

Reading Yaşar Kemal's *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* in the Year of the Dolphin

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Abstract

Environmental literature has a crucial function to play in raising environmental awareness, for such literature inculcates ecocentric values to public consciousness through heartfelt narratives of lived tragedies in “particular places” across the globe. One fine example belongs to Turkey’s most influential living author, Yaşar Kemal; his novel *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* (1978), with its setting of Istanbul and its environs, takes up the issue of large-scale dolphin hunts in Turkish coastal waters in the early 1950s, a tragedy that was banned in 1983 but is still continuing in many coastal waters around the world. The novel, in rich language inspired by the epic styles of the Anatolian oral tradition and Turkish folklore and legends, makes a forceful call for extending moral concern to the environment. The novel’s ecocentric approach covers the rights of both the Marmara ecosystem devastated following the overexploitation of dolphins for their oil and the intrinsically valuable dolphins, with their capacity for cognition and human-like emotions. Still, the greatness of the novel lies in Kemal’s conviction that changes in the natural world are followed by changes in human nature—this is perhaps Kemal’s unique contribution to environmental studies. Along with the devastation that befalls Istanbul and its environs, the novel presents pictures from the lives of alienated, unwholesome human characters who confer only economic value to nature and its species. In the Year of the Dolphin (2007—extended into 2008), part of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (which aims, among other things, to make peoples of the world aware of the threats facing dolphins and to stop the exploitation of the seas of the world), it is crucial to read Kemal’s *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, for it is both a plea and a strong voice to bring about transformation in our value systems that will lead to increased protection of the environment, including the world’s oceans.

Keywords

Yaşar Kemal, *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, Year of the Dolphin, environmental literature, dolphin hunts, intrinsic values, sea literature

“Astraddle on the dolphin’s mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit!”

—W. B. Yeats, “Byzantium” 248

“They have stained the Marmara with the blood
of the dolphins. The Marmara was filled with
the cry of the dolphins, with death, with black
smoke.”

—Yaşar Kemal, *Denizler Kurudu* 163

The United Nations Convention on Migratory Species declared 2007 the Year of the Dolphin (and this “year” has been extended into 2008). The Year of the Dolphin is part of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. This remarkable campaign, involving Governments, NGOs, and the private sector of countries around the world, aims to raise global awareness of the threats facing dolphins and promote their conservation in the world’s oceans. The official campaign website states that “crucial elements in achieving this are educating to create awareness of dolphin species and their situation, alerting and informing decision makers and involving local communities in grassroots action.”¹ The newly founded institutes, soaring dolphin research publications and the media are all contributing to the creation of “an ocean home [for dolphins] that is safe from harm.”²

It seems that now, in the West, more and more people are aware of the intrinsic value of dolphins. But the questions now are: how effectively will this information get disseminated to the public in the rest of the world, how will decision makers around the world be informed, and how will local communities be involved when many attempts at creating a greater awareness of dolphin endangerment still rely on “abstract information”—information based on their exploitation in seas everywhere and not on “experiential discourse.”³ Through recent reports, we are made aware that tens of thousands of dolphins have been slaughtered in dolphin harvests by coastal communities around the world. Yet evidently, such numerical information concerning the massive exploitation of

¹ See the website: <http://yod2007.org/en/Start_page/index.html>.

² *Ibid.*

³ I borrow these terms from Scott Slovic and Paul Slovic, “Numbers and Nerves: Toward an Effective Apprehension of Environmental Risk” (14).

dolphins has not led to a substantial change in global ethics, one that would prompt action against the perpetrators of wanton cruelty.

What is needed seems to be an intimate story told in a “particular place” in the world, a story that touches the souls of readers rather than a discourse that reduces the value of natural phenomena to mathematical (and often *economic*) calculations.⁴

“Environmental risks—both the risks we expose ourselves to when we live in the world and the risks of human impacts on the natural world—are often described in language poorly suited to overcome the numbing, desensitizing effects of abstract, quantitative discourse” (14), say Scott Slovic and Paul Slovic in “Numbers and Nerves: Toward an Effective Apprehension of Environmental Risk.” They rightly point to the power of environmental literature to provide us with intimate stories and images that can cut through the mind-numbing effect of mere statistics. Herein lies the key to reaching people’s hearts and inculcating ecocentric values in the public consciousness. Such literature exposes man’s cruelty to nature and its species in diverse corners of the world, in a language that touches even the hearts of people who are indifferent to nature or unaware of it. At this worrisome stage of human civilization that we have entered into unthinkingly at the opening of the 21st century, we need to consider seriously this crucial function of literature and listen to stories that strengthen our bonds with nonhuman species.

One such story has been written on the overexploitation of dolphins by Turkey’s “Homer,”⁵ Yaşar Kemal (born in 1922). This world-famous writer is rightly known as an advocate of human rights who has stood up for the exploited in the bulk of his work. In his highly acclaimed novel *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* (1978), Kemal stands up for nature’s rights and turns “quantitative discourse” into meaningful images in order to call for a new human consciousness that would be more holistically oriented. Kemal did not write his novel out of the same

⁴ For a discussion on the significance of “experiential narratives of specific places” in environmental literature, see Slovic 17-23.

⁵ See Talat Sait Halman, “Opening Speech,” *Geçmişten Geleceğe Yaşar Kemal: Bilkent Üniversitesi Türk Edebiyatı Merkezi Uluslararası Yaşar Kemal Sempozyumu*. Halman, in the valedictory speech at the symposium honoring Yaşar Kemal, repeats the words of Olof Lagercrantz’s who named Kemal as “Turkey’s Homer” (20). Also see, *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art*, where Kemal himself refers to Azra Erhat, the Turkish Translator of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, who was “so moved by [Kemal’s] joy [at Mount Ida] that afterward she published an article titled ‘Homerosoğlu Yaşar Kemal’—‘Yaşar Kemal, son of Homer’” (82).

“dolphin-inspiration”⁶ that led to the writing of the Legend of the Golden Dolphin. Kemal’s fiction, instead, is based on a real tragedy that took place in Turkish coastal waters in the early 1950s. Through his magical and lyrical narrative that seeks to reach people from all cultures and all walks of life, Kemal sparks renewed interest in dolphin-human contact in contemporary times, long after the legends and myths of dolphin-human contact have faded into the immemorial past.

“Many early cultures have dolphin tales, but around one thousand years ago the stories dry up,” states Scott Taylor in his *Souls in the Sea*; he proceeds to say that “[in] recent times this Spirit has resurfaced, coming once again to offer us inspiration” (9). Kemal’s novel, published thirty years ago, has a special significance: dolphin hunting was still practiced in Turkish coastal waters when Kemal wrote *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, and the novel can be considered a plea for ending the exploitation of these creatures. As the main character, Fisher Selim, says, “[t]he dolphin is like a human being, it is human. To kill it is worse than killing a man. Why, it is even holy—it protected our Prophet Jonah and kept him in its belly for forty days and forty nights” (36).⁷ What follows, then, is my contention that it is effective stories such as Kemal’s novel, reverberating with intense humane feelings, which make us remember our ancient (primal) bonds with these most humanlike beings of the seas.

⁶ Scott Taylor reveals

[t]he idea that there has been a wave of Dolphin-inspiration washing its way around the world comes from a study done by a man in Australia. Peter Shenstone experienced a flood of insights one night in 1976 while sitting in meditation in his home in Sydney. . . . An inner voice told him how humanity has benefited from the guidance of dolphins, outlining a scenario that leads into an exciting future of health, harmony, passion, and creativity. Peter made a twelve-year study of this idea and created a set of hand-written and illustrated books called *The Legend of the Golden Dolphin*. (297)

⁷ In the Qur’an, specifically in Sura 21 and Sura 37, Prophet Jonah was swallowed by a “big fish.” However, in Turkish oral narratives, the “big fish” is transformed into the “dolphin.” The transformation into the “dolphin” is probably due to the semi-closed seas where the largest fish are the dolphins, not the whales. Another reason for the transformation can be attributed to the humanlike characteristics of dolphins.

In the moral geography of his narrative,⁸ which closely corresponds to the American ecologist Aldo Leopold's call for a "land ethic," Kemal includes the waters of our planet and the earth's nonhuman species within the "boundaries" of ethical consideration.⁹ He warned us of the dangers of ecological devastation through past and present large-scale dolphin hunts, at a time when nature's rights were being defended by neither local communities nor government officials. In the absence of respect for marine life on the part of fishing communities, Kemal's narrative illuminates dolphins' intelligence and emotional life. The author narrates his story with a strong emphasis on the living memories of fishermen. Written in a rich language inspired by the epic styles of Anatolian oral tradition, Turkish folklore and legends, and world mythologies,¹⁰ the novel makes a deep impact on the reader. This impact arises not so much from the mere "numbers" of dolphins hunted as from the protagonist, Fisher Selim, whose bonding with a Marmara dolphin makes us realize the immensity of the suffering endured by creatures in Turkish coastal waters in the 1950s and thereafter:

Nobody had ever loved Fisher Selim like this huge three-metre-long dolphin, not his mother, nor his father, not the comrades by whose side he had fought in the war, not his brothers, not the

⁸ In the many-layered narrative of *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, dolphin hunting in the Sea of Marmara (the paper's focus) is accompanied by side stories (e.g., Zeynel's story) that may be perceived as digressions from the main story; however, these side stories weave new dimensions and complexity to the main narrative and also demonstrate Kemal's power as an epic narrator. In Turkish oral narratives, the main story is usually supported by side stories that are essential to narrative tension.

⁹ Aldo Leopold, the foundational figure in modern ecocentric ethics, famously stated: "[t]he land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (239). Some of Kemal's essays (in the collected works *Yaşar Kemal: Zulmün Artsın* and *Yaşar Kemal: Ağacın Çürüğü*) on the need to extend moral concern to the land correspond to Leopold's call for a "land ethic." See Kemal "Doğayı Öldürmek," (Destroying Nature) 35-38, and Kemal "Öldürülen Toprak" (Land That Is Being Destroyed) 43-47 in *Yaşar Kemal: Zulmün Artsın*. Also see Kemal "Doğanın Öldürülmesi," (The Destruction of Nature) 107-10, in *Yaşar Kemal: Ağacın Çürüğü*.

¹⁰ Yaşar Kemal's style is rich with narratives from both Turkish and other cultures. Kemal explains this quality of his work as being a derivative of the Anatolian culture itself. As he reveals in *A'dan Z'ye Yaşar Kemal* (Yaşar Kemal from A to Z), edited by Alpay Kabacalı, "once you travel in Anatolia, you will come across fragments from Homer in our tales. . . . In our folk stories one comes across Hindu tales as well. One can collect Arabian tales, stories from A Thousand and One Nights in Anatolia today. One can even observe fragments from the epic of Gilgamesh in Anatolia's tales today. These legends and tales exist in our oral tradition, and are told in a magnificent language. . . . I am a product of Anatolia. As I created my language, I created myself with Anatolia" (17; translated by the author).

fellow-fishermen whose lives he had saved, only one other person, just one. . . . Just let the dolphin not see Fisher Selim's boat for a few days. . . . He would go mad, turning the vast Marmara Sea inside out, dashing at lightning speed from Yalova to the Bosphorus, from the Bosphorus to the Gulf of Saros, with all his family at his tail, frantic, grieving. He would approach every boat in sight, enquiring for his friend Fisher Selim, searching among the craft along the shore, tirelessly, ceaselessly. And the fishermen would come to Selim and say: "He was beating about the sea again today, your pet, hey, Fisher Selim, looking for you!" And Fisher Selim, his heart swelling with love and pride, would think that there was some beauty, some hope left in being human. (*SCF*¹¹ 27)

Yaşar Kemal's works are characterized by his loving concern for the natural environment and its species.¹² As a matter of fact, Kemal has been called "one of the pioneers of world literature"¹³ in his tireless pursuit of greater environmental awareness. His inspiration as an environmental writer comes from his childhood, which was rooted in the landscape: he was raised in the Çukurova region¹⁴ of Turkey, where he had a firsthand experience of nature. Kemal's decision to become a writer came later in his life, but his lifelong love of nature—gained in childhood—seeps into each and every one of his works. He has described the "emotional landscape" of his childhood as a free one with "no closed doors." He states:

¹¹ *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* is hereafter abbreviated as *SCF* in the parenthetical documentation.

¹² For Kemal's approach to nature, see Kemal, "Nature as the Foundation of Literature and Life," *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art* 81-83; also see Andaç, "Transformation of Man and Nature," *Living Through the Words of Yaşar Kemal* 141-57. For nature's crucial role in some of Kemal's novels (including *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*), see Clare Brandabur's unpublished essay, "Life, Death, and Memory: Ecological Dimensions in the Work of Yaşar Kemal," where Brandabur states, "[Kemal] can be considered the most profoundly eco-conscious writer of our time" (2).

¹³ Oğuztem reveals, "[a]lthough Yaşar Kemal's concern for nature is widely known, very few are aware that he is actually one of the pioneers of world literature in this regard. Environmental concerns come to the fore seriously starting from the 1970's in the world. . . . Concern for nature in Turkish literature was seriously undertaken by writers such as Fisherman of Halicarnassus and Sait Faik [Abasıyanık], and later by Yaşar Kemal who followed their lead. With their literary output, Turkish literature is, in fact, avantgardist in the world" (38; translated by the author).

¹⁴ Çukurova is the ancient region of Cilicia in southern Anatolia. Yaşar Kemal, aiming to reach the global through the local, views Çukurova as his Yoknapatawpha County.

One day I chose to stay among the eagles' nests in the mountains; another day I was in the plain on the ramparts of the castle with the snakes; on still another day I was in the pomegranate groves, or by the fig trees in the village. . . . One day I could be found on the banks of the Savrun River, on a spree among the purple sweet marjoram; another day I was under the tents of Yörük nomads, with a falcon, a hawk, or a sparrow hawk on my wrist, a gift of the Yörüks. On another day I sat as a disciple in the presence of a bard, while on the following day, I roamed around the countryside with treasure hunters. It was a vast world. (YKLA¹⁵ 25-26)

The Sea-Crossed Fisherman, set in Istanbul and its environs, is one of Kemal's sea novels. With its deep yearning for the once healthy ecosystem in this particular part of the world, the novel presents pictures of devastation in both the land and the water.¹⁶ In Kemal's own words, the novel "is the story of alienation of all big cities in the whole world in agony because of the environmental, human crisis" (Andaç 63).¹⁷ The author claims that Istanbul is "on its death-bed" and goes on to say, "[o]ur city has been put into this state by a savage creature called Man. These creatures do not appreciate the city they live in, don't appreciate the water, the sea, human beings or even themselves" (Andaç 145). Kemal's "savages" are the ecologically illiterate fishermen and especially the real estate speculator Halim Bey Veziroğlu and his associates, those responsible for the commodification of the waters of the Marmara and of the land.

The novel starts out by emphasizing the human impact on the Sea of Marmara and ends with a glimmer of hope that nature will heal itself. In the intervening pages, twenty-five chapters altogether, Kemal gives us scenes from the lives of the alienated fishermen living in Menekşe (a coastal town on the Marmara Sea near

¹⁵ *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art* is hereafter abbreviated as *YKLA* in the parenthetical documentation.

¹⁶ In Kemal's, *Al Gözüm Seyreyle Salih* (1976), another sea novel set in Şile on the Black Sea coast, there is a reference to the overexploitation of dolphins for their oil in the Black Sea. As the narrator reveals, "[t]hese seas teemed with dolphins in the past times. . . . Nowadays there are not any dolphins, not even one single left" (192; translated by the author).

¹⁷ Yaşar Kemal says, "[i]f I write *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* and picture an Istanbul on its death-bed, if I describe the collapse of people, of nature and of the sea, if I tell about the agony of death, about alienation, I am describing today, the present-day world, thus I am contemporary. And this is not just reality in Turkey. *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* was published in France, in England and in the US. It does not reflect things for the city of Istanbul only; the same holds true for Rome, for Paris and for Stockholm" (Andaç 63).

Istanbul, jeopardized by the encroachment of urbanization), and from the lives of the despondent poor people who are running after property and wealth at the cost of the environment. He also gives us a series of crimes committed by the outlaws, the destruction of the once idyllic landscape, and Fisher Selim's life story as revealed to the anonymous narrator during their fishing trips. Within the vast scope of this novel, a manhunt across historic İstanbul—the police are chasing Zeynel, a murderer—and a dolphin hunt that stretches across the Sea of Marmara are interwoven, making clear the immensity of the destruction that has befallen nature due to the materialism and greed of people who, having become alienated even from themselves, have been stripped bare of their humanity.

Dolphin Hunts in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*

In the novel's sprawling narrative Kemal takes up the issue of commercial dolphin hunting in the Marmara in the early 1950s, a historical event practiced "along the entire Turkish Black Sea coast from İğneada to Rize" (Öztürk 1998) until 1983, and may have caused irreversible losses in and to the waters of the Marmara.¹⁸ Reading the author's brutal descriptions of the hunts, one cannot help wondering whether he was writing from first-hand experience. When I asked Kemal about this he told me it was so, saying he had witnessed the violent dolphin hunts of the early 1950s. He also said that he had had to wait for more than twenty years to turn it into a novel because the "tragedy" he had witnessed was more than he could endure. "Some can write about cruelty, but not me," he said. "I had to wait until 1977 when I went to live in Sweden; there I decided to take up the issue."¹⁹ Kemal

¹⁸ The existing scientific data on these years covers the decimation of dolphins, not in the Marmara, but in the coastal waters of the Black Sea. See statistics of dolphin catches for former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Turkey in the Black Sea during the years 1927-1974 in T. D. Smith, "Table 1. Estimated numbers of small cetaceans killed in the Black Sea, by nation and for all nations, for all species, in thousands," "Current Understanding of the Status of Small Cetacean Populations in the Black Sea" 124-25. Also see statistics of dolphin catches for former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey in the Black Sea during the years 1938-1983 in Bayram Öztürk, ed., "Table 2. Dolphin catches in the Black Sea," *Black Sea Biological Diversity: Turkey* 28-30. For information on exploitive dolphin hunts in the Sea of Marmara, see Kemal's reportage series, *Denizler Kurudu* (The Seas Dried Up) (1972). Although these reportages cannot be considered as scientific data, Kemal's conversations with the fishermen of Menekşe in this non-fictional work throw interesting light on the dolphin hunting in the Marmara as narrated in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*. Challenges to the livelihood of traditional fishermen, as presented in *Denizler Kurudu*, with the advent of many harmful fishing methods that devastated the Marmara ecosystem, are also central to *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*.

¹⁹ Personal communication with Yaşar Kemal, 13 July 2006.

was a bit annoyed by my insistence on knowing whether he had seen the dolphin hunts with his own eyes: “Why, I am a novelist. . . . I do not have to witness things. . . . I can write out of my imagination. . . . But, yes, I am talking about a real life event.” He continued:

It was the year 1953 or, perhaps 1954. The managing editor of *Cumhuriyet*,²⁰ Cevat Fehmi Başkut, called me and told me about two Italian freighters that had anchored off Haydarpaşa port. As Cevat explained, they were paying huge sums of money for dolphin oil. I was curious. I got in a fisher’s boat and sailed off to Auva—you see I lived in Florya for 45 years and had many fisher friends as well as fishing boats. There what I had seen was horrible. It is a very sad story. There were schools of dolphins and they were being shot off Auva’s shores with rifles. I saw the cauldrons on the shore where dolphins were boiled for their oil, and I smelt the thick dolphin oil in the air. The event was a tragedy in the eyes of many.²¹

This experience resulted in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*. In the novel, Kemal’s real-life, ecologically ignorant Marmara fishermen, pressed by severe economic conditions and eager to make a fortune in dolphin oil,²² kill the dolphins with harpoons, dynamite and bullets. Following the exceptionally cruel hunts, they boil the dead animals in huge cauldrons all along the shores of the Marmara, “without even realizing they [are] cutting off their own daily bread” (35). Kemal’s narrator²³ explains the scope of this tragic event:

Nobody remembers what year it was, that accursed year when dolphin oil became a precious commodity. Foreigners were eager to buy it and one drop was worth a gram of gold. Fishermen flowed into the Marmara from everywhere, the Black Sea, the Aegean, even the Mediterranean, and soon a fierce hunt was on, more like a wholesale massacre. . . . The cries of the dolphins still echo over the Marmara,

²⁰ *Cumhuriyet* is one of the oldest newspapers in Turkey, founded in 1924.

²¹ Personal communication with Yaşar Kemal, 13 July 2006.

²² As Altan Acara argued, dolphin oil, as it remains in liquid state for a longer period of time, was specifically used in industry, including “steam engines” (34). For a revealing discussion of the use of dolphin oil in the past, see Acara 30-36.

²³ Yaşar Kemal enters *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* as an anonymous writer who is one of the few people close to Fisher Selim, the main character.

the shrieking as they were caught—harpooned, dynamited or shot dead. . . . The oil thus obtained was scooped into barrels that were loaded on to foreign freighters anchored off Haydarpaşa or the Bosphorus. (SCF 35-36)²⁴

Horrified by what he saw, Fisher Selim begs the fishermen to stop, saying: “You’ll anger the sea, you’ll make her cross with all of us. After the wrong we’ve done her she’ll never give us even a tiny sprat” (36). Yet the fishermen assume that the riches of the Marmara can never be exhausted. In an attempt to “save the Marmara, our sea, our bread, from these stupid vandals” who regarded dolphin oil merely as good business, Fisher Selim and a few of his distressed friends pay a visit to the Vali—the Governor—only to find him unconcerned (35). “[H]e was looking at them queerly as though at creatures from some other, unknown world. . . . They waited uncertainly in that huge room which had once been the seat of grand viziers. Then a policeman signalled to them that the audience was over” (35). Not losing hope, they send “telegrams to the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, to their representatives in the National Assembly, but with no result at all, not even an answer” (36).

Thus, Kemal’s narrator explains how the state officials ignored the slaughter of dolphins. The underlying historical reason was, as the narrator says, that the government was providing the rifles and bullets to the dolphin fisheries situated along the Black Sea coast. Therefore two decades later Kemal took up another very powerful weapon, his pen, and wrote *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* to avenge the loss of these innocent and gentle creatures. His Fisher Selim takes the place of Memed in *Memed, My Hawk*, and becomes another noble bandit²⁵ in the Kemal canon, defending the rights of the oppressed. Yet now the oppressed are non-human creatures, the Marmara dolphins (those “holy” souls of the Marmara), who lack the capacity to defend their own rights and indeed defend themselves from sudden death.

A well-known aspect of Kemal’s novels is the fact that there is an inseparable bond between the landscapes and the people who belong to them. Kemal regards the human and the nonhuman as complementary and interrelated parts of particular ecosystems, and often humanizes nature while naturalizing the human. It follows

²⁴ In Kemal’s reportage series, *Denizler Kurudu*, Kemal’s conversations with the local fishermen points at a dramatic decline in dolphin populations in the waters of the Marmara following large scale hunts, within a time span of only a few years.

²⁵ Yaşar Kemal’s best-known character is Memed in *Memed, My Hawk* (1955). Memed is a noble bandit; he is often likened to Robin Hood who fights for justice and helps the oppressed.

from this that both the land and its people are in a continuous process of becoming, which gives the novels a special kind of dynamism. In the multi-layered narrative structure of *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, then, all the layers can be seen as leading to this very connectedness between the human and the nonhuman. Thus we may say that Kemal adopts a truly ecocentric approach to nature, giving priority to the health of the physical environment and conferring “biotic rights”²⁶ to its intrinsically valuable dolphin communities. He writes both to protect the stability of the Marmara ecosystem and to promote the conservation of dolphins, emphasizing that they are incredibly close to humans in their capacity for cognition and humanlike emotions; he describes their intelligence, creative behavior, highly developed communication skills, self-awareness, and capacity to feel joy, love, grief, and anger. Kemal also legitimizes his ecocentrism by claiming a deep connectedness between physical and human nature, arguing that “[w]ith changes in the ecosystem, our own natures change, too”²⁷ (YKLA 145; qtd. in Kabacalı 21). Never to lose our pride in being human, he feels, we need to seriously consider our proper place within nature and live in accordance with its laws.

Devastation in the Marmara Ecosystem in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*

Yaşar Kemal’s sharp critique of the local fishermen’s dolphin hunts in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* also draws heavily on his earlier nonfictional work *Denizler Kurudu* (The Seas Dried Up, 1972). The oral history in *Denizler Kurudu*, based on the laments of environmentally conscious Marmara fishermen, shows how the Marmara ecosystem was devastated because of large-scale dolphin hunts. When analyzing these two works it is important to consult actual catch statistics in the coastal waters of the Black Sea, for the statistics prove that indeed too many dolphins were caught in these coastal waters. When we combine this fact with that of the excessive dolphin hunts in the Marmara, as chronicled by Marmara fishermen in *Denizler Kurudu*, then we know that the Marmara ecosystem must have been significantly altered.²⁸ An important document in this regard is T. D. Smith’s essay

²⁶ Yaşar Kemal’s ecocentric vision corresponds to that of Aldo Leopold, who argues for “biotic right, regardless of the presence or absence of economic advantage to us” (Leopold 247).

²⁷ Kemal, by his own admission, “justifies this argument in the novel” (personal communication, 13 July 2006).

²⁸ All species of cetaceans have been under legal protection in Turkish waters since 1983. See <<http://www.accobams.org/2006.php/pages/show/270>>. For further information, also see Öztürk,

“Current Understanding of the Status of Small Cetacean Populations in the Black Sea,” which reveals the catch statistics for the former USSR, Bulgaria, and Turkey during the years 1927 and 1974. According to Smith’s statistics, after the Soviet catch of 134,000 to 140,000 dolphins in 1938—including *Delphinus delphis* or the common dolphin, *Phocoena phocoena* or the harbour porpoise, and *Tursiops truncatus* or the bottlenose dolphin—the next overexploitation probably occurred in the Turkish coastal waters of the Black Sea in the 1950s (124-25).

Smith says of dolphin hunting of the Black Sea coast: “In the period 1951-56 the average annual catch exceeded the maximum Soviet annual catch in 1938,” and reached 157,000 to 185,200 dolphins annually.²⁹ He believes the “data . . . suggest either an extremely intense fishery on a locally greater abundance of porpoise, or gross inaccuracies in the catch statistics. If the former, it does seem likely that a fishery of this magnitude could cause a reduction in the porpoise populations” (125-26). This would mean that during these years dolphin populations declined to marginal levels, and thus throws an interesting light on Kemal’s references to the years 1953 and 1954 as being the time when dolphins became almost extinct in the Sea of Marmara. It is also interesting to note that a study by Özdamar, Amaha, and Miyazaki claims “dolphin fishery” in the Black Sea off the coast of former Soviet Union countries dates back to the year 1870, and was “primarily for obtaining blubber oil from dolphins,” whereas dolphin fishery off the Turkish Black Sea coast was initiated in the 1930s. Furthermore, while the former USSR (Georgia, Russia and Ukraine), Bulgaria, and Romania banned the commercial hunting of dolphins in 1966, Turkey went on hunting them until 1983 (31).³⁰ Özdamar et al’s study also tells us that owing to “little published information about the dolphin fishery in Turkey,” facts about dolphin hunts were largely obtained through interviews with old fishermen who were involved in this practice until 1983, and interviews “with persons engaged in dolphin utilization” (31).

Yaşar Kemal, too, relies on the real-life experiences of the local fishermen to narrate his story. In *The Sea-Crossed Fishermen*, Kemal’s narrator, drawing from

“Elements of an Agreement under the Bonn Convention (CMS) for the Conservation of Marine Mammals of the Black Sea” 115-16.

²⁹ In Öztürk’s *Black Sea Biological Diversity: Turkey* (1998), the same catch figures for the years 1951-57 are observed. See, “Table 2. Dolphin catches in the Black Sea” 28-30. Öztürk reveals that dolphins, in the Black Sea, were caught “mainly for oil and vitamin D extracted from blubber and for meal for poultry feed” (28).

³⁰ Dolphins, in Turkey, were mainly hunted for their oil and were mostly processed in the Et Balık Kurumu (EBK) factory in Trabzon (on the Black Sea coast), a government factory built in 1952. For the statistics of oil production at EBK during the years 1954-1983, see Özdamar, Amaha, and Miyazaki 37.

oral history, refers to the once-healthy ecosystem of the Marmara and its sustainability: the dolphins used to lead (or chase) small fish from the depths to the shallow waters all along the shores and helped the fishermen in their daily endeavors; yet these very fishermen, due to increasing economic pressures and unaware of the exhaustability of the native biota, would seek short-term profits through dolphin oil and soon dry up the seas, at the cost of “cutting off their own daily bread.” As the narrator says:

[A]s the dolphins roamed the Marmara in shoals, leaping and frolicking gaily, boon companions to birds and sailors, they stirred up the fish from the depths and herded them to the shores, so that in those times the catch was bountiful and the people of Istanbul could buy tunny for ten kurush and not, as now, a hundred lira the pair. . . . Doesn't every fisherman, every skipper, know that the dolphin drives the smaller fish in towards the coast, stirring them out of their nests, making it easy to catch them? Doesn't he know that with the dolphins gone the seas will dry up? (*SCF* 35-40)

The fishermen's awareness, in Kemal's novel, of how much the dolphins help them echoes the statements in Fikret Berkes's “Turkish Dolphin Fisheries,” one of the few documents on the old fisheries in Turkey. Although Black Sea fishermen, “in the face of economic considerations,” seem to have “abandoned” the belief that dolphin hunts are “sinful,” Berkes states that nonetheless “[m]any fishermen said that dolphins were useful both in keeping away sharks and dogfish . . . and in driving fish schools into coastal areas and the fishermen's nets. Coastal fish trap and weir operators used to complain about dolphins damaging their gear: now the same fishermen complain that there are not enough dolphins to drive the fish into their weir” (165). In *Denizler Kurudu*, largely based on the collective memory of the fishermen of Menekşe, Kemal provides a more detailed account of the eventual instability of the Marmara ecosystem following the exploitative dolphin hunts, an instability which eventually led to loss of livelihood for the fishing communities. As one fisherman explains:

The dolphins used to block the way of the fish coming from The Black Sea. The fish coming down from the Bosphorus and heading towards the Aegean Sea were stopped by the dolphins and these fish used to get dispersed to the shores all along the Marmara. However,

when the dolphins were slaughtered, there was nothing to stop the fish coming from the Black Sea. Then these migratory fish came directly down from the Bosphorus and went out through the Çanakkale Boğazi, and they ended up on Greek shores. Ah, Dolphins. (DK³¹ 169-70)³²

As another environmentally conscious fisherman explains in *Denizler Kurudu*, “[i]n the presence of the dolphins, other predator fish could not enter the Marmara. Dolphins ate the fish, scared them and diverted them from the deep seas to the shallow waters along the coasts of Marmara, and also protected them from the other predators” (163). This fisherman holds the government responsible for the eventual devastation, for the officials “gave a mauser rifle to every single person who requested one so that they would slaughter the dolphins” (163).³³ Still another fisherman complains, “[t]hey have stained the Marmara with the blood of the dolphins. The Marmara was filled with the cry of the dolphins, with death, with black smoke. The fishermen slaughtered thousands, even tens of thousands of dolphins in a single day. The dolphins became extinct in just a few years” (163). To chronicle the devastation of the Marmara in the hands of greedy fishermen who were unaware of the environmental consequences of their actions, the narrator in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* also describes the use of mauser rifles: “A burst of gunfire made [Fisher Selim] jump. He heard a long shriek as of a child being slaughtered.” He continues:

Unthinkingly, [Selim] set the motor purring and headed towards the sound. After a while he found himself in a forest of fishing boats. Hundreds of guns were blasting away and the sea was red with blood. Smitten dolphins shot up into the air screeching like children, splashed down into the water and surfaced again, white belly turned up, bleeding. Some, screaming, dived out of sight only to rise a little

³¹ *Denizler Kurudu* (The Seas Dried Up) is hereafter abbreviated as *DK* in the parenthetical documentation.

³² All translations from *Denizler Kurudu* are my own.

³³ As revealed by Özdamar, Amaha, and Miyazaki, hunting dolphins with rifles, on the Turkish coast of the Black Sea, dates back to the 1940s. The study reveals that “[t]he first rifles acquired by the fishermen for dolphin hunting were provided by the government in 1940. After 1960, Turkish fishermen caught dolphins almost exclusively with rifles” (33). Özdamar, Amaha, and Miyazaki further reveal, “Fisheries Department of Ministry of Agriculture provided fishermen with rifles and bullets through fisheries cooperatives” (34).

later, white belly up, bleeding. Others tossed and turned, squalling frantically, squirting blood, then lay still, white belly up. . . . And the fishermen, with hooks and ropes, hoisted them into the boats. . . . Fisher Selim stood staring at the bleeding dolphins, at the sea foaming with blood. . . . (SCF 48)

In *Denizler Kurudu*, Kemal explains the loss of biological diversity in these waters following the decimation of the dolphins. One paralyzed fisherman chronicles the consequences of interfering in nature's ways: "In the absence of dolphins, you never come across swordfish. I caught nine red mullets this year, can you imagine, just nine throughout the summer. A fisherman like me. Didn't I use to catch nine boats full? In the absence of dolphins, there is no kolios, no bream, no orfos. No lobster, no mackerel, no mullet. In the absence of dolphins, there is no sea bream, no bluefish, no gray mullet, no bass" (164). In Kemal's words, the Marmara's significance lies in its being a "fish breeding farm," for

all the different species of fish in the Black Sea pour into the Marmara to lay their eggs. They take refuge in Marmara. Once you destroy the stability in the Marmara, the stability in the Black Sea and also in Aegean Sea will be devastated. The world is like our bodies. Once you destroy one part of the seas, the rest of the seas will be effected. Once you destroy a part of the land, the rest of the lands will be destroyed. (DK 193)

In fact, in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* exploitive dolphin hunts are not the only cause of the devastation of the Marmara ecosystem. The traditional, small-scale fishermen of Marmara, faced with great challenges to their livelihood, resort to exploitative fishing techniques such as the use of high voltage lights in the water and dynamite. Even worse, Halim Bey Veziroğlu's cannery ships ("bought from Europe" through his connections with the "arms magnates, the captains of industry, the drug-traffickers"), equipped with radar, drained the whole Sea of Marmara. The narrator describes this process:

All equipped with radar . . . these ships, like so many eyes raking the bottom of the sea. . . . Each radar is as powerful as a thousand human eyes, a million eyes, unerringly picking out the fish wherever they may be, in whatever sheltered nook, at whatever depth. Black clouds

of fish are beating about the sea with millions of eyes upon them, green, razor-sharp. . . . They spread their vast nets and the fish are caught up in thousands, sucked into the ship on one side, pushed out in cans on the other, glossy coloured cans with the picture of a fish on each one. They are swallowing up all the fish in the sea, these ships, and vomiting mounds and mounds of tin cans on to the shore. . . . And trucks and trains and boats stand by to carry the canned fish to the far corners of the world. . . . The seas are empty! Empty, drained, killed by the thousand-eyed cannery ships. (*SCF* 279)

The introduction of mechanization, the overwhelming magnitude of radar fishing, the immense exploitation of the sea's natural resources for commercial purposes destroys the biological diversity of the sea. In *Denizler Kurudu* Kemal calls on the "bureocrats, officials and the scientists" to stop the devastation:

Can't you just stop and think about what these fisher folk are saying? You can't reanimate the seas once they dry up. Once the ecological balance is gone, you can't put it back in order, either on the land or in the sea. The alarm bells are ringing and making us deaf. Why don't you listen to Lame Hasan, a man of the seas for the past sixty-two years . . . ? Why don't you listen to Ahmet Ateş and Ali Rıza, why do you close your eyes to Nuri's laments about the dangers of fishing with high voltage lights? Go out to the Marmara, to the Black Sea, listen to the thousands of fishermen who are near-crazed by all the inhuman ways of fishing. The land and the seas are slipping beneath our feet . . . have we, all of us, gone mad? (205)

Dolphins Are Intrinsicly Valuable

Yaşar Kemal believes that the integrity and stability of the Marmara ecosystem can only be protected by means of love and respect for its individual members.³⁴ Thus his narrator introduces us to the novel's marine characters, to

³⁴ Kemal's vision of love and respect for other species and healthy ecosystems is ultimately Leopoldian. In "The Land Ethic," Leopold states, "a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such" (240); he continues, "[i]t is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value" (261).

Selim's dolphin "family,"³⁵ who are humanlike in their long-term social bonding and playfulness, their custom of travelling together, their self-awareness, intelligence and rich emotional lives. Since scientific interest in dolphin behavior³⁶ was not common when Kemal was writing *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, his storytelling gains special importance. A great storyteller himself,³⁷ the author seeks to convince the reader of the intrinsic value of dolphins through images and metaphors, and also by means of the techniques of the Turkish storytelling tradition; his narrator shows us the closeness of dolphins to human communities and in particular their "long-lasting friendship" with Fisher Selim, something Kemal knows about through his own closeness to fishermen.³⁸ Indeed, Selim's most valued companions are not humans but his "family" of five dolphins with whom he shares his "joys and sorrows" (27). Selim himself becomes virtually a creature of the seas; "[his] clothes, his hair, his hands are invariably covered with fish scales," and he has "a pleasant odour of the sea and he himself always smelled strongly of fish" (148). Selim "talks" with the dolphin he is most closely attached to in the "family" of five;³⁹ it performs "all sorts of clowneries around the boat" when Selim is "angry, sulking, in a temper," trying to make him laugh, itself "chuckling aloud like a human being" (33). "Fish folk," explains Selim, "once they get attached to you, are more faithful, more devoted than any human friend" (28):

The dolphins would laugh out loud when they saw [Selim]. An animal laugh? Laughter, tears, the prerogatives of humankind? Hah, what fools men are! It is human beings who have forgotten how to

³⁵ In *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, Fisher Selim repeatedly refers to the dolphin family of five as "his own family [familya]."

³⁶ For comprehensive scientific information on the Bottlenose Dolphins, see Janet Mann et al., ed., *Cetacean Societies: Field Studies of Dolphins and Whales* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000).

³⁷ By his own admission, Kemal "did not start [his] literary work by writing." He states, "[u]ntil I turned seventeen or eighteen, I was a teller of folktales and a collector of folklore. I used to go from village to village in the Taurus Mountains region, narrating the tales I had learned from Çukurova's leading itinerant storytellers, with whom I had done my apprenticeship" (Kemal, "Literature, Democracy, and Peace" 15). For a discussion of Kemal's admiration for storytellers, also see Kemal, "Childhood Memories," *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art* 20-21.

³⁸ Kemal has stated that he lived in Florya for 45 years and had many friends who were fishermen (Personal communication, 13 July 2006).

³⁹ As revealed by Dr. Ayhan Dede (Istanbul University, Faculty of Aquatic Sciences, Department of Marine Biology), who has been doing research on the dolphins in the coastal waters of Turkey (particularly in the Bosphorus and the Marmara) since 1993, the Marmara houses two species of dolphins: Tirtak (Common Dolphin) and Afalina (Bottlenose Dolphin); Fisher Selim's dolphin is probably a Bottlenose Dolphin as this species forms small groups of communities (Personal communications, September 2007).

laugh. It is human beings who are lonely, friendless, who cannot, will never ever enjoy the touch of a warm hand, the beauty of a loving gaze. It is human beings who are cynical, callous, indifferent to the beauty of the world around them, incapable of feeling the pure joy of being alive, of seeing the sky under which they live, the earth over which they walk, just blind wanderers in the midst of the majesty of nature. Dolphins, fishes, birds, foxes, wolves, even the smallest insects are those who enjoy our world to the full. (*SCF* 27)

The narrator also refers to Selim's dolphin's amazing powers of cognition, saying that it could spot Selim no matter how far away he was, and "smell him out" whenever Selim was putting out to sea, "whether from the Bosphorus or Pendik, or from Ambarlı or the Islands"; with his other family members he would follow Selim's "old hulk all the way to wherever [he] was going" (26).⁴⁰ Yet his aquatic companion was too smart to search for Selim on "days of high wind and storm." Then, "after long days of separation, when at last the dolphin spotted Selim's boat, he would come racing from afar, swishing up into the air every hundred meters, his joy radiating through the water to all the creatures of the sea, the fish and lobsters, the shrimps and crabs, and to the gulls too and the shearwaters and egrets. Round and round the boat he would swirl, then stop and gaze with bright adoring eyes at his friend" (*SCF* 28). Selim's friend also helps him to fish, a human-friendly habit of dolphins noted above:

A strange phenomenon it was indeed, this relationship between the dolphin and Selim. . . . The dolphin would find the finest nests of red mullet, lobsters and shrimps, and would then lead Selim to them. Selim's boat would overflow with the choicest fish, and when he went to sell his catch at the fish market the other fishermen would turn green with envy. (*SCF* 33)⁴¹

⁴⁰ Kemal's reference to the dolphin's capacity to spot Selim in the seas may not be fictitious. Dolphins' acute hearing ability across long distances is a scientific fact; they can determine the direction of sounds very well and can also retain sounds in their memory (Personal communications with Dr. Ayhan Dede, September 2007).

⁴¹ A much quoted maxim of Aldo Leopold—"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (262)—indicates his approval of activities that do not harm the biotic pyramid. Corresponding to Leopoldian ecocentric ethics, Kemal approves of small-scale fishing in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* as it does not disturb the integrity and stability of the Marmara ecosystem.

Kemal's narrator also refers to dolphins' capacity to suffer. These almost-human creatures, when they are shot dead, "leap high into the air with baby-like squeals" (*SCF* 278); they "sobbed . . . when the bullets hit them in the head, like babies, how they hurled themselves into the sky, writhing, bending, tracing arcs in the air, splashing back into the sea, staining the blue water with red blood, their white bellies upturned, floating on the waves. . . . Not a single dolphin has ever been seen since, neither in the Marmara nor in the Black Sea" (*SCF* 200). In *Denizler Kurudu* Kemal also stresses these creatures' capacity for suffering: "Dolphins are like human communities. . . . They die like human beings, writhing, shrieking, screaming. . . . When a dolphin is shot, all the other dolphins in the nearby waters gather around the wounded dolphin to offer help. As more and more gather around, the fishermen shoot at each one of them until there is none left. . . . They cannot escape. . . . Dolphins are very much like the youngsters of human beings. They are naive, courageous, and pure hearted creatures" (165).⁴²

Fisher Selim's eventual alienation from human beings, following the slaughter of his entire dolphin family, gives rise to a local legend concerning Selim and his dolphin; their "friendship" is magnified in the fishermen's imagination until it reaches supernatural dimensions: "He went mad, poor Fisher Selim, stark staring mad when they killed his dolphin," says one fisherman. "He wandered up and down the Marmara Sea, all by himself, searching for his fish," says another. And then the dolphin is transformed into Selim's "beloved," a mermaid: "One mermaid, only one, remained in the Marmara Sea and it was Fisher Selim who found her"; "[e]ach morning before sunrise the mermaid would swim over from Emerald Bay at Büyükkada and climb into Fisher Selim's boat. She'd take a mirror and comb her long shimmering yellow tresses. . . ."; "[h]e had three children by that mermaid, two girls and a boy. . . ."; "[l]ook here, Selim's not the first one. . . . Ever since the time of the patriarch Noah men and fish have had intercourse with each other. Ever since the Flood mermaids have seduced the handsomest males at sea" (*SCF* 68-70). The fishermen's imaginative, mythic transformation of the dolphin-Selim relationship into a mermaid-human one plays a crucial role in Kemal's narrative: now Selim's dolphin is no longer just a marine mammal or even a human being but a superhuman, virtually divine being, a "Spirit," one who has a right not only to life but to eternal life.

⁴² Dolphins never abandon a wounded community member. This is a quality drive hunts take advantage of at present: dolphins' attachment to other members in their communities makes it easier to hunt hundreds of dolphins at one time.

Although in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* Kemal is primarily concerned with dolphins, some of his novel's most powerful lines refer to another non-human species, the swordfish. Wounded long ago in army service, Fisher Selim is in love with a "flaxen-haired" nurse, imagining she waits for him to build them a house overlooking the Bosphorus. He hopes that she will someday come back and, for this future union, Selim tries to save up money to buy a plot of land from Halim Bey Veziroğlu who keeps saying, "[o]h dear, Selim Bey, land prices have shot up again and your money's not nearly enough. . . . Well, you can root up those trees of yours if you wish. . . . We'll see, Selim Bey, the land won't run away, don't you worry, and I won't sell to anyone else . . ." (174). The only way for Selim to save enough money to buy this plot of land (on which he has already planted many trees) is to hunt down a particularly huge swordfish. Eventually he catches it with his largest hook. But in the ensuing struggle he feels sorry for it: "No fish, however strong, can sever this nylon cord, thick as a finger. . . . It can't get that huge hook out of its mouth either. It'll never break away, never be free again, the poor thing . . ." (180). Thus he decides to let it go.⁴³ And then, as he starts out for Menekşe, "light as a bird inside," he keeps worrying about the swordfish:

What if the fish can't get the hook out of its mouth? he was thinking as the boat slowly chugged on towards the coast. What if it swallows it? Will it die? Then, no, he told himself, his heart trembling with joy, no hook can really hurt such a big fish. The flesh will form an envelope over it, that's all. As for the line, well, it'll find a way to cut it. . . . Every old fisherman knows this from long experience. (SCF 180)

Unlike Hemingway's old man in *The Old Man and the Sea*, whose huge fish is eaten by sharks before he gets it back to shore, Selim voluntarily lets his swordfish go, for he feels that such a glorious creature has every right to live and roam the waters of Marmara.⁴⁴ Indeed, according to Fethi Naci, the renowned Turkish

⁴³ See *Denizler Kurudu* (194-200), where Kemal explains that he had heard the story of a fisherman and his struggle with a swordfish from a fellow fisherman (Hoca) before the translation of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* into Turkish. In *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, Kemal attributes the story to Fisher Selim and has him let go of the swordfish, exactly as he had heard the story from Hoca, the fisherman.

⁴⁴ In the narrative, Selim's ethical concern extends to other members of the Sea of Marmara: "[t]here was a time . . . when this Marmara Sea teemed with swordfish, each one three, four

literary critic, “[a]s Selim is battling with the swordfish, so is Yaşar Kemal with Hemingway. . . . The eight-page-long narrative of Selim’s encounter with the sword-fish is, perhaps, the most beautiful part of the novel.” Naci confesses that he “read *The Old Man and the Sea* many years ago, but in that novel [he] could find no eight pages that equally impressed [him]” (90). No doubt the beauty of the narrative lies in Kemal’s subverting of the assumption of “lord man”; that is, in his deep-seated belief in the intrinsic value of these sea creatures to whose fate humankind is inextricably connected.

The Connectedness of Nature and Human Nature in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*

A high regard for both the integrity and stability of the Marmara ecosystem and its dolphins in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* may be summarized as a call for a “land ethic” in Kemal’s thought, corresponding to the ideas of Aldo Leopold. One may argue that Kemal demands from his reader an understanding of “the complexity of the land organism” (Leopold 190) and also a recognition of the “biotic right[s]” of nonhuman individuals, “regardless of the presence or absence of economic advantage” (Leopold 247). This could be regarded as crucial for Kemal, because his ecologically illiterate characters may only then bring “a limitation on [their] freedom of action”⁴⁵ and choose a way of life that does not interfere in nature’s ways.

Yet, as Kemal states in *Denizler Kurudu*, the fishing communities, having no understanding of the “land mechanism,” conferred only economic value to the land, hence the dolphin hunts. The author, to help spur a sense of moral responsibility to the land, argues: “With changes in the ecosystem, our own natures change, too—witness the unbalanced people who have appeared. The people of the plain that I once knew no longer have the wholesome image of former times” (*YKLA* 145). In *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, then, Kemal portrays connectedness of human nature to physical nature with the silent protest of the natural world. The narrator explains: “The fish were angry then and took themselves off. To Greece, to Russia”; and “[t]hey scorn us now, the fish of the sea. It’s the worst thing that could happen, to be scorned by the fish of the sea” (*SCF* 140). Fisher Selim’s prophecy, “you’ll

metres long, weighing as much as six hundred kilos sometimes. But now all those fishermen, gentleman anglers, harpooners, dynamiters have killed them all off!” (*SCF* 26).

⁴⁵ Leopold, in “The Land Ethic,” states, “[a]n ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence” (238).

anger the sea, you'll make her cross with all of us," gains significance in this context—significantly, the original title of the novel is *Deniz Küstü* (The Sea Became Cross). The novelist thus implies that all entities in the natural world have consciousness, and that the earth nurtures humankind only if she is respected. Once the landscape becomes cross—once it turns its back to humankind—our human values are lost and alienation becomes unavoidable. As Kemal exemplifies in his narrative, natural and cultural phenomena—from dolphins to swordfish, from the Sea of Marmara to the fishing village of Menekşe—are living beings, possessing distinct personalities, and the living earth will react, sooner or later, to the collective assault perpetrated by humanity.

As Kemal conceives of these matters, then, human nature retains its purity and wholeness in healthy and stable ecosystems.⁴⁶ *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* lays bare this very inseparability of the fate of humankind and physical place. It follows from this that, in the vast geographical setting and time span of the novel, documenting the demise of the once healthy seas, Kemal portrays the alienated lives of individuals who have lost their kinship with nature's nonhuman individuals, who are exclusively dedicated to the pursuit of material wealth. He draws portraits of unwholesome and unbalanced men in pursuit of opportunities to abuse the land and to turn nature's noble entities into commodities to be sold in the market-place. In this way, Kemal depicts his idea that human decline is inevitably intertwined with the diminishment of nature. The parallel story of the manhunt of Zeynel, revealing the many-layered ills of Istanbul, should be read as being a part of this very nature/human nature link. It would be a misconception to read the side stories in Kemal's narrative as merely showing the brutality of modern, urban existence and having no connection with the devastation that comes to nature.

In *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, the fishermen of Menekşe, having lost old traditional values of being merciful to creatures in the seas, turn to the "dolphin oil business" to seek their fortune. One fisherman says, "if I don't hunt them, others will" (38). Various other fishermen utter the following comments: "Why, everyone's doing it! They say that all these fishermen are rich as Harun al-Rashid now. There's no end to the fish of the sea" (40); "[a]ll my fortune I've put into it, sold my land too" (41); "[t]his is good business" (37); "[t]he dolphins are going to feather the nests of us poor fishermen. Those foreign freighters anchored in the port are ready to buy as much oil as you can offer them" (38); "[i]f it wasn't for this

⁴⁶ In his 1973 novel, *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* (*Murder in the Ironsmiths Market*), as in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, Kemal takes up the issue of how changes in nature tend to be followed by changes in humans under the impact of industry and modernization.

dolphin business . . . I'd have been obliged to sell all my boats this year and try something other than fishing. Think, only the other day I sold fourteen barrels of oil and got more money for them than I earned in all my fishing days" (38); and "[a]t this rate we'll be able to buy apartment buildings in Istanbul, all of us Marmara fishermen" (38).

The story of the unwholesome "fortune-seller" in *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* who has long abused a "huge coppery eagle with a wingspread of maybe three meters" and made a fortune is also significant in this context. As the narrator reveals, the owner of the eagle—with a large board on his back, pierced with dozens of holes into which were inserted slips of paper bearing fortunes—visits regularly all the principle market-places across Istanbul and, with the power of his rhetoric, has huge crowds line up and willingly pay two and a half liras for having their fortunes drawn by the "quivering, lustreless" eagle:

Roll up, roll up, folks! Come and see the golden eagle that was captured on Mount Kaf. The golden eagle hatched by the Phoenix who lives on the mountain. . . . Only one egg in a thousand years does the Phoenix lay, and from that egg this eagle. . . . Ninety-two years old it is. . . . It will be nine hundred and eight years before another such immortal eagle appears on this earth. (*SCF* 80)

The fortune teller goes on explaining that

[g]olden eagles born of the Phoenix circle the globe sixteen times as soon as they break out of their egg. And their eyries are on the snowy peaks of the Altai Mountains, and also on the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. The Phoenix never lays its egg anywhere but on Mount Kaf and for seven years it sits on this egg without stirring, neither to eat nor to drink. It is nourished by the Almighty. . . . So now, do you understand who this eagle is? (*SCF* 80)

The "fortune-seller," bearing a megaphone in his hand, shouts in the crowded market-place, until the trembling eagle can no longer take it and "drop[s] down unable to get up again, stretched out over the board, motionless, its eyes half-closed, veiled with a white film" (81). The narrator reveals: "It was rumoured of this glabrous, shabby man that he owned property in the best quarters of the town, a

huge mansion on the shores of the Bosphorus and partnerships in a factory and a bank, all of it earned by the eagle” (82).

Apart from the dolphins and the fortune-seller’s eagle, the hawks from the mountains of Trace, the Istanca range, and from the rocky crags of Rize province, too, are objects of gaining material wealth. With reference to Dursun Kemal’s habit of visiting the Çiçekpazarı—Flower Bazaar—regularly to count the number of hawks of every color and size on display in a large cage, “to find out if any had been sold or new ones added to the cage” (85), the narrator shows the exploitation of the hawks of these natural landscapes: “This time he counted thirty-six. So there were five new ones today.” Kemal, in *Denizler Kurudu*, condemns the unbalanced men who regard nature solely in economic terms through the sarcastic words of a nature lover. According to “Hoca,” “the seas are the home of two intelligent species: gulls and dolphins. Because dolphins had use value for humankind, they were made extinct in just a few years.” Hoca first inattentively says, “people say gulls’ eggs are good for relieving all kinds of bodily pain.” Then, regretting having revealed this information, he says, “No, you didn’t hear this . . . let no one hear this. . . . Gulls aren’t good for anything, neither are their eggs. Some say gulls’ eggs are good pain relievers, but this is a big lie. Once people learn this—the fact that gulls’ eggs are good for relieving pain—the fate of gulls will be worse than that of dolphins” (*DK* 166).

In the course of the novel, “the woods and valleys and streams of the Bosphorus,” too, are shown to have great monetary value. Halim Bey Veziroğlu, the real estate speculator and developer, buys plots of land, only to sell them at prices people cannot afford. In an attempt to own more plots of land, he does not hesitate to bulldoze the small village homes in Menekşe. Veziroğlu regards all of nature as to his economic advantage; the value nature has for him is entirely instrumental. The narrator explains his commodifying the natural environments:

They’re all his, the woods and valleys and streams of the Bosphorus, all Halim Bey Veziroğlu’s, the age-old plane trees. He’s going to cut them down, uproot the woods, level the valleys, dry up the brooks and fountains. A ravaging fire, an ill wind blowing over Istanbul, this Halim Bey Veziroğlu, turning into a hurricane. Filling the lovely shores and wooded valleys of the Bosphorus with ugly apartment blocks of a hundred or two hundred flats. . . . And the waters of the Bosphorus will be strewn with refuse from these buildings and, like

the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus will become nothing better than a stinking swampy marsh. (SCF 197)

In *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, the slaughter of the dolphins and many other ills of Istanbul are attributed to Veziroğlu and his associates. The narrator states: “Many of the evils fermenting in Istanbul, throughout Turkey, stem from these men. Lift a stone—whether it be on the slaughter of dolphins, the destruction of the shanties, drugs, arms dealing—and you will find them underneath. And Halim Bey Veziroğlu is connected by his fingertips, as with an electric current, to them all. . . . He has severed the sea’s life-giving artery, this Halim Bey Veziroğlu, drained it of its lifeblood” (SCF 200).

In Kemal’s fiction, with the advent of the exploitive dolphin hunts and the process of the inhuman commodification of the Marmara, the reader can easily predict the fate of Selim’s beloved family of five dolphins. When Selim can’t talk the fisherman into ceasing the hunts, his sole concern becomes to protect his own family of dolphins. He begs the fishermen he can reach, one by one, not to harm his dolphins:

He would describe to them his own dolphin, the round black mark on his back, the broken tip of the right fin, the tail that was not upright like the others’ but quite flat, and he would ask them not to hurt him or his family. He would plead with those dogs, those greedy low-down wretches who had the curse of God on them. . . . He would do this for the sake of his family. (SCF 37)

Nevertheless, Selim’s dolphins cannot escape their fate and they, too, fall into the hands of the fishermen. Selim learns that Bald Dursun had gone out with fifteen boats and piled up numerous dolphins in Zargana Bay at Erdek, high as a hill (he set up nine huge cauldrons and was boiling them away day and night). No sooner Selim hears this, he gets in his boat and goes to Erdek. There he sees the beach “piled with dead dolphins, each with a black hole in its head.” Under the curious gaze of the sailors “slicing up the dolphins and dropping them into the soot-blackened, bubbling cauldrons,” Selim looks for his own dolphin walking over the heaps of dead dolphins. He finally catches sight of his dolphin, “the mark on his back . . . growing darker and the broken wing beating faintly” (65). Selim experiences an emotional breakdown, finds the fisherman who was responsible, and swears he will kill him very soon, the way he killed his dolphins, plugging “seven holes into [his]

head.” He says, “[s]o long as I live, I shan’t let my dolphin’s blood go unavenged” (66). Though for a long time Selim does not keep his promise, so great is his desire to avenge his dolphin family that, at the end of the novel, he kills Halim Bey Veziroğlu, the man who was responsible for the dolphin oil business and all the other brutal things that led to the devastation of Istanbul, with a shotgun. Kemal has recently stated that “destroying nature is the gravest crime. It can, under no circumstance, be forgiven.”⁴⁷ The gravest criminal in this novel devastates priceless nature, but pays the price with his own life. Taking the life of a criminal is not a solution, indeed; but one should remember that this is the underdeveloped, small town of Menekşe in the 1970s, and in the absence of responsible government, Fisher Selim does not know a better way. Selim’s act of murder, then, should be taken as a symbolic “eco-defense,”⁴⁸ for he thinks he has every right to defend the “biotic rights” of the individuals of the ecosystem who are incapable of defending their own rights, that violators of nature’s rights ought to be held responsible for what they are doing to nature.

During his ensuing flight from the police via the sea, at the very end of the novel, Fisher Selim sees “a school of dolphins” in the Marmara. The narrator explains the scene as a “miracle [bursting] over the sea,” and goes on to explain,

[i]n the dawn light, in the brightness shed by the flashes of lightning, cleaving through the blueing, greening waves of the dawn sea and tracing sparkling blue circles as they leaped through the air, a school of dolphins was approaching his boat in a whirl of joy. It was years since Fisher Selim had seen dolphins in the Marmara Sea. His legs gave way and he knelt down where he was, on the after deck, trembling with emotion. (*SCF* 286)

These lines can ultimately be interpreted as dolphins’ gratefulness to Selim for having defended their rights.

Once Kemal stated, “[w]hat has happened to the environment is worse than what happens to men who have to endure wars” (Andaç 130). In this regard, the author’s quest for some kind of a “land ethic” in his environmentally threatened land may be regarded as crucially important for the future of environmental

⁴⁷ The statement is taken from Kemal’s speech on the occasion of the opening of *Yaşar Kemal Woods* at Batman Çamlıtepe on 8 September 2007. *Radical*. 10 September 2007.

⁴⁸ See the words of Edward Abbey, the American nature writer and the father of radical environmental movement, in his essay “Eco-Defense.” He regards violent acts as “ethically imperative” when performed in defense of nature (346).

literature.⁴⁹ Kemal has also stated that he has never been a “pessimist” and that “[t]he human species, which is afraid of the dark, invents for itself myths and dreamworlds so that it can continue on its way, and whenever it feels hemmed in, it will find the means to save itself” (YKLA 146). Today dolphins do not roam the waters of Marmara as they did in past times. The Sea of Marmara once was whole—it was a sea, in the real sense of the word, with its integrity and with its living souls. Because the big fish have eaten up the small fish, the Marmara has now turned almost barren.⁵⁰ And yet, keeping in mind Kemal’s deep belief in the “infinite power, infinite creativity and in the eternal process of change taking place both in humankind and in nature,”⁵¹ things may someday change for the better. Thus, the novel ends with a note of hope, with a school of dolphins approaching Fisher Selim. Kemal wants his readers, at the end of the novel, to enter this imaginary world in which the ecosystem has started healing itself. After all, what will save us if not the myths we introduce into our daily lives?⁵²

The Year of the Dolphin could not have come at a better time. There are indeed countless ways for individuals to contribute to this campaign. People throughout the world need to be made aware that dolphins—priceless souls of the seas—are disappearing. Currently, “by-catch” is one of the biggest threats to dolphins; according to a recent study, an estimated 300,000 cetaceans (dolphins,

⁴⁹ At this critical stage of the global environmental crisis, literary criticism, too, may join the quest and contribute to the expansion of the land ethic in the collective literary output of world cultures. See my comment on the future of environmental literary criticism in *Edebiyat ve Toprak Etiği: Amerikan Doğa Yazımında Leopold’cu Düşünce* (Literature and the Land Ethic: Leopoldian Thought in American Nature Writing), where I argue that “studies of a land ethic may become central in the near future in all genres of literature, for, as Leopold rightly argues, the extension of ethics to the land is the third and the most important stage in the ethical evolution of human communities” (140).

⁵⁰ See the research results of Ayhan Dede in “Türk Boğazlar Sistemi’nde Yaşayan Deniz Memelileri Populasyonları Üzerine Araştırmalar” (Investigations on the Marine Mammal Populations in the Turkish Straits System) PhD thesis. İstanbul University, 1999. In his thesis, Dede indicates that the population count of dolphins (Afalina [Bottlenose Dolphin] and Tırtak [Common Dolphin]) in the Marmara was “1268” in October 1997 and “1861” in April 1999 (numbers taken from the “Abstract” of thesis, vii). Contrast this number with the “tens of thousands of dolphins” in the Marmara before the brutal dolphin hunts, as described in the narratives of *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* and *Denizler Kurudu*, and as confirmed by Dede during our personal communications.

⁵¹ See Ramazan Çiftlikçi, *Yaşar Kemal: Yazar-Eser-Üslup (Yaşar Kemal: Author, Text, Style)* 40.

⁵² During our conversation, Yaşar Kemal wanted to know the present situation at Bikini Island. He had heard that the ecosystem of the island was healing by itself. He said, “[i]f this is the case, then our world will surely survive.” He wanted both non-human nature and human nature to stay intact and did not wish to believe that humanity will one day perish (Personal communication, 13 July 2006).

porpoises, and whales) die every year as they get tangled in nets. There are still many places on earth—many coasts of South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and South America—where innocent dolphins are brutally hunted. Some large-scale hunting near small towns across the coastline of Japan can kill as many as 20,000 dolphins each year, with many local people unaware of what is actually happening in the seas. But these numerical facts do not mean a thing, because the real questions are: how emotional do we get when such situations are described in cold “quantitative discourse” and what will it take to move the public (and governments) to take action. Heartfelt narratives of “particular places,” such as Kemal’s story, may well inspire readers and lead to individual reactions which are, undoubtedly, a foundation for environmental and cultural reform. Individual reactions in time will turn into public reactions, and then into a formal political and legal control in favor of the environment. Environmental literature will greatly contribute to such a transformation. Reading works like *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* is an important way to develop awareness of the historical and contemporary impacts of human behavior on the health of the biosphere.

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