



**CULTURAL MEMORY of 1970s' TURKISH POLITICAL  
HISTORY THE QUESTION of STATE-SANCTIONED TORTURE  
and IMPRISONMENT in the MARCH 12<sup>th</sup> NOVEL "YARALISIN"**\*

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**ABSTRACT**

The 'March 12<sup>th</sup> Novels' is a retroactive umbrella term used to describe the works of fiction written between 1971 and 1980 which take as their inspiration the events surrounding the coup d'état; the military takeover, the battle between revolutionary left wing activists and nationalists, and the political and social fallout of the intervention. Erdal Öz's *Yaralısın* (You are Wounded) is a direct response to the traumatic and brutal oppression of the political left after the March 12<sup>th</sup> military intervention of 1971 in Turkey. The novel plays an important role, among others from the March 12<sup>th</sup> literary corpus, in the collective memory of the violent persecution suffered by left wing activists, intellectuals and writers during this period. Öz's work, however, devoid as it is of any explicit reference to contemporary politics or events, can also be read on a more universal level, with much of what it reveals about the nature of violence and power applicable to any totalitarian regime. This article uses the philosophical and social theories of Michel Foucault in particular to examine the way in which Öz depicts the relationship between the state and the individual, exploring the protagonist's internalisation of state power, taking on both the role of accuser and interrogator. Elaine Scarry's work is also vital in elucidating the psychological effects of torture, in particular the way in which it destroys language and its victim's capacity for self-expression, twisting the suffering of the prisoner in order to legitimise state control.

**Key Words:** Turkey, Erdal Öz, *Yaralısın*, Torture, Imprisonment, State, 12 March Novels

**1970'Lİ YILLAR TÜRKİYE SİYASİ TARİHİNİN KÜLTÜREL  
BELLEĞİ 12 MART ROMANI "YARALISIN"DA DEVLET  
GÜDÜMLÜ İŞKENCE ve MAHKUMİYET SORUNSALI**

**ÖZET**

'12 Mart Romanları', 1971 askeri müdahalesi sonrasındaki zaman diliminde, Türkiye'de yaşanan siyasi kargaşayı, aşırı sol ve sağ temsil eden gençlerin birbirleriyle ve devletin kolluk kuvvetleriyle olan

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çekişmelerini, kavgalarını ele alan; müdahale sonrası yaşanan ve özellikle de sol ideolojiyi vuran gözaltı, işkence ve mahkumiyet dalgası ile 1970'li yıllar Türk siyasi yaşamının bilinmeyen birçok yanına ışık tutarak bu durumu edebi bir perspektiften değerlendiren ve bu olaylara etkili bir dille ayna tutmaya çalışan eserlere verilen genel bir ifadedir.

Bu bağlamda Erdal Öz'ün 'Yaralısın' romanı, 12 Mart 1971 askeri müdahalesi sonrası Türkiye'sinde, döneme ait acı gerçeklere doğrudan ışık tutarak, sol ideolojiyi temsil eden bir neslin yaşadığı acıların kültürel belleğini tutar. Roman, 1970 yıllar Türkiye'sinde, sol fikirli yüzlerce, binlerce entellektüel, üniversite öğrencisi ve aktivistin gözaltı süresince zulme ve işkenceye maruz kaldığı; ülkede hakim olan karanlık bir dönemin kültürel hafızasını kaydederek günümüz neslinin yakın tarihini öğrenmelerinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Erdal Öz'ün bu romanı ayrıca, dönemin siyasetine veya siyasi olaylarına herhangi bir isim veya zaman dilimi kullanmadan somut anlamda doğrudan vurgu yapmaması yönüyle de evrensel bir özellik taşımaktadır. Romanda sunulan işkence ve insanlık dışı her türlü uygulama, herhangi bir totaliter rejim tarafından uygulanabilecek şiddetin doğasına işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışmada Michael Foucault'un felsefi ve sosyoloji teorileriyle açıkladığı devlet ile birey arasındaki ilişkiyi, totaliter bir yapıya sahip iktidarın uyguladığı aşırı gücün etkilerini görmekteyiz. Buna ek olarak, iktidarın romanın tutuklu kahramanı üzerinde hem psikolojik hem de fiziksel anlamda uyguladığı gücün oluşturduğu etkileri, bu güç karşısındaki direnç girişimini ve bir süre sonra bu güce boyun eğmek zorunda kalarak, kendi kendisinin sorgulayıcısı ve suçlayıcısı olma sürecini incelemektedir. Öte yandan, Elaine Scarry tarafından kaleme alınan "The Body in Pain" adlı kitap da, işkencenin özellikle de şiddete maruz kalan bireyin dış dünyayla iletişime geçip kendini ifade etme yetisini ortadan kaldıran psikolojik etkileri ile devletin mahkum birey üzerinde kurduğu kontrolü ve baskıyı meşrulaştırma amacıyla şiddetin dozunu daha da arttırma gibi çıkarımlarını ele alması yönüyle bu makalede birinci derecede öneme sahiptir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Erdal Öz, 'Yaralısın', İşkence, Mahkumiyet, Devlet, 12 Mart Romanları

## Introduction

When, on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1971, senior Turkish military officers presented a memorandum to then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, demanding that he step down, they brought to an end more than a year of bloody political and social struggles and set in motion what was to be known as the 'March 12<sup>th</sup> intervention', the second of three coups to topple political power in Turkey in the space of twenty years. Naturally, many at the time assumed that a coup which brought down the centre-right government of Demirel would replace his regime with a leftist government, and many on the left welcomed news of the intervention. Initial appearances were deceptive, however, and it soon became clear that the intervention had aimed not to remove right wing power from government but to sure it up against the threat of the left-wing opposition. After a decade of greatly improved political participation from both ends of the political spectrum, an increasingly mistrustful and poisonous political atmosphere had developed in Turkey, which saw political violence and murder fuelled by a virulent anti-Communist movement imported from the USA. The

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military officers who carried out the March 12<sup>th</sup> intervention were in fact right wing nationalists who acted to pre-empt what they saw as an otherwise inevitable left wing coup. Although officially they replaced Demirel's government with a technocratic administration, true power lay with the right wing military High Command.

It was in the wake of the 1971 intervention, in response to the brutal persecution carried out by the new regime against anyone identified as left wing, be they activists, writers, intellectuals, students or journalists, that leftist writers began writing what would become known as the March Twelfth novels, a new corpus of Turkish fiction which was both an act of protest and a way of coming to terms with what was happening to them. Erdal Öz's *Yaralımsın* is very much part of this new movement of writing.

In his work, Öz explores the role of violence and power in relation to the individual and his self-definition process when confined within the prison power structure. Although undeniably an attack on the abuses carried out by the right wing regime against the left (of which Öz himself had personal experience, having been imprisoned after the military intervention), *Yaralımsın* also examines the relationship between the individual and state power from a more universal perspective and avoids any explicit political or geographical contextual references which could locate the novel in a specific place or time. The protagonist of the novel is not incarcerated only because of his political views; rather it is his rejection of state control and his resistance to it as an individual which leads to his imprisonment and interpellation. The torture inflicted upon him forces him to identify with the social conventions that the state views as acceptable, while the constant interrogation reduces him from a nonconformist individual to a being who can only identify as part of a collective group.

After doing all he can to resist, ultimately the protagonist comes to the realisation that through his very act of resistance he is in fact doing exactly what his abusers want. The effects of torture in this work reflect precisely what Scarry theorises, *i.e.* that systematic use of torture by the state perverts the suffering of the prisoner and in so doing legitimises state power.<sup>1</sup> Torture compels the protagonist to internalise state power and indulge in ruthless self-criticism, examining his own failings and what remains of his shattered humanity, instead of critically judging the actions of his captors.

### Historical Background

The genesis of the Turkish novel lies with the educated urban class of Tanzimat Turkey, whose understanding and appreciation of European culture and political thought instilled in them a belief that Western ideas were needed to reform the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. Writers hailing from this group adopted the novel as the obvious choice of literary medium through which to criticise Ottoman society and promulgate their vision of reform.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between this urban intelligentsia and the political authorities has had a significant effect on the development of the Turkish novel ever since. Up until the First World War, the novel in Turkey had also been influenced by the political changes and upheavals which formed the foundation of the modern Turkish nation: the movement for political reforms during the 1870; the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II.; the Young Turks who brought down the Sultan in 1908; and more generally the force of Turkish nationalism as it gained momentum. It was not only the content but also the realist style and techniques of the early novels which were heavily influenced by these political events and their authors were often activists fighting and suffering at the hands of the oppressive Ottoman regime.

<sup>1</sup> Elaine Scarry, *Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987, s. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Robert P. Finn, *The Early Turkish Novel 1872 – 1900*, The Isis Press, Istanbul 1975, s. 11.

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When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk<sup>3</sup> established the Turkish nationalist movement after the First World War there was a concerted push for a secular republic, led by an alliance of intellectuals, white collar workers, army officers and civil servants, who found themselves battling the traditional Islamic world-view. Novelists were vital in spreading a more secular, republican ideology to the remotest corners of Turkey. While the Republican People's Party (RPP; *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)<sup>4</sup> was the new ruling elite's only means of bringing about political and social change, by way of legislation, contemporary Turkish literature spoke to and on behalf of the rural peasantry, enabling the establishment of a secular Turkish republic.

Literature came to the fore once again as a means of social and political struggle in the 1920s, when a group of socialist writers, intellectuals and activists used publications, books, demonstrations and ultimately new political parties to protest against the oppressive one-party rule of the RPP, which smothered all dissent<sup>5</sup>. In defiance of government crack-downs on worker-peasant solidarity, which the authorities saw as a threat to the supremacy of Turkish national identity, the counter-elite depicted the struggles faced by rural Anatolian peasants and the growing urban working class in their literature in order to encourage unity between them. After the Second World War, as Turkey sought to strengthen ties with the United States, these left-leaning writers faced brutal repression at the hands of the state. This oppression of the left continued even when single-party rule came to an end with the election of Adnan Menderes's Democrat Party (DP; *Demokrat Parti*) in 1950, which encouraged further Westernisation, signed Turkey up to NATO and became a founding member of CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation).<sup>6</sup>

Presenting himself as both a populist and as a traditionalist, Menderes was victorious in three national elections during the 1950s, pushing the RPP into opposition to his DP. Repealing numerous secular reforms and abolishing newly established institutions, Menderes infuriated the RPP, and weakened the power of the military, civil service and any other group he deemed to be too close to the RPP.<sup>7</sup> Menderes's paranoia and suppression of dissent reached its culmination when he tried to shut down the RPP and the military stepped in on 2 May 1960 to remove his government from power.<sup>8</sup>

The hugely important role of European ideals in the creation of modern Turkey caused significant problems for a nation trying hard to differentiate itself from the West. The adoption of a genuinely democratic system in 1950 is a prime example of this tense relationship with modernisation and Westernisation, having been overthrown by military coup four times in the space of 37 years, namely in 1960,<sup>9</sup> 1971,<sup>10</sup> 1980<sup>11</sup> and 1997.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of its complexity and its impact on the politics, society and literary output of Turkey at the time, the March Twelfth intervention of 1971 sets itself apart from the other coups of 27 May 1960 and 12 September 1980. Unlike the majority of putsches, the March Twelfth intervention did

<sup>3</sup>The founder of modern Turkey. See Dankwart A. Rustow, "Atatürk as an Institution Builder," in **Atatürk Founder of a Modern State**, ed. Ali Kazancıgil & Ergun Özbudun, C. Hurst & Co Ltd, London 2006, s. 57-79. Lord Kinross, **Atatürk**, Morrison and Gibb Ltd, London 1964. Andrew Mango, **Atatürk**, John Murray Ltd., London 1999.

<sup>4</sup>Feroz Ahmad, **Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye 1945-1980**, Hil Yayınları, İstanbul 1994, s. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Erik Jan Zürcher, **Turkey: A Modern History**, I. B. Tauris, London, s. 184-86.

<sup>6</sup>E. J. Zürcher, *Ibid.*, s. 245-48.

<sup>7</sup>F. Ahmad, *Ibid.*, s. 106.

<sup>8</sup>Ergun Özbudun, "Turkey: Crisis, Interruptions and Re-Equilibrations", ed. Juan J. Linz Larry Diamond, Seymour Martin Lipset, **Democracy in Developing Countries Asia**, S. 6, Lynne Rienner, London 1989, s. 201.

<sup>9</sup>Davut Dursun, **27 Mayıs Darbesi**, Şehir Yayınları, İstanbul 2001.

<sup>10</sup>F. Ahmad, *Ibid.*, s. 277-79.

<sup>11</sup>E. J. Zürcher, *Ibid.*, s. 292-300.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Mango, **The Turks Today**, John Murray Publishers, London 2004, s. 96-98.

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not target the government, call for the dissolution of parliament or ban the ruling party. Instead, its intention was to move against the left-wing opposition; it seems that General Faruk Gürler, one of the coup leaders, may have meant what he said when he told the President, "Mr Demirel, we did not do this against you."<sup>13</sup> The unique nature of the March Twelfth overthrow has brought it considerable attention from historians, jurists and, most significantly, writers.

In the wake of the 1961 coup, the DP was banned and the Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, the Minister of Financial Affairs, Hasan Polatkan, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu were executed on 16-17<sup>th</sup> September 1961 for their 'misuse' of power and abrogation of the constitution.<sup>14</sup> From this point there began an on-going cycle of political reform, including the drafting of a new constitution in 1961, the extension of political freedoms and the formation of Turkist, Socialist and Islamist parties. The diversity of interests and objectives displayed by these various new political parties in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM)<sup>15</sup> laid the foundations for what promised to be a successful and benign parliamentary democracy. A similar tolerance and acceptance of divergent opinions allowed literature to flourish during the 1960s, free as it was to concentrate on issues revolving around the class system, injustice and the widening gap between rich and poor. As interest in socialism increased, writing became more preoccupied with social justice, class struggle and political change. The large-scale movement of people from rural areas to the cities and the resulting conflict of cultures were popular motifs during this period. Writers played a crucial role in political activism at the time, leading the anti-American riots of the 1960s, taking a prominent role in civil society and co-founding new political parties and trade unions, including the *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Worker's Party of Turkey) and the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers' Unions (DISK; *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*). It was only through the political activism of writers that in 1965 TİP was able to take its place in parliament, becoming a redoubtable opponent of the ruling party in spite of its lack of elected seats. There is a case for arguing that in introducing liberal reforms as they did in 1961, the military not only allowed left-wing destabilising elements to flourish within Turkey but also directly set the scene for the 1971 intervention against those very elements.

### Critical Reception and Legacy of the March Twelfth Novels

The impact of the March Twelfth intervention on authors and their writings cannot be underestimated: it resulted in the creation of an entirely new and politically charged literary discourse, whose aim was to analyse and explore the principle powers which lay behind the intervention. The generic term 'March Twelfth Novel' was adopted to describe the works of leftist authors writing in response to the intervention, which had entirely changed the left's understanding of Turkey and of itself. The result was a major rupture in the sixty-year development of the Turkish novel, which brought about a swing towards the use of socialist realism and a broadening of scope to include economic migrants in large cities and rural Anatolian society alongside the traditional focus on highly Westernised upper-middle class families Istanbul. While it expanded geographically, however, on a social level the scope of the novel narrowed until it focused almost exclusively on the university-educated political left, exploring the human impact of the state oppression it faced.

Most March Twelfth Novels are regarded as little more than the knee-jerk reactions of people who had been traumatised by the ordeal of the witnessing the intervention and its violent revocation of civil and political freedoms.<sup>16</sup> The most famous novelists of this period were profoundly influenced by the left-wing student protests which swept Europe in 1968 and they sympathised with

<sup>13</sup> Reported by a senator to a journalist. See *Cumhuriyet Newspaper*, 19 March 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Zürcher, *Ibid.*, s. 261.

<sup>15</sup> TBMM: The Turkish Grand National Assembly.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmet Kekeç, "Darbeler ve Romanlar," *Hece; Türk Romanı Özel Sayısı*, S. 6, 2002, s. 65-67.

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the socialist leanings of activists and organisations suffering from the aftermath of the intervention.<sup>17</sup> Seen as a whole, the writings of authors such as Füzûzan, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Sevgi Soysal, Ayla Kutlu, Çetin Altan, Erdal Öz, Pınar Kür, Samim Kocagöz, Oğuz Atay, Atilla İlhan and Vedat Türkali, depicting the socio-political upheavals of the 1970s and the oppression introduced by the new military regime, tell the story of the physical and psychological destruction of leftist identity after the failure of the youth movement to prevent the intervention. Going against the general left-wing sympathies of the March Twelfth novels were a small number of authors, including Emine İşinsu, Tarık Buğra and Sevinç Çokum, whose works propounded the right-wing perspective, endorsing the methods of the state and challenging the testimony of witnesses and the status of victims.

The dominant theme of the March Twelfth novels is the ordeal of young left-wing activists in prison and the torture they suffered. Ahmet Kekeç<sup>18</sup> argues that a lack of support among the general population was the reason for the young revolutionaries' failure to prevent the military intervention. He asserts that, rather than questioning the motives of the young rebels, post-coup novels focus on their defiant attitude once they have been captured.<sup>19</sup> For Kekeç, the March Twelfth novels are far more concerned with defiance in defeat than with youthful ideals.

Murat Belge,<sup>20</sup> on the other hand, bases his analysis on a novel-novelist-public triangle and regards the March Twelfth novels as depictions of imprisonment, torture and provocation, which create an unavoidable metaphorical distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. Belge argues that if this opposition consists of imprisoned revolutionaries 'inside' and the general public 'outside' then these works constitute a means of creating awareness among the public about the plight of the prisoners. He does not automatically presume that the rebels are innocent but at the same time asks if the fault lay with the law or if those who are in charge of the administration of justice acted unfairly towards them.<sup>21</sup> Belge warns that 'defending the offence' could potentially lead to far graver accusations and claims that, regardless of its effectiveness in illustrating genuine abuses of power, basing a novel primarily on the brutal methods of repression used after the March Twelfth intervention will inevitably distort the author's sense of objectivity. He comes to the conclusion that artistic experience will simply not suffice in the quest to complete theoretical knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Fethi Naci<sup>23</sup> meanwhile takes a far more political approach to the March Twelfth novels, addressing the difficulty of depicting their real life traumatic experiences in a realistic manner.<sup>24</sup> He accentuates the honesty and genuine nature of these novels, and shows that, instead of discussing them verbally, the novelists of this period insert their political beliefs straight into their novels.<sup>25</sup> Naci regards the March Twelfth novels as the necessary starting point for every novelist who has come after and is a keen proponent of expanding the genre to encompass wider experiences, new challenges and more diverse characters, thus pushing the novel form to modernise and achieve higher levels of sophistication. Naci insists that any novelist since the military in 1971 intervention who wishes to write with a social focus must learn valuable lessons from the March Twelfth novelists and carry out extremely in-depth research into Turkish history, the socio-economic climate, socialism and youth culture. Naci particularly emphasises the importance of this

<sup>17</sup> A. Ömer Türkeş, "Romanda 12 Mart Suretleri Ve 68 Kuşağı," *Birikim*, S. 132, 2000, s. 80-85.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmet Kekeç is a writer and columnist.

<sup>19</sup> A. Kekeç, *Ibid.*, s. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Murat Belge is one of Turkey's most important left-liberal intellectuals. He is also an academic, writer, translator, literary critic, columnist, civil rights activist and occasional tour guide.

<sup>21</sup> Murat Belge, *Edebiyat Üstüne Yazılar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, s. 127-34.

<sup>22</sup> M. Belge, *Ibid.*, s. 114-35.

<sup>23</sup> Fethi Naci is a literary critic, intellectual and writer.

<sup>24</sup> Fethi Naci, *Türkiye'de Roman Ve Toplumsal Değişme*, Gerçek Yayınevi, İstanbul 1981, s. 416.

<sup>25</sup> F. Naci, *Ibid.*, s. 364-66.

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last point: if a novelist wishes to write about youth culture then it is vital that he or she know as much about it as the youths in question.<sup>26</sup>

We also find an emphatically political approach in the criticism of Ahmet Oktay,<sup>27</sup> who highlights the intolerance and aggression shown by left-wing authors towards anyone whose opinions and ideals differed from their own and asserts that this deliberate provocation is directly responsible for the popularity of the novels.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, Ahmet Türkeş<sup>29</sup> examines the March Twelfth novels from a broader perspective and detaches their leftist ideology from conventional socialist works of fiction in order to explore the influence of the March Twelfth novels beyond the 1980 coup.<sup>30</sup> Berna Moran<sup>31</sup> takes a social approach to the novels and looks in depth at the working classes and the constant migration to the big cities. This large-scale internal movement of people not only threw up clashes of culture but also revived the importance of the working classes in Turkish literature, with writers often concentrating on the perpetual struggle between the workers and the bourgeoisie.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, it is worth taking into account Çimen Günay's enthusiastic call to abandon the derogatory and often hostile attitude of critics towards the March Twelfth novels. She argues that close examination of gender roles within the novels can illuminate the complexity of interpersonal relations within a patriarchal power structure and by extension shine a light on the most recent period of Turkish national history. She addresses post-1968 radicalism as crises of gender: "a masculinity that strives for change, encountered a rival masculinity that upholds traditions and resists change."<sup>33</sup>

Although regularly dismissed as little more than politically charged leftist diatribes which do not depict genuine historical events, what the March Twelfth corpus represents in reality is a collective cultural memory, specifically the memory of how the Turkish people and the Turkish state interacted during the period following the military intervention. They are a direct response to society's experience of extremely traumatic and painful events; while these events may be what Vincent Engel calls "unimaginable, incommunicable, and unspeakable", nonetheless societies, just like individuals, can only learn to live with them if they are able to narrativise them in some way.<sup>34</sup> Increasingly, critical attention is now being paid to the function of writing, and fiction in particular, in creating cultural memory, a movement which goes against more orthodox theories that writing destroys memory by freezing the dynamism and fluctuating nature of remembrance, as propounded by Maurice Halbwachs in *La Mémoire Collective*<sup>35</sup>. Where fiction has the advantage over the genre of memoir is that the latter must exclude the memories of other people; fiction on the other hand does not owe its readers reality or truth and thus is able to express things which autobiography never could. By its nature, fiction contains a fundamental paradox: the fact that it is not constrained to describing real-life events means that it can impart essential truths about reality and at the same time rely on the easy get-out clause that 'it is only fiction'.<sup>36</sup> Fiction allows readers to become part of the reality of its characters, letting them into their inner world, their feelings and experiences,

<sup>26</sup> F. Naci, *Ibid.*, s. 417.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Oktay is a poet, journalist and writer.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Oktay, *Türkiye'de Popüler Kültür*, Everest Yayınları, İstanbul 2002, s. 242.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmet Türkeş is journalist, literary critic and writer.

<sup>30</sup> A. Ö. Türkeş, *Ibid.*, s. 80-85.

<sup>31</sup> Berna Moran is one of the well known literary critics in Turkey.

<sup>32</sup> Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 3*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, s. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Çimen Günay, *Cold War Masculinities in Turkish Literature: A Survey of March 12th Novels*, Leiden University Press, Leiden 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Francois-Xavier Lavenne, "Fiction, Between Inner Life and Collective Memory. A Methodological Relection," *The New Arcadia*, S. 3, 2005, s.1-4.

<sup>35</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, PUF, Paris 1950, Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> Francois-Xavier Lavenne, *Ibid.*, s. 8.

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encouraging readers to suffer with them. Conveying traumatic events is made much easier by creating fictional plots, narrators and characters who exist in different times and spaces and the fact that fiction is not a representation of historical reality allows it to express what would otherwise be impossible to say and to examine the uncertainties of the past.<sup>37</sup>

### Theoretical Basis of the Article

The use of abstract symbolism in Öz's work is not primarily a way of disguising criticism of the authorities, done out of fear of reprisal; rather the deliberate rejection of historical, documentary fiction is far more indicative of a modernist and postmodernist scepticism demonstrated towards the 'grand narratives' of conventional novels. As is the case with many of the March Twelfth novels, Öz reveals his politics, not through explicit references to actual events or people but through the consciousness of his protagonist and his struggle with 'self'. It is not coincidental, as Selvin Yaltir puts it, that "in most of these novels the protagonists experience an ontological crisis because of a crisis of history."<sup>38</sup> In the March Twelfth corpus, the protagonists' psychological progression casts light on the state's use of power as a result of the necessarily two-way relationship between those with power and those without. I will use Foucault's theory that 'power produces its own resistance' in order to explore this relationship further.<sup>39</sup>

Erdal Öz's focus on the use of physical and psychological torture aimed to bring it to wider public attention to the abuses committed by the military state. Torture in *Yaralısin* also calls into question just how far the state is able to undermine its own laws under a Schmittian 'state of exception' during which, according to Agamben, "the fundamental human rights of citizens can be diminished, or the state can rationalise official illegalities such as torture under arrest or detention without a court trial, by alleging the liability of the state and the need to safeguard order."<sup>40</sup> This means that the perceived threat posed by the victim to the state is enough to legitimise the use of torture: it is through its power to inflict pain that the state is able to assert its legitimacy over individual. In Öz, just as in Altan, the protagonist internalises the power of the state with the result that the normally external opposition between oppressor and oppressee is played out internally within the protagonist's consciousness.

In this article, I will be referring particularly to two critics who have done much to elucidate the effects of torture and imprisonment on the individual, from a psychological and philosophical perspective. The first is Michel Foucault and the second is Elaine Scarry. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) traces the three-hundred year history of the shift within Western legal systems from cruel, 'inhumane' punishments to the primarily prison-based penal system we see today. Foucault argues that while the old physical punishments inflicted damage and suffering on to the body, modern day imprisonment affects what he terms the 'soul'. He claims that, contrary to received wisdom, in reality imprisonment is a far crueller punishment than public execution or corporal castigation because the prisoner becomes aware of his place in an overwhelming power structure. This power structure has two extremes: at one end is the all-powerful 'sovereign' and at the other is the 'condemned man', who must encode his own lack of all power. In doing this he creates a non-corporal entity, or soul, which is "born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint."<sup>41</sup> This soul is quite unlike the religious concept of the 'soul' and because it is brought into being by the discourse of punishment, it can be neither

<sup>37</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Çeviren: Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2004, s. 559 - 60.

<sup>38</sup> Selvin Yaltir, *The Representation of the Past in Modern Turkish Fiction. Conceptualizing History in Tutunamayanlar and Ölmeyle Yatmak*, MA, Uttech University 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, New York 1975, s.97.

<sup>40</sup> Agamben Giorgio, *State of Exception*, Otonom Publishing House, İstanbul 2005, s. 40.

<sup>41</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s.29.

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innocent nor guilty. According to Foucault, the state imposes itself on the soul, and numerous examples of this can be found throughout *Yaralısm*. The overwhelming omnipotence of the state causes the protagonist to lose entirely any concept of identity, subjective reality and even to lose track of time and space. Over time, their physical imprisonment causes the soul of the protagonist to accept the power structure in which he is trapped and internalising state power is the only way left open to him to encode his existence.

I will also be using Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) to look at the relationship between language and torture. Scarry argues that physical abuse "actively destroys" a person's capacity to use language and this fact is understood and exploited by state powers which employ torture. Torturers are thus able to impose the fabrication of state legitimacy onto the emptiness left by the victim's wordlessness and twist their pain into a spurious affirmation of legitimate power.<sup>42</sup> We can find many examples in *Yaralısm*, as in many other March Twelfth novels, of the protagonist giving in to the will of the state as the result of sustained physical and psychological torture. He is driven to create his own guilt, to internalise state power and interrogate himself, to eliminate entirely those parts of himself that the state wants eliminated, even his own identity.

### Analysis of the Novel 'Yaralısm'

Published in 1974, a year after its serialisation in the daily *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, Erdal Öz's *Yaralısm* continued the themes laid down in Çetin Altan's earlier *Büyük Gözaltı* (published in 1972) and emulated its critical success, winning the Orhan Kemal Novel Award in 1975 and being published in numerous foreign countries.

Öz<sup>43</sup>, a law graduate, was imprisoned after the March 12<sup>th</sup> intervention and he justified his writing in the following manner: "In that time of disease, I tried to come out against the germ of fascism which our society had caught."<sup>44</sup> The novel itself was inspired by his own real-life dealings with the terror tactics of the state and some claim that the work borrows from the diaries of the incarcerated revolutionary youth leader Deniz Gezmiş and his accomplices, who in 1972 sat on death row.

In *Yaralısm*, Öz exposes the role that violent power plays in the self-definition of the individual within the prison power structure. Although clearly in part an indictment of the abuses and injustices suffered by the left, particularly in the wake of the military intervention of 1971, the novel also explores the relationship between state power and the individual on a more universal level. The prison guards, policemen and torturers who incarcerate and abuse the protagonist represent the state and state power, but the animosity they show towards a wide range of religious and political standpoints, as well as sexual identities, demonstrates that the protagonist is not in prison purely as a result of his political views. Rather it is his individual rejection of state control and his resistance to it which leads to his violent interrogation and incarceration, the torture he undergoes compelling him to identify with the social conventions deemed acceptable by the state. The narrative is driven by the interpellation process, which reduces the protagonist from an individual nonconformist to someone who can only identify with a collective group.

<sup>42</sup> E. Scarry, *Ibid.*, s. 5 - 6.

<sup>43</sup> Born in Sivas in 1935, Öz completed his law degree at Ankara University in 1969. His political activities led to his arrest and incarceration, not long after the military intervention of 1971. One of the most important writers of his era, Öz ended his days managing the publishing house, Can Yayınları, he had set up in 1981. Novels by Öz: *Odalarda* (In the Rooms, 1960), *Yaralısm* (You are Hurt, 1974). Short stories: *Yorgunlar* (The Weary, 1960), *Kanayan* (Bleeding, 1973), *Havada Kar Sesi Var* (Sound of Snow in the Air, 1967). Memoirs: *Deniz Gezmiş Anlatıyor* (Deniz Gezmiş Narrates, 1976), *Gülünün Solduğu Akşam* (The Night His Rose Wilts, 1987), *Defterimde Kuş Sesleri* (The Songs of Birds in My Notebook, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Öz, *Yeni Ortam*, 1 November 1975, quoted in F. Naci, *Ibid.*, s. 419.

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Öz creates an anonymous protagonist, removed from any specific identifiable context in order to lend the narrative a universalism which allows greater insight into the way in which humans respond to intense mental and physical torture. Öz does, however, allow himself greater reference to the political turmoil of the period than Altan and his novel is less abstract in its shifts between the past and present time. Instead of emulating the way in which Altan creates all other characters in the book as a product of the protagonist's consciousness, Öz constantly removes his protagonist from other groups of people who cannot be divided up into individuals, creating a claustrophobic atmosphere within the narrative. The protagonist finds himself on the bottom rung of the prison hierarchy, subject to the savage monopoly of power wielded alongside state authority. Adopting the power of the guards, the chief prisoner of the cell issues orders to the protagonist, who begins to understand the power structure of the cramped prison space. Constrained by a traumatic loss of agency, the protagonist's first minutes in his cell are characterised by feelings of loss of pride and dignity.<sup>45</sup> In a scene which evokes Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as much in the heightened realism of its description as in its choice of metaphor, he sees himself being transformed by his torment into an insect to be crushed under foot: we see the prisoner's terror and shock as the stone he has been hiding under is suddenly removed, leaving him exposed in the harsh sunlight.<sup>46</sup>

Over the course of the novel, the protagonist finds himself in conflict with two different groups of people, 'I', the individual, against 'we', the group. The first of these groups stands for the state, consisting of the prison guards, torturers and spokesmen promoting authoritarian propaganda. The second group is made up of the prisoner masses, an anonymous crowd of homogenous people each known only as 'Nuri', who are incarcerated alongside the protagonist; the relationship between the so-called Nuris and the protagonist gives the clearest representation of the dangerous and artful mechanisms of state control. When the Nuris do not realise that the protagonist is being tortured, it is unclear as to whether this is due to their own experience of torture and their subsequent slide into mindless conformity, wiping their minds of any understanding of the effect of torture on the individual, or because they have always been a different kind of being and never could understand. However, what Öz does make plain is that ultimately the protagonist himself becomes a Nuri at the end of the work as a direct result of his torture and his resulting inability to express individual pain.

The foundation of my analysis of *Yaralısm* lies in Scarry's theory that pain destroys language.<sup>47</sup> It does this in two ways: firstly, torture physically restricts the victim's ability to utter words and leaves only the capacity for single-word articulations and ultimately screams. In that it renders the victim's response animalistic rather than rational, torture succeeds in dehumanising the individual. Secondly, torture also extinguishes the individual's ability to articulate its effects: beyond individual experience, pain can have no reference and for this reason it can be doubted and denied.<sup>48</sup> This process of denial is exhibited in the novel through the Nuris failure to recognise the fact that the protagonist is suffering torture; this in turn causes the protagonist to doubt himself and destroys his capacity to articulate individual thoughts or expression. Öz's use of the second-person voice is key to the denial of self found in the narration: while the narrative depicts the existence and experiences of a first-person character, delving into his thoughts, memories and actions, the use of the second-person creates a distance between the narrator and the narrative, in turn producing a profoundly intuitive and visceral style of writing which leaves the reader with the impression of an out-of-body experience:

<sup>45</sup> Erdal Öz, *Yaralısm*, Cem Yayınları, İstanbul 1975, s. 15.

<sup>46</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 15.

<sup>47</sup> E. Scarry, *Ibid.*, s. 4.

<sup>48</sup> E. Scarry, *Ibid.*, s. 35.

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The cellblock was full of Nuris.

You sat down on a wooden bench by the head of the table, which had been recently wiped and was beginning to dry streakily. You leaned against the oily wall that was shiny from being leaned on and rubbed up against, whose plaster was coming off in large strips. You tried to break off and gnaw on two or three chunks of the solid lump of cheese that they'd brought you on dried out scraps of old newspaper. You didn't even touch the stale bread from the bottom drawer of the wooden cabinet. The pungent smell of stale urine coming from the door just across from the toilets was striking you in face, increasing the acidity of the air.<sup>49</sup>

While this scene is depicted with precision and conveys an experience remembered in sharp detail, the use of the second-person narrator intimates that these occurrences were experienced by someone who is not the narrator. The use of this narrative style is particularly powerful in the scenes depicting graphic torture; while harrowing in their explicitness, they retain a detached and clinical nature.<sup>50</sup> The focus tends to lie on the mechanics of the suffering being inflicted, specifically on the body parts being tortured and on the external signs of suffering in the individual. In contrast, there is very little description of the pain experienced by the victim:

Once again, they pressed the button.

They poured water over the wires attached to the flesh, pulsation moved over the points where the water flowed.

They increased the power. They attached one of the wires to your penis.

The pain was now excruciating.

Later, they released the wire from your penis and began to move it over your body; your nipples, your ears, your tongue.

Your moans became screams. The sound of your heart is thud now...

You feels as if your flesh is being torn from your bones; you feel as though you're about to die. You lose consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

The only way for the protagonist to survive the pain of the torture he is subjected to is to detach himself from events and watch his own body from a distance, describing the scene in the second person. This perspective eventually becomes untenable once the pain reaches the point where it is no longer bearable and the protagonist feels that he is about 'to die'; at this stage he 'loses consciousness'. It is significant that this is also the metaphorical outcome of the mental and physical torture he undergoes; his suffering causes the protagonist to lose both any ability to communicate or express himself and his individual consciousness. During his imprisonment, the policemen view the protagonist's body as the perfect location for subversiveness, using it as a means to "unmake" their prisoner by abusing him into a state where he can no longer articulate, experience or even imagine any reality beyond the limits of his pain. In *Yaralısin* the role of torture extends far beyond its basic purpose of extracting information and takes on a prominence as a ceremonial means of destroying its object on a physical, intellectual and mental level. Torture plays an essential part in the performance of power in the novel, tearing into the prisoner's body through physical torment and injuring his soul even more deeply.

The ability of the second-person narrative to function internally and externally is particularly effective in demonstrating the distance between the protagonist and the other groups:

<sup>49</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> M. Belge, *Ibid.*, s. 114-118.

<sup>51</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 112.

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its detachment from the protagonist endows it with the authority of a third-person omniscient narrator, while it also has access to his mind and can give expression to his thoughts. Every sentence of the work focuses on the protagonist and the details of his thoughts and deeds. Although new to prison life, his experience of the authoritarian oppression which is the reality of life in the outside world has given him the ability to assess and monitor the criminal implications of every action he takes. Though his head is shaven like his fellow prisoners, the protagonist is also keenly aware of the difference between himself ('you') and the others in his cell. Equally, while they openly admit having broken the law, the other inmates also realise that he is different, a "siyasi mahkum" (political prisoner),<sup>52</sup> incarcerated for political reasons and more than just a common criminal. Coming from the poor working and peasant classes, their lives and concerns have nothing in common with those of the protagonist. The uniformity of the other prisoners is underlined by the fact that they all share the same name, Nuri, and use it amongst each other. This is also the name the guards use to address them. The protagonist finds that only by using nicknames or epithets referring to their origins can he distinguish between the Nuris. The point at which the protagonist comes to the realisation that he himself has also become a Nuri is representative of the final disintegration of his identity, its destruction the direct result of his torture and imprisonment. There is sharp contrast between the way in which the protagonist views the Nuris at the beginning of the novel and his realisation by the end that he has become one of them; in the opening pages he describes the Nuris as like "animals", eating with their hands, incapable of wearing shoes properly and defecating openly without shame or embarrassment: "You no longer need call such people human." However, as the book draws to a close, the protagonist realises that through his behaviour he has become one of them:

Like other Nuris, you go to toilet and piss from the doorway instead of going in. You don't mind splashing your urine to the walls and your trouser. You slam the door behind you instead of closing it gently. You are also beginning to wear your shoes not properly and moving away by dragging your feet without taking a proper step. You notice that you are also having great joy from what you are doing.<sup>53</sup>

In light of Foucault's concept of 'gentle punishment', it becomes clear that the abuses suffered by the protagonist "represent in their form the content of the crime".<sup>54</sup> Foucault uses a quotation from Vermeil to illustrate his point: "Those who abuse public liberty will be deprived of their own; those who abuse the benefits of the law and the privileges of public office will be deprived of their civil rights; speculation and usury will be punished by fines" and so forth.<sup>55</sup> By this reasoning, it is thus wholly appropriate for the protagonist, having committed the crime of differing from the state in his opinions, to be punished by means of mental and physical torture, forced to renounce his individualism and take on only collective identity. Given the benefit of the narrative perspective, however, which allows the reader access to the protagonist's internal focalisation, it soon becomes clear that even his individuality is no more than an act, as he tries to align his thoughts and deeds to those of the other prisoners around him in order to 'humiliation':

"Got any things?"

"No."

"What was your crime?"

What was your crime? What will you say? What will you say? You don't know.

<sup>52</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 9.

<sup>53</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 9.

<sup>54</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s. 105.

<sup>55</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s. 103.

“You’re in for politics?”

“Yeah.”

Nuri saves you from your hesitancy.

“I’m in for politics.”

From now on, you’re an activist. This is good. If anyone asks, you will be able to tell them your crime.

“Are you a student?”

“No, I’m not.”

Nuri goes off without being able to understand very much. You try leaning against the wall like a political prisoner, but you immediately give up and pull yourself from the wall. Nobody speaks a word. The humiliation went on for days and weeks. Let it end. Enough already! Your strength to resist has ended. You have no struggle with beliefs in here; you are not fighting with anyone. For the first time, you see them, the people of a different world. They have come and settled before you, been abandoned and found out how to live. Some common rules are in force: you must conform to them.<sup>56</sup>

In an environment where the principle classification of those around him is criminality, the protagonist, who is genuinely unaware of his crime, desperately tries to find a ‘prison identity’ to adopt. Twice he asks ‘What will you say?’, and is only saved from his dilemma by the Nuri: he is ‘in for politics’ and can therefore call himself an ‘activist’. Even this, however, is nothing more than an illusion: he cannot emulate political prisoners and ‘lean against the wall’, and he concedes that he has ‘no struggle with beliefs in here’. For this reason, ‘politics’ and its ambiguity become contextually loaded. It is not a specific political belief which has brought about his incarceration but the fact that he has any political opinion at all. Rather than being imprisoned for politics, he is imprisoned by politics. Significant parallels can be drawn with Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where it is not so much direct dissent which is punished by the state as non-conformity. The state in *Yaralısim* enforces psychological conformity by means of torture: the protagonist finds he is unable to talk with the Nuris about politics and he cannot describe his torture to them. The only way in which he can communicate with the Nuris is by abiding with their rules and conditions and ultimately this restricts the protagonist’s capacity to think – precisely the aim of the state.

In addition to portraying the effect that torture has on the protagonist’s mind and ability to think, the separation of the Nuris from the protagonist acts as a metaphorical representation of the gulf which divided leftist intellectuals and the population in general. Murat Belge interprets the absence of populism in the left-leaning characters of the March 12<sup>th</sup> novels as a symbol of the left wing’s total lack of success in conveying their message to the working classes and rural peasantry.<sup>57</sup> A Nuri makes this point clear to the protagonist:

‘Even though you revolutionary people are very stand-offish and arrogant towards the people, you claim to undertake a fight on behalf of the people, without understanding their needs and wishes.

It can’t be possible. Let it be said that you have no right to do this.

It is inevitable that you will lose this war without us.

<sup>56</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> M. Belge, *Ibid.*, s. 132.



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It is the people who have the power.’<sup>58</sup>

Thus in spite of what they claim, the only group truly represented by the voice of the left wing revolutionaries is their own left wing intellectual class. When, at the close of the novel, the protagonist himself becomes a Nuri, not only does he fail in his efforts to resist state oppression – as a leftist intellectual – but this also means that the Nuris remain suppressed and without representation; contrary to the opinions expressed by the Nuris, there is no evidence to be found either in the novel or in the chronicles of history to say that the working class have ever had any significant power. The only power open to them consists in being part of a collective group under the direct control of the state. Moreover, the Nuris are complicit in their state of subjugation, resisting only on a childish and bestial level. Most of the time they are submissive to the prison guards:

‘Where is the senior prisoner?’ asked the guard. A fat, fleshy tough-looking guy of medium height got up from the beds and came over.

‘Yes, chief?’

‘Look, Nuri, I have brought you someone. He will stay here for now.’

‘OK, chief.’<sup>59</sup>

Even the Nuri identified as the ‘senior prisoner’ shows respect and deference in the face of the guard’s brusque, imperious manner. This is understandable, however, as any show of defiance would result in severe corporal punishment or possibly worse. The torture endured by the Nuris has forged them into a submissive collective group; as a result they are not capable of resisting the state or voicing opposition. Thus torture plays a key role in the strategy of the state: its ultimate goal is the destruction of expression through the use of torture, thereby removing any capacity to resist and reinforcing the state’s monopoly on power.

The protagonist spends most of the novel isolated and removed from the other prisoners by the political nature of his crime and his disdain for them as little more than animals. Eventually he recognises that his leftist, intellectual acts of dissent are an utterly foreign concept for ordinary people and that in a culture that views violence and physical power as the only means of solving problems, the idea of political ideology can only exist on a metaphysical level. Two juxtapositions further accentuate his deepening isolation; the first is between the protagonist and those keeping him prisoner, while the second, a more psychologically challenging distinction, lies between the protagonist’s state of mind before his incarceration begins and his current mental condition in the novel. Both times, the protagonist is regarded as part of a category rather than as an individual. The novel opens with the capture of the protagonist:

When the door opened, you understood everything.

You’d been waiting for days.

Your knees ached and the smell of sticky soot filled your nasal passages again.<sup>60</sup>

The hopelessness of the protagonist’s situation is made clear in this scene, where the apartment ‘door opens’ and five unknown men in plainclothes enter. There are strong parallels here with another March 12<sup>th</sup> novel by Sevgi Soysal, in whose work, *Yıldırım Bölge Kadınlar Koğuşu*, the “door opened” at the arrival of the non-commissioned officer, who is there to meet the

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<sup>58</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 174.

<sup>59</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 174.

<sup>60</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 11.

prisoners and justify the use of torture by the state.<sup>61</sup> The book burning episode is the only indication allowed to the reader, beyond the context of the novel itself, of the protagonist's leftist leanings. Rather than alluding to the protagonist's past involvement in political activism, the novel concentrates on the banned literature on the shelves of his library and the fear he experiences as he waits. While others have claimed that such a paucity of historical context reduces the novel's authenticity, I would argue that in fact the allusion to criminal activity and the mutual acknowledgement of guilt which exists between the protagonist and state officials illustrates the irrelevance of notions such as 'law' under the authoritarian state depicted in the novel.<sup>62</sup> The protagonist describes the fury of the five men turning his apartment upside down in search of forbidden books and writings:

You can still smell the odour of the soot from the recently burned blacklisted books and see their ashes all over the apartment.

The words that had been liberated by the fire jumped out from the hidden corners. They decried your great sin of three days earlier to the faces of the men in the room. They were angry.<sup>63</sup>

While book burning was commonplace in so many twentieth-century dictatorships, we are used to the idea that it is the authorities which burnt books publicly in order to demonstrate their power. Here, however, we find that the protagonist internalising state power and thus, in spite of the fact that he has no idea why those books are banned, he burns his own books, successfully controlling and policing his own thoughts and mental processes.

As symbols of a primeval and animalistic brutality and with their humanity negated by their anonymity, the five unidentified policemen come into clear confrontation with the protagonist, their leader keen to demonstrate his power and physical dominance over him. It is not clear where the leader draws his authority from; rather, he constantly uses the pronoun 'we' in opposition to the protagonist and speaks with the complete self-assurance of the agent of an authoritarian state: in response to the protagonist's pleas that there is nothing illegal in his owning copies of the *Forum*<sup>64</sup> journal, all the leader says is, "Every kind of forum has been banned."<sup>65</sup> Thus it is made clear that the 'we' used by the leader is metaphorical in its meaning, in that it refers as much to the authority he represents as to the menacing physical presence of five men against the lone protagonist. The leader claims that the protagonist's subversive books have contaminated his mind, while the leader has read them without succumbing to their polluting influence:

"Hey, you! We're all well read," he said in a loud voice:

"We're college graduates as well!"

He was angry. You expected him to hit you.

"They made us read the books that are taught in universities.

We know the value of a book."<sup>66</sup>

If the leader is to be believed, 'we' can read dissident literature without being tainted by its subversiveness and remain mentally sound. The result of this assertion is that the protagonist is set

<sup>61</sup> Sevgi Soysal, *Yıldırım Bölge Kadınlar Koğuşu*, Bilgi Yayınları, İstanbul 1979, s. 236-37.

<sup>62</sup> M. Belge, *Ibid.*, s. 131.

<sup>63</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Forum* was a biweekly journal published from 1954 to 1969. From 1960 until its final publication, it acted as a forum for leftist writings, including those of Doğan Avcıoğlu, Kemal Sülker and Adnan Cemgil. See "Devirler, İsimler, Eserler Terimler," in *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1979), 245.

<sup>65</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 14.

<sup>66</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 15.

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apart as a deviant in conflict with the accepted norm. We can draw significant parallels between the extent and severity of the ‘sledgehammer operation’ and the emphasis Öz places on the apparently boundless power of the protagonist’s captors, acutely contrasted with the protagonist’s feeling of impotence: “Either you change your own head or we will break your head. Get it?” This is a common feature of many contemporary novels exploring the relationship between the individual and fascist authoritarianism. The unnamed dictator of Gabriel Garcia Márquez’ novel *Autumn of the Patriarch*<sup>67</sup>, for example, has infinite power: “all he had to do was point at trees for them to bear fruit.”<sup>68</sup> Individual pathology manifests itself through the ubiquitous fascist state: while the state cannot possibly be omnipotent it must be seen to be so, thus the power of the state lies in the minds of those who perceive it:

“Listen. Here, laws no longer exist. There is no constitution or any nonsense like that, okay?”

It was unnecessary for you to nod your head.

“Fine. Well, you will understand. If you give us grief, there’s nothing we can’t do to you. If we want to, we’ll destroy every part of you. Even right here in this room, right now. Not a soul would hear. We’ll take you up to the top floor, open the window and toss you out. Ooop, crunch you go, flying down from the ninth floor. What do you say to that? Don’t forget it. We’ll tell your family, “He threw himself out of the window.”<sup>69</sup>

It must be understood that the death threats made against the protagonist are no more than that: threats. The omnipotent agents of the state want the protagonist alive. As Foucault asks, “Why would society eliminate a life and body that it could appropriate?”<sup>70</sup> There is no higher purpose to executing an individual dissident acting against the state: “Far more telling than death would be the example of a man who is ever before one’s eyes, whom one has deprived of liberty and who is forced to spend the rest of his days repairing the loss that he has caused society.”<sup>71</sup> It is striking to note that the protagonist has already been deprived of his liberty: his complicity in his own subjugation is implicit without need for vocal or physical assent.

It is never explicitly made clear that the protagonist’s captors and torturers are operatives of the state; rather they are depicted purely as anonymous, malevolent figures whose sole aim is to break their prisoner. For them, the protagonist is just “a white lab mouse in their hands, they will do to you as they please.”<sup>72</sup> In his descriptions of the torturers, Öz places particular emphasis on the eye, which represents not only the focal point of communication between two people but also the area of the body where humanity is perceived. Foucault’s claims in *Discipline and Punish* rely heavily on panopticism, the act of seeing and being seen. Power relies on the prisoner’s perception that he is always being watched and that he is only ever “the object of information, never a subject in communication.”<sup>73</sup> The degree to which the protagonist has internalised his belief that he is constantly under observation is made plain in the scene through his obsession with eyes: the protagonist comes “eye to eye” with his captors, who are “doing their jobs”, and he is unable to differentiate between their eyes. All of them are “uncomprehending, empty, staring, glassy eyes,

<sup>67</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Penguin, London 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Boyers, *Atrocity and Amnesia: The Political Novel since 1945*, 1985 ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford 1985.

<sup>69</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 17.

<sup>70</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s. 109.

<sup>71</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s. 109.

<sup>72</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.189.

<sup>73</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s.12.

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dull, ugly, lustreless, and crusty.”<sup>74</sup> This incapacity to differentiate between the eyes of his guards and torturers ensures the function of power: every eye is identical there is no escaping their surveillance. The longer they torture him, the more animalistic become the descriptions of the protagonist's own eyes: “wild, primitive, bloodshot eyes.”<sup>75</sup> In the course of his torture, they command the protagonist to scream like a dog, and threaten to dehumanise him by means of castration if he refuses to talk:<sup>76</sup>

“Scream, you dog, scream!”

One of them was kicking your stomach with all his might. He wanted you to scream.

“I will not scream!”

You realise that you are shouting this out-loud.

“I will not scream!”<sup>77</sup>

In spite of the protagonist's best efforts to resist, in the end he realises that through his very resistance he is doing just what his torturers want. Here we can observe exactly what Scarry describes as the effects of torture, whereby the state utilises systematic torture to pervert the suffering of the prisoner and thereby legitimise its own power.<sup>78</sup> In response to the mechanism of torture, which assumes the victim's guilt, the prisoner is consumed by self-criticism, dissecting his own faults and the broken fragments of his own humanity, rather than critically appraising the conduct of his captors: “You must be able to come face to face with yourself; you want to be able to look yourself square in the eye.”<sup>79</sup> The stigma faced by the protagonist pushes him to isolate himself from the other prisoners, whose openness about their past contrasts sharply with his own silence. This is precisely what his tormenters hope to achieve, and this effect of torture is referred to over again in Rejali's *Torture and Democracy* which in its earliest pages claims, “Citizens who cannot speak competently about cruelty are unable to protect themselves against tyranny and injustice.”<sup>80</sup> The total silence of the protagonist further serves to underline the juxtaposition between the protagonist and his fellow prisoners. The gulf between them is explicitly verbalised by one of the other prisoners, who tells the protagonist that the latter's status as a political prisoner means that he is treated differently.<sup>81</sup> As eager as the other prisoners are to talk about their past or express their opinions, the protagonist is equally unwilling to do so. Even when it is made clear to the other prisoners that the protagonist is being tortured, he refuses to discuss it:

He asks you something you did not expect.

“Have you looked in the mirror?”

“I must have done. Why?”

“You can't have done. There's something in your eyes.”

“It's from lack of sleep. Are they bloodshot?”

“It's not that,” he says, “You have, well - how can I put it? - you listen with your eyes, pal.”

<sup>74</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.105.

<sup>75</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.108.

<sup>76</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.109.

<sup>77</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.108.

<sup>78</sup> E. Scarry, *Ibid.*, s. 135.

<sup>79</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.108.

<sup>80</sup> Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2007, s. 3.

<sup>81</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.191.

“Ah. Go on.”

Nuri was speaking very tactfully, as if he had studied. Maybe he'd left in the second year of high school.

“I left in the middle of second grade.”

It was not so. He couldn't read.

“What happened to your wrists?”

You quickly pull your wrists away from the table. You know they are red with the wounds caused by your handcuffs. How much time has passed since they first cuffed you? The fresh layers of skin are pink and fine.

“You have wounds on your wrists.”

You are ashamed. “They beat me, Nuri. They tortured me.” Will you tell Nuri such things? You can't do it, you can't explain.

“Did they do something to you, my friend?”

“No, they didn't do anything. Anyway, where are these wounds?”

“Show me. Let me have a look.”

“Drop it, Nuri. Let's talk about something else.”

You both become silent.<sup>82</sup>

With this episode the protagonist's role is reduced from an active one to merely recording impressions. After suffering at the hands of his interrogators, internal struggle is all the protagonist is capable of, a struggle which is quite apart from that of the other inmates: thus the protagonist's relationship towards his fellow prisoners is one of an observer. While he feels sympathy for them, the protagonist sees that that “The society took being human out of them [his fellow prisoners]”<sup>83</sup> and is unable to find common ground with them.

However, in a similar way, the protagonist's own situation severs his connection with the world outside his prison. In fact this rupture begins before he even enters prison, at the moment when he burns his books:

Thin trails of smoke could be seen drifting from the chimneys in the middle of the summer.

You had carried all your books to the room.

How will you destroy this many books, the books that you've brought home over the years with the little bits of money you'd saved? You don't know why they are now prohibited.<sup>84</sup>

Öz devotes a full five pages of the novel to his depiction of the book burning scene. Significantly, burning books was carried out by many during the time of the military intervention for fear of incrimination. The protagonist, however, is not comforted by contextualising what he did: the book burning at the provocation of the authoritarian state is an isolated act committed without understanding by a lone individual who does not understand what he is doing or why. A later scene sees the captors present the protagonist with a boy who has been tortured; in spite of

<sup>82</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 85.

<sup>83</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 233.

<sup>84</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 143.



their shared plight, this episode contains no real contact between the boy and the protagonist, even though the former urges the latter to talk and avoid the suffering he himself has endured:

The guard says:

“You see, this young boy was like you too. However, at the end he talked and saved himself.”

The guard is kicking the boy who is lying on the floor.

He is around 17 or 18 years old. They did everything to change his beautiful face. They smashed and hammered this boy.

The boy without lifting his head from the floor says;

“Confess everything to them, brother.”

There was shame in his voice.

The blond guard is kicking the boy by saying, “Tell him, tell him.”

The boy said, “I used to wear 39 size shoes but now even 46 sizes don't fit my feet.”

He seems as if he's speaking without knowing what he's saying. He sounds as if he thinks he can save himself by saying the verses he has been forced to memorise quickly.

The blond guard is kicking him again by shouting; “Tell him you dog.”

The boy says again by lying on the floor in pains;

“Confess everything to them, brother, and save your life.

The blond guard says again:

“Do you hear him?”

As you want to shout and say ‘that is enough’ you feel like your mouth is splitting.

The blood was spilling from your mouth to your jaw and to your shirt.

They are grabbing the boy and dragging him along the floor.<sup>85</sup>

What is truly shocking in this scene of brutality is not so much the cruelty and physical displays of violence, the kicks and screams of pain, but the fact that torture has reduced both the boy and the protagonist to such a level that they cannot communicate, either literally or metaphorically: the mechanical utterances from the boy demonstrate that he has been beaten down into nothing more than a mouthpiece for the state. He has become the ‘example of a man who is ever before one's eyes’ which, according to Foucault, the state will use in order to assert its power.<sup>86</sup> In the eyes of the state, the boy is ‘saved’ by virtue of this process. The protagonist is equally incapable of communication, but this time he physically cannot utter any protest against the violence. After his most recent beating he tears his mouth as he opens it and can do no more than cover himself in blood, a poignant metaphor demonstrating the way in which torture destroys language.

As the novel draws to a close, the outside world of apparent normality is brought into acute contrast with the existence of the protagonist: the guards who lead him to the torture chamber chat about the Ankara-Leeds United football match; school children can be heard playing outside and a street vendor selling yoghurt; the protagonist asks,

<sup>85</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 200.

<sup>86</sup> M. Foucault, *Ibid.*, s. 109.

“What business do these beautiful things have being right next to such ugly things? Side-by-side, right inside each other are two different worlds. Which one is real? Perhaps both of them. Two faces of the world perhaps.

Whilst I was in the hospital. For about a month and a half. They coerced me. I didn't sign it. Even the prosecutor came a few times, the others too. They came all the time. They coerced me. They said again that they'd take me off to be tortured.”

They cut you off. They don't want to talk about torture. Who does?<sup>87</sup>

The protagonist's narrative is smothered and suffocated by an omnipotent authoritarian power. The reader is left to wonder if the 'they' who coerce the protagonist the same 'they' who cut him off. If 'they' in this scene represents the people, children and yoghurt sellers of the 'normal' outside world, it may be the case that they deprive the protagonist of the opportunity to talk about his torture because 'they' do not want to be reminded that they are complicit in it. There is a strong link between the 'they' of this episode and the 'they' identified by Huxley in Edward Lear's poetry. Just like the March Twelfth novelists, what Lear asserts through his limericks, though in a more cheery, fanciful way, is individuality and freedom.<sup>88</sup> It is this freedom that 'they', the social conservatives and those who wish to further entrench the system, must suppress and stamp out, at times with chillingly disproportionate brutality. As Orwell cuttingly observes, “To smash somebody just for dancing a quadrille with a raven is exactly the kind of thing that 'They' would do.”<sup>89</sup> The individual has no possible power against such a malignant opponent. The protagonist of *Yaralısn* recognises this and realises that he must become one of 'them' in order to escape the plurality who wish to annihilate him: he must become a 'Nuri':

You took out a cigarette packet and handed it to the prisoner next to you. He took one from the packet. You both light up.

He says, “Thank you.”

“You're welcome.”

“Where are you from?”

You tell him where you are from.

“Are you from the centre?”

“Yes, from the centre.”

“You came yesterday didn't you?”

“Yes, I came yesterday evening.”

“What is your crime?”

“I am a political prisoner.”

His questions seem to be finished; but they're not. He has one more question.

“You didn't tell me your name?”

It was the first time someone had asked your name. One of the Nuris is asking your name. You are not used to hearing this question. You squeeze your voice as if whispering and say:

<sup>87</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s.146.

<sup>88</sup> George Orwell, *The Collected Essays*, Seeker & Warburg London 1961, s. 327.

<sup>89</sup> G. Orwell, *Ibid.*, s. 327.

“Nuri... My name is Nuri.”<sup>90</sup>

Like the ending of Altan's *Büyük Gözaltı*, this is an archetypal denouement, typical of the March Twelfth genre. The protagonist's struggle consists in seeking answers to questions repeated over again – “What is your crime?” – that he does not understand. In the end, he just wants the constant interrogation to be done with: Öz's protagonist shows his relief that the “questions seem to be finished” and Altan's asks himself if he has ‘ever been free’ from questioning. Ultimately, both protagonists give up their fight and acquiesce to the absurdities of their captors as if they were perfectly logical, because they are no longer able to differentiate freedom from constraint.

### Conclusion

In his attempt to depict the experience of someone who is subject to an oppressive state, Öz uses an abstract and surrealist narrative to great effect. The works of a number of extremely eminent political thinkers and philosophers, including Foucault, Scarry and Schmitt have greatly facilitated my examination of the psychological effects of imprisonment and torture on Öz's protagonist. I have also turned to social theorists, such as Robert Boyers and Darius Rejali, when exploring the use of torture, be it in reality or in writing, throughout the twentieth century. Öz goes much further than just denouncing torture and arbitrary imprisonment; he also succeeds in illustrating the many ways in which power holds the individual under its control, using punishment and monitoring. The novel cannot contain any political discussion because the protagonist is imprisoned and so always under the watchful eye of his captors. Rather than questioning the authority of the Turkish state, the protagonist's imprisonment and experiences of torture lead him to internalise state interrogation and monitoring, ultimately causing him to question abstract ideas such as memory and even his own identity,

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<sup>90</sup> E. Öz, *Ibid.*, s. 266.

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