Celal and the class from which he springs and the villagers. The Istanbul government of this motherland and the people of the city not only are completely ignorant of the dark reality of Anatolia, but they are responsible for it by neglecting it⁵⁰. Among those chiefly responsible for this Ahmet Celal counts the intellectuals and consequently himself. The intellectual’s responsibility and his own deep regret for the situation is expressed very often throughout the narration. When he decided to come to Anatolia, he was not totally ignorant of the reality himself. He had met the Anatolian soldier in the battlefields of the Great War⁵¹. While on the way to Anatolia he firmly believes and aspires to be part of them on the grounds that they have the same blood. He tells Mehmet Ali that his mother will be like his own mother. Mehmet Ali’s silent response points to the impossibility of this. Reality is revealed straight away⁵². Living in the village, he realises that things like washing himself, shaving and combing his hair every day, in other words the trivial routine of a city gentleman, provokes the villagers’ laughter and make him feel as if he is a clown. At the beginning Mehmet Ali explains to him that this is because taking care of your self is a woman’s task not a manly one⁵³. Also, at a later stage in the novel Emeti Kadın reveals to him that she does not even have the time to throw some water on her face everyday⁵⁴. On the other hand such is the wretchedness of these people that his invalidity which was a sign of pride in Istanbul, made absolutely no difference to them. Ahmet Celal soon noticed that this was normal as almost everybody in the village had some sort of invalidity⁵⁵.

The significance of this theme of alienation is emphasised by the delirious dream at the very end of the book. As the village girl, Emine, tries to tend his wound, Ahmet Celal imagines that the gap between the Turkish villager and the Turkish intellectual has been

⁴⁸ *Yaban*, 132

⁴⁹ *Yaban*, 172

⁵⁰ Outbursts of guilt and responsibility on behalf of the enlightened and privileged classes occur frequently in the narration. Characteristically in *Yaban* 110: *Bunun nedeni, Türk aydını, gene sensin! Bu viran ülke ve yoksul insan kitleleri için ne yaptın? Yıllarca, yüzyıllarca onun kanını emdikten ve onu bir posa halinde katı toprak üstüne attıktan sonra, şimdi de gelip ondan tiksilmek hakkını kendini buluyorsun. Anadolu halkının bir ruhu vardı, nüfuz edemedin. Bir kafası vardı; aydınlatamadın. Bir vücudu vardı; besleyemedin. Üstünde yaşadığı bir toprak vardı! İşletemedin. Onu, hayvanı duyguların, cehaletin, yoksulluğun ve kılığın elinde bıraktın. O, katı toprakla kuru göğün arasında bir yabancı ot biti. Şimdi, elinde orak, buraya hasada gelmişsin. Ne ektin ki, ne biçeceksin? Bu ısırganları, bu bu kuru dikenleri mi? Tabii ayaklarına batacak. İşte, her yanın yarılmış bir halde kanıyor ve sen, acıdan yüzünü buruşturuyorsun. Öfkeden yumruklarını sıkıyorsun. Sana ısırap veren bu şey, senin kendi eserindir.*

⁵¹ *Yaban*, 39.

⁵² *Yaban*, 20: *Ta ki, kendi kanımdan, kendi canımdan bu küçük insan cemiyetinin içine karışayım, onunla haşır neşir olayım, onda kimsesizliğini unutayım diye... Yolda, Mehmet Ali'ye durup durup şu sözleri tekrar ediyordum: 'Anan, benim anam; kardeşlerin benim kardeşlerim olacak. Bunu iyi bil.' Ve Mehmet Ali hiç cevap vermezsiniz yağız erkek çehresinin ortasındaki o çocuk tebessümüyle gülümsüyordu.*

⁵³ *Yaban*, 21: *Beyim, bizde saçlarını kadınlar tarar.*

⁵⁴ *Yaban*, 112: *-Ay oğul, hiç vaktim olmuyor ki...*

⁵⁵ *Yaban*, 19.

healed. And yet it is only a dream because a page later Emine cannot go on and he heads off into the unknown.

In trying to answer how Karaosmanoğlu came to write what was ostensibly a war novel whose strongest theme is the divide between the Istanbul intellectual and the Anatolian peasant I suggest we focus on the year of publication, 1932, and look at Karaosmanoğlu's next novel, *Ankara*, published in 1934. Both novels were referred to together by Karaosmanoğlu in his remarks on *Ateşten Gömlek* and their publication spans the life of the journal *Kadro* of which Karaosmanoğlu was the responsible editor.

Kadro

Kadro was the name both of a movement and of its eponymous journal which was published between January 1932 and November- December 1934⁵⁶. Original copies of the journal are somewhat inaccessible; there seem to be no copies in the UK; a reissue on the internet has so far produced an apparently complete reedition of the first two issues and a selection of articles from the rest. For the purposes of this paper I have relied apart from this material on the articles on the Kadro movement by Mustafa Türkeş⁵⁷ and what Karaosmanoğlu himself had to say in his memoirs.

A summarised description of the *Kadro* journal and its aims is given by Türkeş⁵⁸: *The Kadro movement took its name from the journal Kadro; the journal aspired to fulfil two self appointed tasks: to develop an ideological framework in which to interpret the Turkish revolution that had created the republican regime led by the President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and to suggest the economic policies that in accordance with this ideological framework, the regime should pursue in the future. Most of the journal's regular writers had “leftist” backgrounds that had, on occasion, brought them into collision with the republican authorities. Kadro's political loyalty to the regime was never in question, but within these limits, it exhibited a striking degree of intellectual independence.*

In *Zoraki Diplomat* (Forced to become a Diplomat) first published in 1954 Karaosmanoğlu⁵⁹ gives the following description of the magazine and its aims. He seeks simultaneously to justify the consistency of the Kadro movement's aims with Kemalism and at the same time to explain why the magazine was closed down.

Moreover, I was publishing this magazine with his (ie. Mustafa Kemal's⁶⁰) own permission. No interpretation was possible in the articles written in it other than

⁵⁶ Türkeş, 1998: 92 The other members were the ideologue Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, the editor Vedat Nedim Tör and the regular contributors İsmail Hüsrev Tökin and Burhan Asaf Belge.

⁵⁷ *Kadro*, 7 June 1932, July 1932 and September 1932

⁵⁸ Türkeş, 2001: 92

⁵⁹ Karaosmanoğlu 1955: 22-23

⁶⁰ I note that Lewis B, 470 n 58 takes the reference of “onun” to be the Party rather than Kemal. This is not impossible but there is an indirect reference to Kemal three lines above and no previous reference to the Party.

elucidation and exposition of the principles of the People’s Party. In the magazine we claimed that the revolutionary movement could not be carried out with an untrained crowd recruited from opportunists and bureaucrats. A revolutionary party could by no means constructed without cadres. We were trying to prove that the economic system which was given the name of Etatism was not monopolistic. The productive and industrial institutions which were administered with such a false idea could make noone happy except a group of self seeking people who depended on the influence of the State. We were saying that they will form a burden which will gradually become more heavy on the shoulders of the people and that they will become an obstacle to collective development.

The trait of Kadro was not to mix in its articles any politically polemical flavour. Also to keep its criticism far from any general views and scholastic theories. Instead it relied on living and local events and official statistics and numbers. Be it in social and economic matters, cultural, artistic or literary issues, our decision was to remain always within a national boundary and never expand beyond the country. How can production from land be made to increase? What is the way to rationalise our industry? What are the solutions for supplying the Turkish peasant’s sugar and clothes at cheaper prices and succeeding to bring him water, coal and electricity? We were looking at all these issues and strove to find solutions. As for me, all by myself in literature was writing that the approach to the people is possible only by drawing from Folk Literature. I was also writing that a good many master poets from Yunus Emre to Dertli will give the new generation priceless examples of sound and language (On this occasion I would like to say that I have not abandoned this idea and that Turkish Folklore is a boundless national cultural treasure).

In short: Kadro was a small magazine but its claims were large. Also what, I think, annoyed the “official” personalities in the business was mostly this notion, “his not knowing his limits”. Likewise, at the time when I was to publish the magazine, in a conversation which I had with the Republican Party’s General Secretary, this person said to me: “From whom did you take the right to publish in the name of the party? If there is a need to publish an ideological magazine, only we can publish this and at any rate we are about to publish it. What’s more, you keep on saying something as Avant-Guard, Avant-Guard. What does this mean? Can it be an Avant-Guard ahead of us?”

The “we” which the General Secretary mentioned was himself and the Central Committee under his own leadership. The majority of this committee is made up of former Provincial Governors and Directors, who address their superiors as “Sir” and while entering the “presence” to have some papers signed button up their jackets. It follows according to the Republican Party’s Secretary that these people are the essential front arm of the Revolution.

In order to fulfil the aims of the revolution (the inkılap, the preceding ihtilal’s goal having been accomplished with the victorious outcome of the 1919-1922 war) the leading role should be given to a class of intellectuals which would oversee the application of the reforms⁶¹.

⁶¹ Türkeş, 1998: 95

Unsurprisingly, seeing that the membership included former Leftists with Soviet connexions (regardless of the somewhat surprising, given his earlier spat with Nazım Hikmet, inclusion of Karaosmanoğlu) the journal *Kadro* has in its mix of material exhibiting a coordinated outlook something of the flavour of magazines like LEF produced by the members of the Soviet intelligentsia in the relatively free air of the 1920s. Much of the material in *Kadro* is economic but it is possible to extract a few themes directly relevant to the imagined world of *Yaban*. The first and most obvious is the physical condition of the peasantry. The second is the ideal of the unity of the leading classes with the peasantry, *halka doğru*. The third, connected with this, is the notion of internal or autochthonous development and a rejection of superficial Westernisation both in culture and in economics. In a rather surprising set of articles by Karaosmanoğlu himself with the title *Ankara Roma Moskova* he praises the Russian revolution for creating a revolutionary climate all of its own and even more amazingly excuses the OGPU because it inhibits foreign contamination⁶².

Ankara

Ankara, a slightly longer novel than *Yaban*, was published in 1934⁶³. It is narrated in the third person and consists of three specifically marked parts and each part consists of numbered chapters. The basic conceit of the novel is that it purports to be a view back from the future showing a changing Ankara at three different times each corresponding to one part of the book (1921 in the first, 1924-1929 in the second and 1936-1942 in the third). The book is given its unity by a single heroine whose changing life and changing husbands reflect the changes in the city. Selma Hanım is a young woman of the modern type brought up in Istanbul who has moved to Ankara during the War of Independence. As the narrator slyly remarks, women have been inspired by the example set by Halide⁶⁴! The structure gives Karaosmanoğlu the scope to satirise contemporary social phenomena and in the vision of the future to suggest what he thinks should happen but which has failed to happen so far.

In the first part Selma Hanım is married to Nazif Bey, a young banker who has been posted to Ankara. The first chapter starts with the noisy announcement by a telal: *teke bulaan, teke bulan* (a goat is found). It closes as noisily: the newly arrived couple is again awakened by more noises: Ömer Efendi, their landlord, is beating one of his two wives who remains silent while the rest of his womenfolk scream their heads off⁶⁵. Added to all this is the donkey braying from the pen in the communal courtyard of the house where the young couple has taken up a room in Taceddin neighbourhood of the old part of Ankara. From various references we can understand the dramatic date to be around the middle of 1921. Both the reader and Selma Hanım are immediately placed in a rural environment instead of the capital of a modern country which was founded twelve years before the publication of the novel. Here both the time and description of Ankara's physical and human landscape corresponds to that of *Yaban*. Selma Hanım like Ahmet

⁶² <http://kadrodergisi.com/eskisayilar/ankara-moskova-roma-3/>

⁶³ Presumably before *Kadro* was closed down in December of that year.

⁶⁴ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 12, satirising what Kıröğlu 82 calls Ankara as the Kaaba of national heroes.

⁶⁵ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934:9-10

Celal, when referring to Anadolu only had in mind the fertile plains of Western Anatolia⁶⁶. The strenuous journey to Ankara was realised partly by horse drawn carriages moving in the vastness and barrenness of Anadolu.

Ömer Efendi his family are among the men of repute in Ankara⁶⁷. They had appeared out of nowhere in the market place of Ankara and established themselves as the absurdly named Sungurlu Zader. Nobody knew where they came from and how they rose up until the second year of the Great Struggle when they made their sudden appearance in the market. As the narrator remarks with some sarcasm, it was not uncommon for people who stayed behind during the war to do well and nobody asked any questions⁶⁸. The wealth and prominent position of the Sungurlu brothers had no impact on their way of life and their village mentality which is not unlike that of the peasants’ described in *Yaban*. They are suspicious of anything and anyone new and they exploit situations only for their own interest. Most importantly they seem to be unaffected by the war not even at the time when the battles were drawing nearer to them.⁶⁹

The first part also introduces the reader to three characters who will play important part in the novel. They are Murat Bey, a respectable gentleman who finds Western ways difficult despite the effort and money he puts into them, Hakki Bey, at this stage a gallant war hero but subsequently an etiolated bureaucrat and Neşet Sabit⁷⁰, a sort of ideal intellectual who voices opinions identical to those found outside fiction only in *Kadro*. The latter pair will work their magic on Selma Hanım. Hakki Bey will arouse her national consciousness before becoming her husband while Neşet Sabit will inspire thoughts of nationalism and socialism and eventually induce her to ditch Hakki Bey.

Selma Hanım appears to be a woman of determination. She struggles against bedbugs and the poor hygiene of the courtyard she shares with the owners of their house. Encouraged by Hakki Bey to take part in the national struggle she is sent to Eskişehir as a nurse. She did not stay long though because Eskişehir was evacuated as a result of the great assault. Short as this was, it was an experience whose memory endured; most importantly her impression of the Great Chief whose face was seen and voice was heard amidst a rain of fire⁷¹. His face is calm, determined and heroic. His voice is firm and warm. Mustafa Kemal made such strong impression on Selma Hanım that she could describe him in every detail, unlike Mehmet Ali in *Yaban*. This image will be repeatedly recalled in the book. Alas, Nazif Bey, Selma Hanım’s husband does not share her patriotic fervour. After the fall of Eskişehir he urges her to leave Ankara and when she refuses, threatens to leave himself and leave her behind. Instead she continues her work at the Cebeci hospital and the first part ends with the Sakarya victory⁷².

⁶⁶ *Yaban*, 29

⁶⁷ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 20: ...*Ankara’nın muteber bir ailesidir*.

⁶⁸ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 20

⁶⁹ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 21, 37, 64-65

⁷⁰ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 26, 30 and 66 respectively

⁷¹ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 73

⁷² Karaosmanoğlu, 1934:79

The second part starts after the foundation of the Republic in 1924 in the newly built part of Ankara, Yenışehir and finishes in around 1929. Selma Hanım has divorced her first timid husband and has married the once dashing Hakki Bey who by this time has morphed into a high official, mainly preoccupied with his social life in the modernised and newly built parts of Ankara. The people with whom the couple socialise are bureaucrats, members of the National Assembly and foreign diplomats or businessmen angling, with, as is not oversubtly suggested, the bait of bribes, for public contracts. The satire in this part of the novel is basically directed against superficial and ridiculous Westernisation and the abandonment of the revolutionary spirit that won the war. The gap between the mass of the people and the new elite is still massive and unbridged. Karaosmanoğlu goes to town with a chapter devoted to the opening of the Ankara Palas Hotel with a ball to celebrate New Years Eve in 1927. Poor people have walked for miles on end to watch the spectacle of those who arrive in expensive cars and enter the hotel⁷³. Both groups inside and outside the hotel are described in Karaosmanoğlu’s characteristic humorous and ironic style as equally perplexed: those outside because they cannot understand what is going on (but they are not ashamed to show their ignorance and ask questions because democracy now allows them freely to express their thoughts!) and those inside because they do not know how they are supposed to behave. Selma Hanım is naturally inside but feels alienated from both groups. There quite unexpectedly she again sees two people whom she had first met at Murat Bey’s six years before: Şeyh Emin⁷⁴, then a religious fanatic, and Neşet Sabit, the intellectual. The former has changed appearance but remained the example of the slimy religious fanatic who has turned into a modern person. The latter is now a young author who earns his living by writing for an Istanbul paper and does translation and book editing for the Ministry of Education. The unsophisticated young writer’s character develops in absolute harmony with the name he has been given: of strong birth, sound, enduring and stable. Indeed, through out the narration he remains a pure ideologue, ardent supporter of the İnkılap principles and is not compromised by the sort of concessions one has to make in public life. Although he is with those inside Ankara Palas at the new year’s ball he feels an outsider, a spectator. Especially when it comes to the ladies he feels that they look as if they are playing parts in Molière’s *Les Precieuses Ridicules*⁷⁵. Unlike Selma Hanım he does not feel alienated from those outside. It is during this ball that Selma Hanım starts changing once again and becomes imbued with the real İnkılap principles revealed to her by Neşet Sabit.

The second part ends with two highly symbolic scenes. Selma Hanım, having left yet another society soiree in disgust finds herself in the Taceddin neighbourhood in which the novel opened; despite new building elsewhere nothing here had changed since 1921⁷⁶. Meanwhile Neşet Sabit chances on a Mevlut⁷⁷ and realises that the form of a new Turkish

⁷³ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 92-101

⁷⁴ Ibid: 100

⁷⁵ Ibid: 96, 106

⁷⁶ Ibid: 140-147

⁷⁷ Compare the more positive effect of a Mevlut for the war dead on Karaosmanoğlu himself in April 1921 as recounted in Lewis B 401.

society that conforms to the national ideal cannot take its example either from this world or from that of the new Ankara elite⁷⁸

The third part of the novel is set in the future. It starts in 1936 with Selma Hanım who had by now divorced Hakki Bey and lives with Neşet Sabit, the newly built stadium for the celebrations of the fourteenth anniversary of the Republic and finishes in 1942 with the celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the Republic.

This part of the novel represents an ideal future. In the ideal Ankara of this part intellectuals like Neşet Sabit and Selma Hanım mingle in harmony with the working classes and the peasants, and for the first time seem to speak the same language. At the opening of the Büyük Devlet Tiyatrosu *Kaltabanlar* (“the Scoundrels”) by Neşet Sabit is staged and the people who watch it are fully engaged with it. The Gazi himself summons Neşet Sabit to congratulate him⁷⁹. After the theatre the entertainment continues with dances from the Black Sea region⁸⁰. The workers of Turkey are not like the proletarians of the other European countries. The Turkish working classes are in the service of their country for the benefit of all⁸¹. The villagers can now afford to buy good quality clothes produced by state factories⁸², the arid Anatolian land is cultivated, roads are built and connect Ankara to smaller villages by bus which run three or four times a day. The Anatolian countryside resembles the countryside in Provence⁸³. Fresh local products reach the Ankara market everyday. The villagers can afford to buy their sugar and clothes.

Selma Hanım, Neşet Sabit and their like found great pleasure in being among the ordinary people and spent their free time in places of communal entertainment. When the weather was good they would take pleasant strolls in the country or watch sports competitions at the Stadium. When the weather was bad they would go to well known art institutions in the city, to symphonic concerts, to exhibitions and to the People’s Houses which were gradually perfecting their performances⁸⁴.

People stuck in self-interest had left for Istanbul or abroad. Istanbul had become a place for tourists, a cosmopolitan port, a city of pleasures, with palaces, casinos, bar and the thé dansant. As for the music played in Ankara only symphonic pieces along with local dances and folk tunes harmonised by great Turkish artists were heard. Although neither the opera house nor the Great State Theatre had opened yet, the People’s House could satisfy the local people’s gradually increasing need for spectacle. The majority of the works staged there was compositions and literary pieces. Sometimes they played parts from well known operas thus satisfying the lyric and dramatic needs of the people⁸⁵.

⁷⁸ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 119

⁷⁹ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 173

⁸⁰ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 178-179

⁸¹ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 159

⁸² Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 162

⁸³ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 199

⁸⁴ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 152

⁸⁵ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 157, 154

Ankara had changed too: the old temporary wooden stadium which was erected for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Republic in the middle of the barren and steep part of the desert was replaced four years later by the robust structure of a new stadium built with local black Ankara stone and concrete standing in the middle of an open green area this time⁸⁶.

A main avenue was opened according to the plans of Jansen in the middle of Ankara. Although this avenue was not as busy yet as the European metropolitan avenues, the side streets which came down to it had nothing of the previous solitude. The people who were crowded in the old winding streets had now been resettled in orderly neighbourhoods. The local guilds, the merchants and the artisans who had previously occupied dark old buildings in the Kale went to the new and central neighbourhoods and established their shops in various modern buildings. Among them were (amazingly!) the Sungurlu Zade Brothers: The three sons, having studied abroad, took over a shop in the central market and opened their offices above it⁸⁷.

The years go with great prosperity for all and the narration takes us to the twentieth anniversary of the Republic. Crowds of people of all ages and classes go past Çankaya to pay their respects to the Leader and İsmet İnönü. Everybody is happy. Neşet Sabit and Selma Hanım return home tired but happy to continue their life together in the service of the state⁸⁸.

In this fantasy it is made obvious that almost everything that would make it possible had not happened when the novel was written. This is not only true of buildings which go up on the fourteenth anniversary of the Republic or avenues and roads which did not exist but also of changes to institutions which did exist in 1934 but where essential changes are said to have happened subsequently. The narrator tells us that the Society for the Study of Turkish History (which existed at the time of the publication of the novel⁸⁹) had not managed to exert any influence beyond the Ministry of Education until 1935!. As for the Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti⁹⁰ it too had to wait till 1935 to stop being merely a debating chamber for its members. He goes further on to criticise the İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti as being a mere propaganda institution⁹¹.

Difficult as it is for us to take this utopian fantasy seriously (it too much resembles de Brunhoff's ideal city of the elephants in *Babar*), it is (perhaps unfortunately) obvious that Karaosmanoğlu did, at least up to a point. Not only do the circumstances imagined in the third part of the novel conform to Kadro prescriptions but also in his note to the 1964 edition Karaosmanoğlu writes⁹² that unfortunately the dream depicted in the third part of the novel which he had hoped would be fulfilled under Atatürk in twenty years had not

⁸⁶ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 148

⁸⁷ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 153

⁸⁸ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 206-207

⁸⁹ Lewis G, 45: Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti founded in 15 April 1931

⁹⁰ Lewis G 45: Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti was founded in 12 July 1932

⁹¹ The Economic and Savings Association was founded in 18 December 1929

⁹² Karaosmanoğlu, 1964: 6 (unnumbered)

been achieved in forty. Even the wartime spirit of the first part was now lost and Ankara was no more than the caricature of the second part.

It could not be made clearer that *Ankara* was meant to be read as a criticism of the Turkey of its own time, however veiled by being set in the past or the future. This brief account of *Ankara* will have made clear the criticism it shares with *Yaban*.

Yaban in the light of *Kadro* and *Ankara*

As noted above, the second part of *Ankara* ends with a realisation on the part of the heroine that nothing much has changed in the old parts of the city since 1921. I would submit that this should suggest to us that the conditions depicted in *Yaban* as existing in the same year should also be thought of as contemporary. I would also submit that, just as political criticism of the present in *Ankara* is veiled by the use of satire applied to the past and utopian fantasy to the future, so in *Yaban* direct criticism is made permissible not only because it is put in the mouth of a character who lived in the past but also because that voice is represented as partly deranged.

The poor condition of the people is not merely physical. The village is situated in the middle of the vast and arid Anatolian plateau (its fictional location in fact is not that far from Eskisehir, itself not far from Ankara). It is like an old Hittite ruin⁹³. The surrounding area is so hostile that “God should not have gone to the trouble to arrange the punishment of the great Cataclysm in order to invite the people to a choice. He should have left Noah’s people on a land like this one surrounded by these bare hills”⁹⁴. At another point the land is likened to a place of exile⁹⁵. Food was washed where clothes were washed. Children and animals played in piles of rotten garbage. The houses did not even have the slightest of the comforts.

The aridity, harshness and remoteness of the physical environment clearly determine the daily life of the people who inhabit it and the way of their thinking; it also reflects on their appearance and expressions! People look much older than they are and children do not laugh⁹⁶. Most of them are invalids in one way or another⁹⁷. Their attitude to life, to people and to the outside world was determined only by the practicalities of the everyday life, which was more or less equated with the struggle for survival. People showed no

⁹³ *Yaban*, 32: Gerçekten, bir eski Hitit harabesine benzeyen bu köyde, insanların, toprak altından henüz çıkarılmış kırık dökük heykellerden farkı ne?

Yaban, 30: Allah insanları intihaba davet için , o büyük Tufan cezasını tertip zahmetine katlanmalı idi. Nuh’ un ümmetini, böyle bir toprak üstünde bu çıplak tepelere çevrilmiş yere bırakmalı idi.

⁹⁵ *Yaban*, 22-23: Gurbet ili mi? Henüz hiç bir düşman ayağının basmadığı bu arı vatan toprakları bir gurbet ili mi?

⁹⁶ *Yaban*, 38: Bu yaratık, çocukluk nedir bilmedi. ...Acaba, doğduğu günden beri, bir defa olsun, hiçbir şeye güldü mü? Sanmam. Üç yaşında, dört yaşında yavrular görüyorum. Hepsi, yüzlerine , kırk yaşında bir adam ağırlığı var. Arkalarından bakarken, onlara, birtakım kederli cüceler denebilir.

⁹⁷ *Yaban*, 19.

emotions at all⁹⁸. Happiness was not expressed at Mehmet Ali’s third wedding, neither was any anxiety revealed by those who were going or those who were staying behind when Mehmet Ali was called again to the army with three more of his compatriots⁹⁹.

These people confronted the reality with a kind of apathy as they knew that nothing could be done, nobody would care for them, nothing could be changed except for the worse. What was to be done was written on their forehead, as Emine and Emeti Kadın put it. Illiteracy, religious superstition, ignorance and poverty were the consequences of Anatolia’s neglect and remoteness. All Ahmet Celal’s efforts to enlighten them were in vain. When Yusuf Şeyh visited the village, Ahmet Celal’s brave efforts to prove to them his charlatanism not only did not find any ground among the villagers, but, worse, they distanced them from him even further¹⁰⁰.

This is a description of the world that is meant to be transformed into the Provence of the third part of *Ankara*, with the villagers well fed and clothed and participating in a new national culture.

What is the obstacle between the reality of the present and the ideal of the future? At an early point in *Yaban* Ahmet Celal exclaims:

*Talim, terbiye, iyi örnek, bunların hepsi geçici şeylerdir. Ve çevre değiştirmedikçe, insanın değişmesine imkan yoktur. Bu küçük mulahazadan, Türkiye’deki yenilik ve garpçılık hareketlerin, neden başarısızlığa uğradığı sorununa kadar çıkabiliriz.*¹⁰¹

Instruction, education, good upbringing are transitory things and it is not possible for the individual to be transformed for the better while the environment remains unchanged. From this anodyne remark we can address the issue of understanding why all the movements for reform and westernisation in Turkey have ended in failure.

Although Ahmet Celal here sounds like a Kadroist before his time, his own case is meant to exemplify the failure of the old intelligentsia and his physical incapacity could be interpreted as an objective correlative of this failure. Educated, deeply familiar with Western and Turkish literature and very concerned at a certain level for the villagers he can do nothing for them and to him they appear expressionless, like a bundle of hamam towels and less understandable than birds and cats¹⁰². This together with the “delusional” features of the narration to which I have referred suggests to me that the picture of village life is not meant to be objective, as most critics have understood it, but a refraction in the

⁹⁸ *Yaban*, 35: Nihayet, gelin bir hamam bohçası gibi cansız ve şahsiyetsiz, evden içeri sokuldu. Kuşlar nasıl sevişir? Kediler nasıl sevişir? Biliyorum. Lakin, bu köy halkının nasıl seviştiklerini tahmin edemiyorum. Bizim gibi, gözgöze bakışlılar mı? El ele tutuşurlar mı? Dudak dudağa gelirler mi? Okşayışları nasıldır? Kalbın, bir süüt çanağı gibi kabarıp taşıdığı dakikada, ağızlarından çıkan sesin anlamı ve ahengi ne dir?

⁹⁹ *Yaban*, 55: Mehmet Ali gitti. O giderken, bütün ev sarsılacak sandım. Fakat, tahminim kadar olmadı. Hatta ayrılırken, sarılıp, öpüşmediler bile.

¹⁰⁰ *Yaban*, 47. –Kusura bakma,; yabanın biridir, said the embarrassed Muhtar to Şeyh Yusuf referring to Ahmet Celal.

¹⁰¹ *Yaban*, 26

¹⁰² *Yaban*, 35, 55

mind of Ahmet Celal which is symptomatic of the failure of the old style Istanbul intellectual to engage with it and to understand it.

The contrast with Neşet Sabit in *Ankara* is striking. Whereas Ahmet Celal is the son of a Pasha, the origins of Neşet Sabit are unstated; whereas Ahmet Celal is obviously a man of property, Neşet Sabit has to work for a living; while Ahmet Celal is lost in despair and cannot communicate with the people, Neşet Sabit has a consistently positive outlook and succeeds eventually in writing in the language of the people and gains their approval. His view of the common people is expressed early on:

-Bir Anadolu köylüsünün yüzüne hiç dikkatle baktığınız oldu mu? Bir Anadolu köylüsü diyorum; kadın olsun, erkek olsun, çocuk olsun, hepsinde öyle bir ifade görürsünüz ki bütün saffetine, sadeliğine, hatta basitliğine, iptidailiğine rağmen, vekarı, olgunluğu, derin ve istiraplı çizgileriyle sizi korkutur.

Buraya gelirken, yolda, dağ başında bir oduncu çocuğa rasgeldim. On yaşında ve rımydı, yo kmuydu bilmem. Fakat, gözlerini içine baktığım zaman öyle bir ufaldım, öyle ufaldım ki başımı iğmeğe mecbur oldum. Çocuk o kadar büyük hayat tecrübesiyle yüklü ve o kadar içten gelen bir irfan ile kavruktu ki, bunun karşısında bütün bildiğim ve öğrendiğim şeylerin hiçliğini anladım.

Genç adam süstü. Mahzun mahzun düşündü ve ilave etti:

-Ve kendi hiçliğimi, kendi tatsızlığımı...Adam, siz de, ne olursak olalım; biz bu memleketin içinde birer tufeyşi olmaktan kurtulamıyoruz. Bu memleketin asıl sahibi, dağ başında gördüğüm o oduncu çocuktur ve yalnız o, bu taşlar, bu topraklarla konuşmasını biliyor; bu taşların sırrı, yalnız ona açılıyor. Kotkuyorum, bu manzaranın dili gibi köyünün ruhu da bana hiç açılmıyacak diye...Bu enişemde yeryüzünün gizli noktalarını bulmağa giden kaşifi andırıyorum.¹⁰³

Have you ever had to look carefully at the face of an Anatolian villager? I mean an Anatolian villager; whether a woman, man or child, you find an expression in all of them which, despite its purity and its simplicity, even its plainness and primitiveness, frightens you you are frightened by its dignity, maturity and deep pained lines.

On the way here at the top of the hill I chanced on a child who was a woodcutter. He may have been ten years old. Yet, when I looked into his eyes I was humbled and had to bow my head. The child was carrying so great an experience of life and was scorched with so much true knowledge that before him I understood the insignificance of all the things I have known and learnt.

The young man was silent. In sadness he thought and added

My own insignificance, my own dullness...Well, whatever. In this country each of us cannot escape being a parasite. The real master of this country is the child with the wood

¹⁰³ Karaosmanoğlu, 1934: 67

I saw on the top of the hill and only he knows how to converse with these stones and this earth. The secret of these stones and this land is only revealed to him. I fear that just as the secret of this land will not be revealed to me neither will the soul of the villager. In this fear I resemble the explorer who goes to find the hidden places of the earth.

From the utopia of part three of *Ankara* one must infer that it is this lyrical optimism and engagement with the people which Karaosmanoğlu thinks must replace the exhausted pessimism embodied by Ahmet Celal. The comparison of *Ankara* and *Yaban* suggests that the critical issue for the author is the formation of the “correct” leading class.

If remoteness from the people and a failure to engage with them is a vice, it seems in *Yaban* to be shared by the great leader himself. Ahmet Celal wonders whether, perched on a rock in Ankara, the great shepherd can do much for the village or for him. There are only three other references to him in the entire work. In one he appears during a reverie of Ahmet Celal as a star in the sky¹⁰⁴; from the two others we see what little impression he makes on the ordinary people¹⁰⁵. Such criticism may be buried in the narrative or the narrator’s delusion but it seems to me strong criticism nonetheless.

To Noumero 31328

Because it exists complete, I will briefly describe the narrative form of the 1945 edition. *To Noumero* is the story told in the first person of the eighteen year old Elias who was taken captive and sent to the labour battalions after the end of the war in September 1922. His captivity lasted for fourteen months. Elias survives, with the dice loaded against him on repeated occasions, and is eventually shipped off from his homeland in Turkey to a very doubtful redemption in the metropolitan motherland, Greece. The title come from the prisoner number that is assigned to him at a late stage of the ordeal. The serialised printing of the tale in 1924 reproduced the number using Arabic numerals and a photograph of the tag bearing it appears on the cover of some modern editions. The narrative makes clear that once you got a number your chances of survival substantially improved since knowledge of your existence was now shared with Greece and agencies of the League of Nations (“Joy, joy!” exclaims the narrator when he finally gets the tag in his hands¹⁰⁶). Use of the number as a title introduces the idea of a life so worthless that the height of human ambition was to become a number.

The book consists of a straightforward narration of a succession of episodes in the author’s ordeal vividly described in a consciously spare, brutal and sarcastic language which was then something of an innovation in Greek prose. It is nonetheless carefully shaped as a work of art.

¹⁰⁴ *Yaban*, 75

¹⁰⁵ *Yaban* 27, 92

¹⁰⁶ *To Noumero*, 210

An prominent example of this artfulness is the framing image that begins and closes the work. It begins on the morrow of the Greek defeat with the now famous words of sarcasm, “1922. *Anatoli* (meaning ambiguously either “dawn” or “the east”) *most sweet always, for a sonnet something like that.*¹⁰⁷”. It ends with Elias on the ship taking him from captivity just after he has had to tell his friend that the friend’s family is dead. “*Soon the sun will rise*”, says the friend indifferently having been asked if he feels cold. He does not use the word “*anatoli*” or its cognates. Elias sees an indeterminate line in the sky that will become flame¹⁰⁸, a word chosen to recall their ordeal and the destruction of the life they left behind.

There are a number of consistent themes that traverse the narrative. The most striking is the brutalisation by captivity of the captives themselves. Elias feels “*cruel joy*” when someone else is picked for death¹⁰⁹; the prisoners feel relief when their barefoot march is paused to allow the guards to rape some girls¹¹⁰; put to removing a pile of human bones from view before the arrival of a League of Nations inspector they turn it into play¹¹¹. Another is the “universalist” stance of the author. The dedication of the 1945 edition is to “*my tortured mother and to all the tortured mothers of the world*”¹¹². Elias receives the occasional kindness from a Turk¹¹³, the Greek prisoner “aristocracy” is totally disgusting¹¹⁴, Turkish resistance to the Greek occupation is quite understandable and referred to in terms of admiration¹¹⁵, evils perpetrated by the Greeks are not glossed over¹¹⁶. The most disagreeable and uncharitable prisoners are a collection of Greek priests¹¹⁷.

In a similar spirit the word “*Ellada*” (Greece) is not used in the book and “*patrida*” (fatherland), while occasionally used for a particular locality or memleket by the Christians, is only used to refer to Greece by a sarcastic Turk. “The Greek” or “the Greeks” are referred to as interlopers. As the prisoners are “skimmed” for instant death at the beginning of the book the Turks pick on a man who tries to escape death by claiming he is an Italian citizen; but Elias remembers that when the Greeks came (in the third person, as if they were strangers) the same man, a hotelier, welcomed them and “*not finding a flag to wave used a bed-sheet smelling of doubtful things and shouted :Long Live Liberty!*”¹¹⁸.

¹⁰⁷ *To Noumero*, 25

¹⁰⁸ *To Noumero*, 319

¹⁰⁹ *To Noumero*, 53

¹¹⁰ *To Noumero*, 114

¹¹¹ *To Noumero*, 281

¹¹² *To Noumero*, 7 (unnumbered)

¹¹³ *To Noumero*, 172-174

¹¹⁴ *To Noumero*, 257

¹¹⁵ *To Noumero*, 108

¹¹⁶ *To Noumero*, 95, 186

¹¹⁷ *To Noumero*, 112

¹¹⁸ *To Noumero*: 44.

In his 1945 preface to the new edition Venezis writes¹¹⁹ that he was forced to return to a story he wanted to forget by the new tribulations of his country. At first it was necessary for calm to live again in the middle of sorrow and to remember that human beings, good deeds, kindness and goodness once existed on earth; hence the composition of the simple book about good people, *Aeolian Earth*. But then another force pushes you to “chew and rechew” pain; and so immediately afterwards he took up *To Noumero* again; he “*lived it again working it obstinately three times without touching its rough character*”. And then he saw in the awful spring and summer of 1944 the relationship of blood and “feel” between that time and this. How extensive was this triple reworking? He had already “reworked” it in 1931 when it first came out as a book. It is not possible for now to say anything about the 1931 edition but it is obvious even from the most superficial comparison that the versions of 1924 and 1945 are very different indeed. Even the famous opening is missing from the 1924 version.

To a considerable extent the differences are in language and narrative style. The 1924 version has a rougher demotic (in keeping with the standards of *Kampana*); the 1945 version is closer to the standard literary language of the time. It must be emphasized that this was a personal choice open to Venezis; he was extremely competent in all registers of the language and as a functionary in youth of the Bishopric of Aivali and in manhood of the Bank of Greece would also have composed in the formal katharevousa. I would conjecture that his shift of the language to the mid-1940s mainstream was to make the book more immediate to a wider class of readers and to shed a linguistic colour that by then would have seemed twee and folksy and thereby detracted from the force of the work. In narrative style the 1924 instalments are much more introspective and reflective. The 1945 version cuts out most of the narrator’s own thoughts and carries the story along with dialogue and sentences describing action. These changes can be regarded as the consequence of literary maturity; as Myrivilis himself said, introducing the work in *Kampana*, the author may not yet have found his own voice.

But these stylistic changes apart it is possible also to see major changes to the narrative. Space allows me to take one example; I will compare the episode related on pp 108-110 of the 1945 edition with its 1924 “equivalent”. In the 1945 version the captives have arrived in Bergama to the horror of one of them, a watchmaker because he fears vengeance for reprisals carried out by the Greeks. After they are thrown into a tobacco warehouse a Turkish officer comes in and greets the watchmaker by name and offers him tobacco and brings food. The officer is described in admiring terms as “*one of the brave men (“palicars”) who did not bow their heads under Greek occupation, took to the mountains and spent pride as if it had no value*”. It then turns out that they had lived together before the war, that their wives had been like sisters and the Turk’s wife had been killed during the war. The watchmaker begs for mercy but to no avail. The officer leaves and later in the night the watchmaker is led away.

In the 1924 version there is none of this. The watchmaker is forced to lead a futile search for buried church treasure, there is no Turkish officer, no Turkish officer’s wife and no

¹¹⁹ *To Noumero*: 21-3

conversation. In the night all the watchmaker’s family are taken off but their fate is sufficiently uncertain for the captives to wonder about them later.

Both versions may be a partial account of what actually happened one night in 1922 in Bergama but why the difference of emphasis? The answer is likely to lie in the circumstances of publication. *Kampana* was a newspaper with a distinct political line (leftist and Venizelist) and it was also a crusading newspaper. One of its causes was quite specifically the interests of ex-servicemen and political hostages which it regarded as neglected by political favouritism and indifference. Indeed it hosted on its front page with a banner headline on 4 March 1924 an open letter from Venezis to Myrivilis on the issue of hostages, that is people who were in the same position as Venezis had been. Venezis does not refer to himself but gives a general account of neglect and indifference which allows extensive mistreatment of a large number of persons to go unremarked. In this context regardless of Venezis’s literary merits it made perfect sense to commission, as was said in advance of publication “*his impressions of the living hell of slavery through which he passed in the hope that we will see finally an “artistic expression” of this terrible life which many thousands – alas – of Greeks had the dark fortune to undergo but which noone was able up to now to recount.*”¹²⁰ For this purpose a more “internal” account of the “slave’s” sufferings made sense (each instalment was prefaced with the phrase “*what the man with this number who was enslaved in the war went through*”). In 1943-4 Venezis was revising the text for an age which was going through occupation and civil war and for this context the emphasis on denationalizing and universalizing the suffering made perfect sense. The vignettes of privileged – collaborating – prisoners, for example, as would the vivid images of the brutalization worked by mistreatment would have rung very true with readers of that time.

¹²⁰ Kampana 5 February 1924

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