

The Representation of the Peasantry in Early 20th-Century Turkish Prose Based on the Novel “Yaban”

Szandra Rostás

¹ Department of Turkic Studies, Eötvös Loránd University

² Hungary, Budapest

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's novel *Yaban*, which portrays the social and political transformations during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish War of Independence. The novel's protagonist, Ahmet Celal, is an educated officer from Istanbul who finds himself among the Anatolian peasantry and is confronted with the deep cultural and ideological divide between rural society and the urban intellectual elite. The research provides historical context, exploring the late Ottoman period and the effects of emerging nation-state ideologies. It also offers an overview of the portrayal of peasants in 19th- and 20th-century Turkish literature, emphasizing how representations evolved under the influence of modernization and socio-political changes. Particular attention is given to *Yaban*'s narrative structure, character portrayal, and the literary depiction of the tensions between peasants and intellectuals. The study highlights that *Yaban* is a profound social critique that examines the mutual alienation and lack of understanding between the Anatolian peasantry and the intellectual elite. The novel sharply portrays the peasant class as backward, fatalistic, and indifferent, while simultaneously emphasizing their vulnerability and the tragic weight of their historical fate. The peasants' reactions, fears, and mindset reflect a deeper cultural divide that separates them from the urban intelligentsia. Karaosmanoğlu criticizes both the resistance of the peasants to modernization and the intellectuals' failure to truly engage with and uplift this marginalized class.

KEYWORDS: Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Yaban*, peasant representation, Turkish literature, social realism, Ottoman Empire, Turkish War of Independence, modernization, rural-urban divide

Date of Submission: 01-05-2025

Date of acceptance: 10-05-2025

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief overview of the portrayal of peasantry in early 20th century Turkish literature, followed by an analysis of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's novel *Yaban*. The analysis focuses on two main aspects: first, the literary techniques used by the author to depict the peasantry, and second, the reasons behind the tensions between the intelligentsia and the peasantry.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In contrast to the industrialized countries that replaced agrarian societies in the 19th and 20th centuries, the peasantry in Turkey did not diminish. On the contrary, with the loss of vast territories from the Ottoman Empire under the 1923 peace treaty, the social balance shifted, and the majority of the country consisted of agrarian regions (Anatolia), with peasants making up 80% of Turkey's population at the time (Karaömerlioğlu 2006:12). However, the Turkish-inhabited areas were among the poorest parts of the empire even before the war, and although a significant portion of the population were farmers, only 20-25% of arable land was in the hands of peasants. The period also saw profound cultural changes in the country: following the 1923 regime change, a six-hundred-year-old culture was replaced by what could be described as a new culture. As the agrarian society was one of the main productive sectors, the role of the peasantry gained importance compared to its status in the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's government aimed to create a more uniform society, placing great emphasis on uplifting the peasantry, primarily through education. However, numerous factors hindered this, including inadequate infrastructure and seemingly trivial issues, such as landlords who did not want literate, politically aware peasants capable of articulating their grievances, or local religious leaders who adhered to the old system (Ahmad 2003:82). Elevating the peasantry was not only important for modernization but also served as a useful tool for the creation of a new nationalist ideology. This process, however, did not begin with the republic but much earlier.

In the Ottoman Empire, due to its multicultural diversity and the influence of Islam, ethnic identity held little significance. From the 15th century onward, the state used various means—sometimes violent ones—to

suppress Turkish ethnic consciousness, to the point where the word “Turk” became derogatory, synonymous with “stupid,” “ignorant,” or “peasant” (Fodor 2011). Thus, in the empire, two identities were predominant: Muslim and Ottoman, with only the Anatolian farmers referred to as Turks. This situation persisted for a long time. While nationalist movements began among other ethnic groups in the mid-18th century, among Turks, this did not occur until the mid-19th century. The Young Turks’ movement was the first significant attempt to awaken Turkish national consciousness, although at that time, Islam was still a defining part of this ideology. In the following decades, various nationalist and religious ideologies—sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting—emerged, causing considerable confusion (Fodor 2011). The period after 1908 (the Young Turks’ takeover) was crucial for the development of Turkish national consciousness. Anatolia, “the cradle of civilization,” along with its traditions and history, began to be rediscovered (Ahmad 2003). Following the outcome of the war and the victory of the War of Independence, the leadership made it clear that Turkish nationalism was the only viable path. Since the peasantry, a group historically labeled as “Turks” in the empire, was the most marginalized, the nationalist ideology sought to find the “true Turkishness” in the peasants, who were theoretically the least influenced by Ottoman culture and thus “the purest Turkish people.” The discovery of folk culture was inseparable from the formation of national consciousness in European cultures as well. However, Turkish nationalism had the additional motivation of eradicating the centuries-long Ottoman cultural influence that suppressed Turkish ethnic identity. The peasantry, as the group most oppressed by the Ottoman elite, naturally served as the counterpoint to this. Yet, the question arises: was the peasantry ever asked about their own identity? This question is partly addressed in *Yaban*.

III. THE PORTRAYAL OF PEASANTRY IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY TURKISH PROSE

For centuries, Ottoman literature was dominated by Arab-Persian traditions, leaving little room for Anatolian Turkish culture. Literature was the privilege of the elite, not least because the literary language was so heavily Arabized and Persianized that it was nearly incomprehensible to the Turkish-speaking commoner. The beginnings of modern Turkish literature are traced to the Tanzimat period of 1839 (Çankaya 2013:474). During this time, national themes, Turkish culture, and the Turkish language began to gain prominence in literature, alongside new Western-inspired genres such as the novel, short story, and novella. In poetry, the Arab-Persian traditions were seen as outdated, and the intricate, rigid rules of Istanbul’s divan poetry were replaced by the traditions of Anatolian folk poetry. French literature had the greatest influence on Turkish epic literature from the second half of the 19th century. The stylistic trends that emerged in France appeared almost simultaneously in Turkish literature: romanticism during the Tanzimat period, followed by realism and naturalism, and symbolism in poetry. With these trends, the mystical Arab-Persian worldview was abandoned, and everyday social issues became the focus of literature. Despite writers and poets beginning to explore Anatolia, Turkish literature remained Istanbul-centric for a long time. Readers could only learn about Anatolia through the lens of Istanbul-based writers and poets—external observers. These perspectives often served ideologies, political views, or stylistic trends rather than genuinely understanding rural life (Karaömerlioğlu 2002:127). As a result, for a long time, the Anatolia depicted in literature was a product of artistic imagination. In the post-Tanzimat period, the peasantry became a tool for nationalist myth-making. The countryside was portrayed as the antithesis of the Ottomanized Istanbul, where the people embodied the “true Turks” (Karaömerlioğlu 2002:127). The stereotypical literary image of the peasantry was characterized by traits such as poverty, simplicity, purity, innocence, courage, and honesty. Typical characters included brave and loyal peasants in battle, men who followed their conscience in a society governed by customs, and girls who risked their lives to elope with their lovers to escape forced marriages (Yılmaz 2017:195). This bucolic rural idyll, with its purity, untouched nature, and pure love, offered a refuge in the realm of fantasy.

Alongside romanticism, more realistic novels also emerged, addressing the harsh conditions of peasant life, though these were often written with social sensitivity rather than aesthetic sophistication, e.g., Nabizade Nazım’s *Kara Bibik* (1890) and Hazim Teperyan’s *Küçük Papa* (1910) (Karaömerlioğlu 2007:128). During the War of Independence and the early years of the republic, particularly in the 1930s, Anatolia became the focus of the intelligentsia’s attention. One reason for this may be that during the War of Independence, many writers, poets, and journalists traveled from Ankara to the countryside, where they encountered the real Anatolian people and their conditions. While earlier writers tended to view Anatolia from a superficial perspective, later ones sought to explore village life more deeply, considering it essential for national cohesion. Writing, short stories, and novels became indispensable for shaping national and social identity (Dino 1986:267). Several prominent writers produced peasant-themed novels, including Sabahattin Ali, Memduh Şevket Esenal, and the author of *Yaban*, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu. Each of these authors addressed different contemporary issues, concerns, and

perspectives. Nevertheless, the true peasant novel as a genre only emerged in the 1950s. The 1930s, however, paved the way for the later flourishing of the peasant novel. These works provide an opportunity to examine the intelligentsia's thinking about the peasantry during this period (Karaömerlioğlu 2002:128).

IV. ABOUT YABAN BRIEFLY

Yaban is one of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's most famous works, published in serial form in the *Kadro* journal in 1932. The novel examines the relationship between the Turkish intelligentsia and the peasantry. It is based on the author's real observations: during the War of Independence, Yakup Kadri traveled to a village near the Porsut Stream in Anatolia, an experience he described as a four-month nightmare. The story's protagonist is Ahmet Celal, a 35-year-old war invalid and son of an Istanbul pasha, who lost one arm in World War I. After Istanbul's occupation, he accepts his comrade Mehmet Ali's offer and moves to his village. The novel lacks a conventional plot, instead consisting of cinematic scenes that offer insight into the life of Anatolian villagers during the War of Independence, seen through the eyes of an Istanbul intellectual officer.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

The Novel's Realist-Naturalist Style and Imagery

Yaban is generally regarded as a realist novel, though it also exhibits naturalist traits. In this section, I explore how the author—or the narrator-protagonist—employs these stylistic elements and how they reinforce the intelligentsia's colonialist-like perspective. From the novel's opening, it is clear that, like other realist works, *Yaban*'s core experience is disillusionment and the loss of illusions: "*I knew the earth was harsh and nature cruel, and that man is nothing but a degenerate animal. I knew that among animals, man is the worst, the most despicable, and the least lovable*" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:18). Ahmet Celal arrives in the village already a broken, depressive man, and as the "plot" progresses, this feeling intensifies. Another realist-naturalist feature of the novel is its psychological depth, with numerous analytical, self-reflective passages where the protagonist dissects his mental state, emotional processes, and motivations. He attributes his growing sense of loneliness and lethargy in the village primarily to the irreconcilable divide between his intellectual existence and the peasantry.

In my interpretation, the novel's depiction of setting and characters leans more toward naturalism than realism. While *Yaban* does not fully meet naturalist criteria, its diary-like first-person narration fails to satisfy Émile Zola's naturalist requirements of objectivity and detachment (Czine 1967:34). In *Yaban*, if not the author, the narrator Ahmet Celal constantly expresses his (often hostile) emotions, so rather than a purely naturalist novel, we can speak of a naturalistic mode of depiction.

Naturalism seeks to fully expose imperfections, highlighting details that realism might omit as distasteful, using more expressive imagery to achieve this. *Yaban*'s basic atmosphere is grim and repulsive, reinforced by the narrator's naturalistic, expressive imagery. According to Ahmet Celal's descriptions, with few exceptions, everything and everyone in the village is ugly, coarse, vulgar, and repulsive. He writes with disgust about the villagers' lifestyle, eating habits, appearance, and nearly everything related to them. The novel contains many detailed descriptions, such as: "*After the harvest season, they wash and sort all kinds of grain in the same tub for weeks. Often, they wash food, diapers, dirty clothes, and shirts together in it. You can't explain to them that this is disgusting. Only Mehmet Ali shares my opinion. But he is so convinced that filth is an inseparable trait of villagers, so he doesn't bother dealing with it*" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:25).

"She was a stout woman, resembling the stump of an oak tree. Her face was so pockmarked that from the front, it reminded me of a cauliflower head—a muddy, dirt-covered cauliflower, freshly torn from the garden by a hurricane.

One day I asked her:

- Emeti hanım, don't you ever wash your face?

- Oh, my boy, I don't have time for that..." (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:112)*

As the first quote shows, the narrator seeks to evoke in the reader the same disgust and revulsion he feels, vividly describing anything that might provoke such reactions. Coming from Istanbul's elite, Ahmet Celal is naturally shocked by this lifestyle and, like a colonizer, wishes to "civilize" the villagers, eliminating elements he finds repulsive, but his attempts fail. The second quote exemplifies his imagery ("cauliflower-like face"): he often uses natural imagery to describe the peasants, employing similes and symbols to highlight unflattering details. In Ahmet Celal's world, human appearance should be aesthetic, but the peasants fail to meet his aesthetic standards, prompting his horrified reaction.

He frequently dehumanizes the peasants, using numerous animal similes and symbols in their descriptions. Examples of animals he compares the villagers to include goats (p. 69), frogs, snakes, spiders, dragonflies (p. 71), sheep (p. 72), mosquitoes (p. 76), gorillas, caterpillars (p. 75), worms (p. 87), rabbits (p. 93), and donkeys (p. 100). These are mostly animals considered unattractive by common perception or associated with negative connotations. The only exception is his beloved Emine, whom he compares to a beautiful Van cat, though he adds, “My Emine has no more intelligence than a Van cat” (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:100).

When postcolonial literary theory emerged in the 1970s, scholars began re-reading and re-evaluating classics featuring colonization and/or racial differences, such as Shakespeare’s works (*Othello*, *The Tempest*). In such works, indigenous people or immigrants of different races were often dehumanized, described with animal similes, or depicted as creatures rather than humans. Here is an excerpt from *The Tempest*, where an intellectual European character describes the native islander Caliban (who is repeatedly referred to with animal names), followed by an excerpt from *Yaban*, where Ahmet Celal describes Mehmet Ali’s son:

“What’s this? Man or fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he stinks like a fish; like not-quite-fresh dried cod. A strange fish! (...) This is some four-legged monster from this island, who, it seems, has a fever” (Shakespeare 1997).
“This little human cub lies at your feet like a melon variety rolled in the dirt. The way it moves reminds you of a pile of worms. From any angle, it feels more like it grew out of the earth than came from a mother’s womb. (...) It has so little personality that it doesn’t even have a name. (...) When you look at this creature, you immediately get proof that bringing a child into this world is tantamount to murder” (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:87-88).

Comparing the two excerpts, there is little difference between how the colonizing white man views the native and how the intellectual views the Anatolian peasant in the novel.

Poverty and disease are also central themes in naturalist-realist novels. When the protagonist first arrives among the peasants, he is surprised and offended that his disability does not affect them. He later realizes this is because many villagers live with physical (and sometimes mental) disabilities. Yakup Kadri may have deliberately included an ironic element highlighting Ahmet Celal’s sense of superiority: while he constantly refers to people by their disabilities (e.g., calling Salih Ağa’s hunchbacked son “kambur oğlan” [hunchbacked boy] or Bekir Çavuş’s blind daughter “kör kız” [blind girl]), he is deeply offended when Emine refers to him as “kolu yok bir herif” (“a one-armed guy”).

The physical body also plays a significant role in naturalism, which examines humans as biological beings, sometimes depicting sexuality in a vulgar rather than elevated style. In *Yaban*, Ahmet Celal frequently fantasizes about such things, applying a double standard to himself and the peasants: what is esthetic from an intellectual man, is repulsive, animalistic, and instinctual from a peasant. For example, when imagining himself with Emine, he uses refined terms like “öpme” (kissing), “okşama” (caressing), and “oynaşma” (playfulness). However, when thinking of Emine with the villager İsmail, he uses animal imagery to portray the peasant as debased, comparing İsmail to a young gorilla devouring the village’s finest fruit or a caterpillar climbing a tender willow. In one scene, when Ahmet Celal witnesses “kambur oğlan” “catching” “kör kız,” he describes it with similarly dehumanizing natural imagery: “In my life, I’ve never seen such a disgustingly ridiculous sight. This isn’t a case of a mischievous boy catching a decent girl; it’s something far more horrific. It’s as if a snake is trying to swallow a frog. It’s as if a giant spider is spinning a web around a dragonfly” (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:87-88).

His opinion of Anatolian women is as follows: “In Anatolia, rural women are so devoid of any allure or charm that I think I could lie next to any of them, in their arms, and my body would feel nothing. They probably smell bad too.” (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:35).

Thus, Ahmet Celal uses naturalistic similes and imagery, emphasizing external traits derived from the peasant lifestyle, and places them in a context that evokes disgust. The emphasis is always on the peasants’ origins: they are “like this” or “like that” because they are peasants, in contrast to the intellectuals in Ahmet Celal’s world. A similar technique is found in postcolonial works, distinguishing “us” (civilized, intellectuals) from “them” (primitive, peasants) and thinking in terms of this binary world. The self-proclaimed superior narrator always highlights the examined individual or group’s otherness, portraying it as inferior, repulsive, and incompatible with the conventionally accepted aesthetics of their own and the reader’s culture.

Conflicts in the Novel

In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the fundamental conflicts between the intelligentsia and the peasantry in the novel, how these lead to Ahmet Celal's ultimate alienation and transformation into a *yaban* (stranger), and why these phenomena further reinforce the protagonist's colonialist perspective.

Ahmet Celal's fate is sealed the moment he arrives in the village. The peasantry's distrust stems from a fear rooted in centuries of hierarchical subordination (Dino 1986:268); they cannot trust a stranger. Anything unfamiliar in the village, such as reading books or daily hygiene, instills fear in them. Ahmet Celal's every attempt to communicate with the peasants is inherently doomed. He seemingly tries to assimilate into the villagers' community, but like olive oil in water, he cannot blend into their culture: "*But behold, I see I am like a drop of olive oil in a bowl of water. I can neither dissolve in it nor sink to the bottom*" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:67). Cultural differences inevitably surface on every front. As someone from a different culture, he cannot see the other culture with "innocent eyes"; his own culture is his reference point, making everything the peasants do alien, incomprehensible, and repulsive. He primarily blames his intellectual existence, the books he has read, and the arts for the insurmountable gulf between him and the peasantry, stating he "cannot unlearn what he already knows." "*To be like them, dress like them, eat and drink like them, behave like them, speak their language... Fine, I'll do all that. But how can I think like them? How can I feel like them? Burn all the books that fill my room... Trample these paintings, decorative panels. What's the point? They've all seeped into me. They've left indelible, fatal, unerased marks on me*" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:68).

Beyond the peasantry's inherent hostility toward "outsiders," Ahmet Celal possesses several traits that exacerbate his alienation. One, as mentioned, is his inability to view the peasants without his Istanbul filter, which is always accompanied by contempt. This attitude is also evident in his approach to women. Partly due to Western artists (especially romanticism), various fantasy images of Eastern women existed/exist. One such type was the alluring, erotic slave woman, which, according to Géza Staud, emerged due to the harem system and *One Thousand and One Nights** (Staud 1999). Observing how Ahmet Celal objectifies his "love" Emine in **Yaban**, a similar attitude emerges: "If Emine gave up İsmail and became mine, I would first wash her thoroughly. Then I would burn the layered clothing that ruins her figure on this stove. But to make her a fashionable Istanbul-style girl? No, no... I would braid her radiant red hair into two parts. And I would forbid her to speak (...) I would like her to cook my food, serve me. While I eat, work, or drink coffee, it would be pleasant to see her standing and waiting" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:100). His fantasy evokes a master-slave relationship rather than a marital one. Several similarly sexist and elitist remarks confirm that this stems not primarily from the era's male-female hierarchy but from Emine's peasant origins. In Ahmet Celal's eyes, Anatolian women are so ignorant that they cannot decide what would make them happy. He is shocked to learn that Emine marries the villager İsmail instead of him, who would have "saved her from this miserable life" and "provided her with a life worthy of a human," attributing this solely to Emine's ignorance and stupidity (Güneş 2016:45). While Ahmet Celal's attraction is clearly physical, it also reveals the intellectual's willingness (and perhaps desire) to connect with the peasantry. However, he considers this mere idealism, comparing himself to Don Quixote: "Didn't the greatest idealist of humanity [Don Quixote] love a peasant girl for years? Didn't he treat her with the courtesy of a lady every time they met?" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:60).

Another cause of Ahmet Celal's alienation is his inability to understand the village's authoritarian social structure. He cannot comprehend why the villagers revere the exploitative ağa and imam, and as an intellectual, he takes on a missionary role to enlighten the submissive peasantry, unaware of their rights, but he fails in this as well. "*I try to awaken a sense of justice in them. It's futile; they're like stone. They haven't yet become social beings. They live like Stone Age people, in a barbaric way. Back then, the strongest of the tribe would walk toward you with an axe, take the food from your mouth, take your wife from the cave, and everyone thought it was natural, inevitable, unavoidable*" (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:72). His first fatal act is speaking disrespectfully to the village imam, offending the villagers at their most sensitive point—their religion.

One study compares *Yaban* to *Robinson Crusoe* (another novel frequently cited by postcolonial scholars): Robinson Crusoe, described as a prototype of British imperialism, acts according to Enlightenment ideals while extending his political and cultural power over the island (like Prospero in *The Tempest*). While Ahmet Celal does not seek to exert power over the peasants in a literal sense—he only subtly tries to instill some culture and self-awareness in them—his ultimate alienation stems from the peasants' lack of alignment with his political and military sentiments during the War of Independence (Ağır 2007:14).

Sources differ on the peasants' attitudes toward the War of Independence. Some describe enthusiastic peasants who fully supported the fight, while others report indifferent, unwilling villagers. Türkan Çetin notes that the losses and famines caused by World War I negatively affected the peasants' attitude toward fighting; they

were disillusioned and did not want another war that, for them, meant only loss of life and heavy taxes, believing it would bring no positive change to their lives (Çetin 1993:176). We cannot know the exact truth, and various attitudes likely coexisted. In any case, *Yaban* portrays the latter, indifferent attitude.

The conflict is present from the start: Ahmet Celal arrives in the village as a veteran officer, feeling he sacrificed his arm for the people—including the peasants—and is pained to find that the peasantry treats him as a stranger rather than a celebrated hero. He constantly talks about the war to the villagers and reacts with offense and anger when they respond with indifference.

“- *Don't be angry, we're peasants. We don't deal with such things.*

- *But you're not a peasant. You were a soldier. This talk doesn't suit you. Shame on you! (...)*

- *I know, sir, but you're one of them too.*

- *Who are they?*

- *Well, those who stand with Mustafa Kemal Pasha...*

- *How can someone who is Turkish not stand with Mustafa Kemal Pasha?*

- *We're not Turks, sir.*

- *Then what are you?*

- *We're Muslims, thank God.”* (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:152-153)

This dialogue is a pivotal moment in the novel for several reasons. It highlights the intelligentsia's misconception about the peasantry's identity. At the time of the novel's events, the War of Independence was still ongoing. The concept of nationhood and Turkishness was a current topic among intellectuals but had not yet spread widely, especially not in villages (Ağır 2007:17). The peasants did not fully understand what it meant to have a Turkish identity or what a nation was, as the nation itself did not yet exist. Yakup Kadri reveals that while the intelligentsia, since the Tanzimat, had portrayed the peasantry as the “true Turks,” in reality, the Turkish peasants were unaware of their ethnic origins or uninterested in them. One of the novel's clear aims is to dismantle this artificially constructed nationalist peasant myth.

Ahmet Celal belongs to this criticized intelligentsia. For him, it is obvious that Anatolian peasants must have a Turkish identity and support the War of Independence. However, he fails to realize for a long time that the peasantry lacked the means to access information about the war. The colonialist-like perspective manifests here in his assumption that his belief (in this case, Turkish nationalism) is the only, superior, and indisputable identity, disregarding the fact that the peasantry's identity had been shaped by Islam for centuries.

The novel ends on a pessimistic note. Ahmet Celal fails in every respect, unable to find common ground with the peasantry in either personal or national matters. The prejudices he arrived with are only reinforced, and witnessing the villagers' conditions leads him to lose faith in the intelligentsia as well. By the end, he is alienated from everyone: burdened by guilt, he can no longer belong to the intelligentsia that abandoned the peasantry for centuries. He arrives as a “yaban” and leaves as one, without leaving any trace in the peasants' souls.

“*How can this happen—how can this happen? How can someone not know where a person they lived with for years has gone?*

- *Oh, he was a stranger, just like you,” came the reply.* (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:16)

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I could only highlight a few selected examples of *Yaban*'s characteristics, however the novel offers much more to explore. My goal was to provide insight into how a 20th-century intellectual portrayed the peasantry of the time and the techniques used to do so. Additionally, I sought to demonstrate that the condescending and oppressive perspectives embedded in intellectual thought treated the peasantry as inferior beings, much like colonizers treated the colonized or white people treated those of other races in literature.

Yaban is among the most significant Turkish literary works of the first half of the 20th century and perhaps Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's most successful novel, with fifty-three editions since 1932. In this work, the author decisively breaks with peasant romanticism, painting a merciless picture of a people marginalized, detached from civilization, and living almost at a vegetative level. The novel's honesty divided critics at the time. Upon its release, many celebrated it, with some calling it the most powerful work of its era and the first world-class Turkish novel (Lemos 2018:240). Others accused the author of bias, condescending portrayal, and even humiliating the peasants.

I believe it would be a mistake to fully identify the author with Ahmet Celal or to view the novel as anti-peasant propaganda. The novel expresses the intellectual's self-blame, guilt, and disillusionment as much as it critiques the peasantry. In my reading, Yakup Kadri aimed to show candidly how an Istanbul intellectual would think and feel among peasants in early 20th-century Türkiye/Ottoman Empire. These thoughts and emotions critique the intelligentsia at least as strongly as the peasantry, if not more so. I conclude this paper with a quote from the novel that, in my opinion, encapsulates *Yaban*'s message:

"Here I am, the madman of the homeland, the fool of the nation, here I am, war invalid Ahmet Celal, completely alone. Once again, you are to blame, Turkish intelligentsia! What did you do for this ruined country, for these misery-stricken people? After exploiting their blood for years — for centuries — and spilling it onto the hard ground like waste, you now dare to come here and feel disgusted by them..... The Anatolian people had a soul, and you couldn't penetrate it. They had a mind, and you couldn't enlighten it. They had a body, and you couldn't nourish it. They had land, and you didn't let them cultivate it. You handed them over to bestiality, ignorance, poverty, and famine. (...) This is your doing, from which you now suffer, your doing." (Karaosmanoğlu 2007:110-111)

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