



## Interrupted Happiness: Class Boundaries and the 'Impossible Love' in Turkish Melodrama\*

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### abstract

Social classes in Turkey, the existence of which is often denied in dominant political discourses, are nevertheless apparent in a wide range of cultural forms including the cinema, particularly the melodrama of the 1960s and the 1970s. The specific nature of the Turkish melodrama puts this genre quite apart from other filmic genres existing in Turkish cinema. An axiomatic representation of love and the unchanging formulas typically exemplified in the classic Turkish melodrama have been so popular that even in the non-melodramatic genres this kind of romance was ubiquitous. Class difference between lovers is a typical melodramatic mode in Turkish film; classes constitute boundaries for love and they delay, interrupt or inhibit happiness. In these melodramas upper classes are typically portrayed by means of negative conventions (immorality, decadence, ruthlessness), while various positive qualities are attributed to the members of lower classes (innocence, altruism, humanism). In this paper, we explore the use of class phenomenon in the Turkish melodrama of the 1960s and the 1970s as a way of creating a societal background for the 'impossible love'.

[T]he realism of Marx's science is achieved through many of the same critical intentions and rhetorical effects it shares with melodramatic fiction. Just as Marx's scientific and political aim wants to evoke in his readers intense emotions while inspiring new insights, so too the melodramatic arts of eighteenth-century musical theater, nineteenth-century mystery stories and spy novels, and even twentieth-century horror movies, romantic serials, and courtroom dramas have tried to present as graphically as possible the most compelling social realities in the most poignant way possible.<sup>1</sup>

The very definition of melodrama is ambiguous. While, on the one hand, melodrama is considered "a particular, if mobile and fragmentary, genre, specialising in heterosexual

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1 Thomas M. Kemple (1995) *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, The Market, and the 'Grundrisse'*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 105.

and family relations”,<sup>2</sup> on the other, it may be conceived as the founding mode of Hollywood cinema that has influenced many national and local cinemas including those in Turkey. In this paper, following Peter Brooks who defined melodrama as a “central fact of modern sensibility”,<sup>3</sup> and proposed an extensive reading of melodramatic signs in modern society, we take melodrama as a mode that transcends a variety of genres ranging from literature to ‘scientific’ writing. In fact, Marx’s conceptualisation of classes as polar entities, ‘the villain’ (the exploiter) and ‘the victim’ (the exploited), resembles the moral polarities typical of melodramas. As Thomas M. Kemple asserts at another level of abstraction, “Marx’s text can...be read as a catastrophic melodrama that not only depicts the annihilation of capitalism but also expresses his own revolutionary impatience to see this system as the victim of its own self-destruction.”<sup>4</sup> If melodrama is a mode, rather than a genre, that has common threads in both Marx’s writing and Turkish films, then we cannot impose the sweeping generalisations that are usually attributed to the melodrama as a genre. This paper investigates the issue of cross-class love in eight Turkish films from the 1960s and the 70s. Reading the different ways within which class differences are tackled in these films, we discuss the melodramatic modes through the concepts of class consciousness, class mobility, morality of classes, (happy) endings and the ‘good cry’.

In earlier discussions of melodrama,<sup>5</sup> there seems to be agreement among western researchers that it is “morally conservative and supportive of the political status quo”<sup>6</sup>; as well as ‘a failed tragedy’, ‘a fall from seriousness’, ‘dealing in stereotypes’, ‘overblown emotions’ and ‘moral schematisation’.<sup>7</sup> A relatively recent tendency in both literary and film studies, however, takes the melodrama as a cultural form that has been crucial in shaping public sensibilities and discusses the melodrama’s political significance. Following this trend of identifying melodrama as an indispensable form in cinema and a fundamental mode of expression in modern society, this paper maintains that the melodrama as a modern mode is a recognisable cultural sign. As such, one may encounter melodrama both in a creative and narrativised form in cinema, and in the very

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2 Christine Gledhill (1987) ‘The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation’, in C. Gledhill (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*. London: BFI.

3 Peter Brooks (1976/1995) *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 21.

4 Kemple, op.cit.

5 Analysis of melodrama in Turkey is very limited and most of the existing works remain outside the political context. See, for example, Serpil Kirel (1993) *1950-1960 Döneminde Melodram Sineması ve Muharrem Gürses*, unpublished MA Thesis, Marmara University, Istanbul; Savaş Arslan (1997) *Center vs. Periphery: Visual Representation of the Party Scenes in Yesilçam Melodramas*, unpublished MA thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara; Nezi̇h Erdoğan (1998) ‘Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama Between 1965 and 1975’, *Screen*, 39(3): 259-71; Pembe Behçetoğulları (2001) ‘Melodram: Kadınsı Bir Film Türü’, *Yıllık 1999*, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi, pp. 55-76; Seçil Bükler (2001) ‘Önce Melodramın Sonra Tayyarenin Yıldızı: Göksel Arsoy’, *İletişim* 10; Nezi̇h Erdoğan (2001) ‘Yeşilçam’ın Hayaletleri’, *İletişim* 10. However, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies on melodrama.

6 Daniel Gerould (1994) ‘Melodrama and Revolution’, in J. Bratton, J. Cook and C.Gledhill (eds.) *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Scene*. London: BFI, p. 185.

7 Gledhill, op.cit.

social organisation. For this line of argument, we rely on close readings of film melodramas as well as secondary literature.

## Melodrama in Turkish Cinema

The over-arching phrase ‘Turkish cinema’ as a general trademark may be analytically meaningful for categorising all films produced in Turkey or by Turks, yet, there is no identifiable entity as ‘the’ Turkish Cinema, or any national cinema for that matter. A combination of many factors such as the director, producer, star system, and the particular historical conjuncture, as well as cultural, political, economic and ideological characteristics ensure a great deal of variation among Turkish films. Perhaps this is why Alim Şerif Onaran has stated that there are no Turkish films but only domestic ones.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, we can identify certain patterns that are frequently used in Turkish films in directing, acting and editing, such as a preference for verbal rather than visual representation and a number of visual conventions that are communicated economically to the audience, making sense within that particular cultural context. Economic conditions necessitate other similarities between films that have determined the filmmaking tradition in Turkey: most are low-budget films based on chain production, though unlike in the United States, a centralised studio system does not exist.



*Aysel, Batakli Damin Kizi* (‘Aysel, the Girl from the Marsh Croft’), Muhsin Ertugrul, 1934

Between 1960 and 1980 the number of films produced annually in Turkey gradually increased from 68 to 298.<sup>9</sup> This was partly a result of forced chain production, as Giovanni Scognamillo states,<sup>10</sup> and partly because of the changing place of cinema in Turkish popular culture. Thus, while ‘movie going’ had been one of the few available sources of mass entertainment in 1960s’ Turkey, the television started to replace it by the end of the 70s. The annual number of cinema-goers dropped from roughly 250 million in 1970, to about 40 million in 1986.<sup>11</sup>

8 Alim Şerif Onaran (1990) *Lütfi Ö. Akad.* Istanbul: AFA.

9 Giovanni Scognamillo (1998) *Türk Sinema Tarihi 1896-1997.* Istanbul: Kabalcı.

10 Scognamillo, op.cit.

11 Nilgün Abisel (1994) *Türk Sineması Üzerine Yazılar.* Ankara: Imge.

Melodrama has been a frequently used mode in Turkish film, especially in the 60s and the 70s. Muharrem Gürses is known as the director of the first Turkish melodramas in the early 1950s, with the films *Kara Efe/Zeynebin Gözyaşları* ('Dark Efe/Zeynep's Tears', 1951-52) and *Yanık Ömer* ('Passionate Ömer', 1952), when in fact the earliest films in Turkey that may be described as melodramatic were made during the silent era, in the early 1920s. The film *İstanbul'da Bir Facia-i Aşk* ('A Love Disaster in İstanbul') written and directed by Muhsin Ertuğrul in 1922 has certain melodramatic features. Ertuğrul is also the author of other melodramas including *İstanbul Sokaklarında* ('In the Streets of İstanbul', 1931), the first Turkish talkie, and *Aysel Bataklı Damın Kızı* ('Aysel, the Girl from the Marsh Croft', 1934) adapted from Selma Lagerlöf's original. Gürses was influenced by Egyptian melodramas, very popular in 1940's Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Criticising the 'invasion' of 'Arabic' movies, he decided to replace them with 'better' productions.<sup>13</sup> After the initial impact of Egyptian films, French literary melodramas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup> and American melodramas also helped shape the Turkish melodrama, and the genre quickly gained its local characteristics in the 1960s particularly with the input of domestic literary sources.<sup>15</sup> Since then, the melodrama has arguably been the dominant mode in popular Turkish cinema. The melodramatic mode has been employed not only by the films categorised under the term 'melodrama' as a genre, but also other genres and narratives, such as comedies, thrillers and political films.



*İstanbul Sokaklarında* ('In the Streets of İstanbul'), Muhsin Ertugrul, 1931

## Addressing Class Differences and Cross-Class Love

Class definition in Turkey is highly ambiguous. While evidence backed by in-depth research is necessary before any general statements can be made on the identification and perception of social classes and class differences, in Turkey the former seem to be typically defined in terms of wealth, rather than as a social category with their own cultural values. This makes class mobility relatively easy as it can be realised quickly;

12 The first Egyptian film to be shown in Turkey is *Dome' al-hubb* ('Love's Tears', Muhammad Karim, 1936) and was quickly a box office hit in 1938; see Levent Cantek (2000) 'Türkiye'de Mısır Filmleri', paper presented in *1<sup>st</sup> National Symposium on Communication*, Ankara, May 3-5.

13 Serpil Kirel (1995) 'Yapımcıların Can Simidi Muharrem Gürses', *Antrakt*, December, p. 62.

14 François Copée, Alexandre Dumas Fils, Pierre Decourcelles, Xavier de Montepin and Georges Ohnet are among the authors whose novels have been adapted to Turkish films during this period.

15 Three popular writers of the 1960s whose works were adapted to melodramatic films are Muazzez Tahsin Berkant (21 films), Kerime Nadir (17 films) and Eser Mahmut Karakurt (15 films). All these films were made between 1961 and 1972. See Giovanni Scognamiglio (1998) *Türk Sinema Tarihi*, Kabalcı, İstanbul, pp. 409-410.

simply by accumulating wealth. Rural-Urban migration and integration into the urban class structure are other circumstances of quick class mobility.<sup>16</sup>

Marx never systematically defined the concept of class but his work puts the class analysis at the centre of his theorisation. For Marx, as in this paper, looking into class relations and differences is more significant as a unit of analysis than proposing a definition of classes. It is beyond the purposes and scope of this paper to delineate and analyse class structures in Turkey and their relevance in the organisation of collectivities and social structure. Moreover, we do not claim that the cinema mirrors contemporary politics and ideologies, or that the films can reflect any verifiable reality. We like to see the films analysed as fictive narratives feeding from popular sensibilities and reciprocally manipulating and shaping the audience's sensibilities. Following Thomas Elsaesser who observes that melodramas have a myth-making function, we argue that they tend more to play on, and accentuate already existing perceptions of, reality than to offer a faithful representation of it. Therefore, analysing existing class structures in Turkey has no relevance in our study and we limit our understanding of classes to a moral polarity, already proposed in Marxian literature, so as to make sense of the melodramatic mode of the films that revolves around class differences. In the absence of an audience ethnography, we cannot back up diverse audience responses that we would believe to have existed. Based on the speculations of authorities on Turkish cinema, however, neither the content, nor the structural organisation of 60s and 70s films fit the overall social organisation. Our analysis omits the class diversity or even the basic three-class system in contemporary capitalist society, because the films analysed propose melodramatic visions of the society, reducing the social structure to the differences between upper and lower classes. Thus, classes are automatically defined in terms of economic wealth, which is why the two protagonists of the films are traditionally referred to as the 'poor girl' and the 'rich boy' or vice versa.

In *Fakir Gencin Romani* ('The Story of a Poor Young Man', Nuri Ergün, 1965), the two protagonists, Turgut and Filiz, are classmates at University. Turgut, a poor young man, lives with his mother in their modest house in an old İstanbul neighbourhood and works at a grocery store, while Filiz is the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. They somehow fall in love and start seeing each other outside the classes, yet, Filiz's family does not approve of this relationship, as they do not belong to the same social class. During this love affair Turgut experiences humiliation and embarrassment several times and comes to the understanding that they belong to different worlds. The most powerful realisation comes to him during Filiz's birthday party. Turgut goes to the party in formal attire, wearing a suit and a tie, leaving his sick mother alone at home, and takes Filiz a phonograph record as a gift. At the party he becomes the laughing stock of the other guests, all Filiz's upper class friends, in trendy sportswear of the 60s. Turgut feels alienated in this loud crowd. As Filiz unwraps the gifts, including the record that she

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16 In the early 1920s, when the Turkish Republic was established, only 20 per cent of the population lived in cities. By 1975 the percentage of urban population was over 40 per cent. That is, while 80 per cent of the population lived in agricultural villages in the 1920s, the percentage declined to less than 60 per cent by 1975 as a result of rural-urban migration that accelerated in the 1950s. These demographic changes are quite relevant in the 'migration films' trend and are best represented in Turkish cinema of the era.

puts on the floor without much enthusiasm, her father calls her out, to present his gift, a brand new convertible sports car. The whole crowd rushes out in excitement and Turgut's record gets broken in the stampede. Turgut says; 'I do not understand the language of the rich'. He regrets that he has left his mother alone for this decadent display and decides on the spot to break up with Filiz. After the break up, a 'proper' marriage is arranged between Filiz and the son of another upper-class family. Turgut graduates in honour's degrees and pursues his advanced education in Europe. He returns Istanbul as wealthy engineer, just as Filiz's father goes bankrupt and her husband abandons her. Turgut and Filiz meet again, this time in reversed positions. Filiz has a son who gets along very well with Turgut and the former lovers get together frequently. When Turgut refuses Filiz's proposal to reunite, she commits suicide leaving her son with Turgut. In the last sequence, the boy delivers a letter from Filiz where Turgut finds that he himself is the father of the child.

Class issue is handled in three ways in the Turkish melodrama. In one group of films, as in the example of *Fakir Gencin Romanı*, class differences are irreconcilable. In those films, the two protagonists are unable to overcome their class boundaries, hindering a 'happy end'. Such endings, although not in agreement with typical melodramatic resolutions, nevertheless have the excessive qualities of the mode. For class differences to be reconcilable, the typifying class indicators of the protagonists are expected to change.

Thus, in a second group, class differences are either ignored or surpassed by the 'personal development' of the initially rich, snobbish and irresponsible partner (predominantly but not exclusively the man), allowing a 'happy end'. In fact, class mobility in various forms is a frequent theme in Turkish melodrama. Upward or downward social mobility is quite easy and common for a family or an individual based on changes in income and/or education. In the film *Mahalleye Gelen Gelin*, 'The New Bride in the Neighbourhood' (Osman Seden, 1961), the wealthy young woman, Belgin, an aspiring writer, decides to impersonate a poor worker in her uncle's factory, in order to collect data for her novel. She moves into a poor neighbourhood with her old nanny where she meets Orhan, a truck driver, and although she is already engaged to a wealthy young man, Belgin and Orhan soon fall in love with one another. When the uncle realises that Belgin is involved with an 'improper' man, he forces her to leave the neighbourhood and quickly arranges a wedding for her and her fiancé. At the time of the wedding, however, Belgin and Orhan's friends from the old neighbourhood come to her rescue and 'kidnap' her, taking her to a 'happy end' with Orhan. Similarly, in *Seninle Ölmek İstiyorum*, 'I Want to Die With You' (Lutfi Akad, 1968), the love between a wealthy industrialist and a poor young woman is interrupted by the 'villain' who is finally killed in a car accident so as to make possible this 'impossible' love.



Poster showing Turkan Soray in *Seninle Ölmek İstiyorum*  
(‘I Want to Die With You’), Lütfü Akad, 1968

A third type of films, sometimes overlapping with the previous group, involves twists and turns in the class definitions of the characters. A poor man may be mistaken as rich; may win the lottery or inherit a huge amount of money from a distant relative and become an overnight millionaire. Alternatively, as in *Fakir Gencin Romanı*, a family may lose all their property as a result of bankruptcy and experience downward social mobility. In *Seviştığımız Günler*, ‘The Times We Used to Love Each Other’ (Halit Refiğ, 1961), for example, a mechanic introduces himself as a rich man to three young women from the upper classes. In the film *Avare Mustafa*, ‘Idle Mustafa’ (Memduh Ün, 1962, adapted from Orhan Kemal’s novel *Devlet Kuşu*, ‘Sweet Bird of Fortune’), when Mustafa marries the daughter of an industrialist, his parents and sisters experience an upward social and economic mobility along with him. But Mustafa cannot take the lifestyle of the rich and misses his former sweetheart and good old idle days. In the director’s words, the film attempts to bring forth the idea that “people cannot be

purchased, happiness cannot be obtained by money, and upward class mobility is not that easy.”<sup>17</sup>



Screenshot from *Sevdiğimiz Günler* ('The Times We Used to Love Each Other'), Halit Refig, 1961. The mechanic (Mahir Gunsiray), who introduced himself as a rich man, is caught by one of the young women he had seduced.

## Class and Morality: Siding with the Poor

In both literary and film studies, melodrama has been said to side with the powerless as an entertainment for the working class:<sup>18</sup> “melodrama constantly attempts to give material existence to the repressed”;<sup>19</sup> and “has been historically a major site of the political struggles for the disempowered.”<sup>20</sup>

One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present all the characters convincingly as victims. The critique – the questions of ‘evil’, of

17 Cited in Scognamillo, op.cit. p.286, translation ours.

18 Martha Vicinus (1981) ‘Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth Century Domestic Melodrama’, *New Literary History*, 13(1).

19 Jackie Byars (1991) *All that Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. London: Routledge, p. 17.

20 Jane Shattuc (1994) ‘Having a Good Cry over the *Color Purple*’, in J. Bratton, J. Cook and C.Gledhill (eds.) *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Scene*. London: BFI, p. 148.

responsibility – is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualised psychology. This is why the melodrama, at its most accomplished, seems capable of reproducing more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society, especially the relation between psychology, morality, and class-consciousness, by emphasising so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressively inward, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents.<sup>21</sup>

According to Martha Vicinus, melodrama ‘sides with the powerless’, while evil is associated with ‘social power and station’. Christine Gledhill analyses innocence and villainy in relation to each other and to the logic of capitalism:

Through such ‘moral touchstones’ the contradictions of capitalism are negotiated: the apparently powerless, who by their persevering endurance win through, defeat the logic of capitalism, for reward comes through ‘wholly noncompetitive virtues and interests’. At the same time innocence and villainy construct each other: while the villain is necessary to the production and revelation of innocence, innocence defines the boundaries of the forbidden which the villain breaks. In this way melodrama’s affective and epistemological structures were deployed, within the constraints of dominant socio-economic frameworks, to embody the forces and desires set loose by, or resisting, the drives of capitalism.<sup>22</sup>

We have observed that various Turkish melodramas portray lower class, ‘voiceless’ families and individuals in terms of positive conventions and thus, from the first instant, side with them. It is true that the plot structure in most melodramas is concerned with a coherently positive portrayal of the lower classes to the extent that upper-class individuals end up with a new sensibility under their positive influence. Yet, there is more to melodramas than simply siding with the powerless: a closer look into the narratives of these films may give us a complex, multifaceted picture. In what follows, we will discuss Turkish melodramas in terms of their relation to realism/reality and ideology, and then move to an evaluation of (happy) endings as well as the ‘involvement’ and the ‘resistance’ that these films allow.

## (Happy) Endings, Class Consciousness and the ‘Good Cry’

One of the major criticisms of melodrama as a genre in the 1970s addresses its embeddedness in the bourgeois ideology.<sup>23</sup> In the west, melodramatic film is agreed to stem from Victorian ethics and sentimentality, and the “welfare ethic of redistribution”,<sup>24</sup> making use of stylistic ‘excess’ in both gestures and visual clues.<sup>25</sup>

21 Thomas Elsaesser (1987) ‘Tales of Sound and Fury’, in C. Gledhill (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*. London: BFI.

22 Gledhill, op.cit, p. 21.

23 Gledhill, op.cit, p. 13.

24 Anna Siomopoulos (1999) “‘I didn’t know anyone could be so unselfish’: Liberal Empathy, the Welfare State, and King Vidor’s *Stella Dallas*”, *Cinema Journal*, 38(4): 3-23.

25 Peter Brooks (1976/1995) *The Melodramatic Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Christine Gledhill (1992) op.cit.; Laura Mulvey (1987) ‘Notes on Sirk and Melodrama’, in C. Gledhill (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*. London: BFI; Byars, *ibid.*; cf. Jane Shattuc (1994) op.cit.

Moreover, among English speaking academics, especially earlier feminists, melodrama was seen as confirming white, masculine, bourgeois ideology. Recent assessments of melodrama, however, analyse it as a mix of pleasure, fantasy and ideology. While many examples of melodrama side with the poor, in some other examples, the humility and innocence of the lower classes are not 'rewarded' by class rise through marriage but rather by class-consciousness. From a Marxist perspective, rewarding lower classes by upward mobility would be considered 'false consciousness', while maintaining their class positions might invoke class consciousness.

Class consciousness is an uneasy concept to handle. According to Erik Olin Wright, there are two distinct usages of this term in the Marxist tradition. For some, it is seen as "a counterfactual or imputed characteristic of classes as collective entities", and for others it is "a concrete attribute of human individuals as members of classes."<sup>26</sup> The first understanding is not useful for our argument since the melodramas that we analyse deal with individuals rather than collective entities, although in some cases, individuals may be stereotypical representatives of such entities. Identifying class consciousness as a particular aspect of an individual's subjectivity, however, seems more appropriate for various narrative structures encountered in Turkish melodramas.

In film theory, especially in the 1970s, the relation of melodrama to realism has been widely discussed. It is often argued that what is called the 'classical (Hollywood) film' or 'classic realist text' presents:

a coherent reality in which individual identity is unified and clear, and in which characters' actions are goal-oriented, motivating a formulaic plot pattern. The exposition lays out the situation and primary conflict, showing psychologically defined individuals striving to solve problems or attain goals; the middle drives inexorably toward an absolute truth as the protagonist struggles with other individuals or with a hostile (often social) environment; and that absolute truth (the 'truth' of dominant ideologies) is revealed in the plot's logical conclusion, the happy ending achieved through individual action.<sup>27</sup>

Although this argument seems plausible, the supposed realism of the films needs a much more detailed analysis. As we argued above, it is difficult to claim that classic film texts invariably reflect the 'truth', and the ending is the ultimate moment of tension in which protagonists finally regain their secure positions and thus reproduce the dominant ideology. As our analysis shows, neither can films simply be seen as the mirror of the 'social reality', nor are the endings always the site of self-fulfilment. When an analysis is limited to traditional narrative devices, it becomes much easier to make sweeping generalisations. Bordwell reports that, in one hundred randomly selected Hollywood films, over sixty end "with a display of the united romantic couple."<sup>28</sup> However, insistence on the facts of 'narrative strategies' or 'plot structures' diverts attention from ideological analysis of other filmic elements. Defining melodrama in terms of two general plot lines, for instance, characterised by clear goals – namely, overcoming the hostile environment and the formation of a heterosexual couple – would

26 Erik Olin Wright (1989) *Classes*. London: Verso, p. 242.

27 Byars, op.cit. pp. 107-108.

28 David Bordwell (1985) *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 159.

be reductionism. Rather, a focus on both plot structure and the political significance of Turkish melodrama assists in the analysis of the cross-class love.

In more recent feminist discussions, according to Gledhill, the melodrama is considered a feminine film genre “where film theory saw in melodrama’s exposure of masculinity’s contradictions a threat to the unity of the (patriarchal) realist/narrative text, feminists found a genre distinguished by the large space it opened to female protagonist, the domestic sphere and socially mandated ‘feminine’ concerns.”<sup>29</sup> Byars criticises the Marxist writings on melodrama in the late 1970s on the grounds that they undermine the political significance of the personal, as they argue that “melodrama tends to mystify social conflict by relegating it to the realm of the personal.”<sup>30</sup>

Film melodramas, pejoratively called ‘weepies’ and ‘tear jerkers,’ are trivialised by traditional modernist and masculine perspectives, and, as Shattuc<sup>31</sup> maintains, feminist analysis initially failed to credit the affective power of the melodramatic text by denigrating them as products of bourgeois and patriarchal ideologies. The argument that melodrama has a *distancing effect* on the audience not only undermined the agency of the audience but also failed to recognise the ‘good cry’ that the melodrama evokes. This ‘good cry’, according to Shattuc, “represents the potential for the disempowered to negotiate the difficult terrain between resistance and involvement.”<sup>32</sup>

*Avare Mustafa*, for instance, may well illustrate “the potential for the disempowered to negotiate the difficult terrain between resistance and involvement”<sup>33</sup> and the utopian ‘good cry’. Endings are important moments of a film to search for the ‘good cry’ because this is where the tension is expected to resolve. By a ‘happy end’ we refer to the traditional narrative closure: ‘they got married and lived happily ever after’. The ‘unhappy end’ ranges from separation to a number of tragic events including alcoholism, madness and suicide; or just unfortunate coincidences that the couple may happen to encounter, like a traffic accident or a fatal disease. There are, of course, examples where couples from different classes do get together, but these films are fewer in number, or the couple gets together as a result of class mobility – sometimes upwards, sometimes downwards. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith claims that a ‘happy end’ is impossible for the fact that the happiness couldn’t be anything but the repression of sentiments and the excess:

The tendency of melodramas to culminate in a happy end is not unopposed. The happy end is often impossible, and, what is more, the audience knows it is impossible. Furthermore, a ‘happy end’ which takes the form of an acceptance of castration is achieved only at the cost of the repression. The laying out of the problems ‘realistically’ always allows for the generating of an excess which cannot be accommodated. The more the plots press towards a resolution the harder it is to accommodate the excess. What is characteristic of the melodrama, both in its original sense and in the modern one, is the way the excess is siphoned out. [...] In the melodrama, where there is

29 Gledhill, op.cit. p. 10.

30 Byars, op.cit. p. 16.

31 op.cit.

32 *ibid*, p. 154.

33 Elsaesser, op.cit., p. 65.

always material which cannot be expressed in discourse or in the actions of the characters furthering the designs of the plot, a conversation can take place into the body of the text.<sup>34</sup>

The traditional 'happy ending' suggests that the heterosexual couple gets married. But, *who* is this couple? When we consider cross-class melodramas, the couple is often reunited as a consequence of upward social mobility or by 'virtue'; that is the 're-education' of the upper-class member who is typically portrayed as immoral, decadent and living in 'false-consciousness' and who is transformed. But things are not always that clear. In a number of films, one of the protagonists breaks up with a former 'same-class' lover for the sake of her/his 'cross-class' love. Then the protagonist from a lower class does not feel at home with the life-style and values of the 'rich', and decides to return to her/his sweetheart. In these cases, where the 'happy ending' exists, the 'necessary' marriage does not take place between cross-class partners but same-class partners. Hence, reference to the 'happy ending' is not adequate to elucidate the boundaries of the plot structure. Endings, Byars has argues, "always call attention to the overlay of narrative and social coding."<sup>35</sup> The endings of melodramas, in which the lovers are thwarted, demonstrate a number of different plot structures. In *Fakir Gencin Romantı*, in which the bourgeois female protagonist ends up in a lower class and discovering the 'truth', the end is not a 'happy' one. In *Arım Balım Peteğim* (Muzaffer Aslan, 1970), the lower-class female protagonist has an affair with an upper-class playboy, but is never 'accorded' a marriage; she is content when the man finally adopts their son, although he doesn't (and will never) know that he is the boy's biological father. In *Yarım Kalan Saadet*, 'Interrupted Happiness' (Türker İnanoğlu, 1970), the male protagonist, Ekrem, a rich, handsome and famous musician, meets Fatoş, a poor nurse, during a fundraising concert at a nursing home. Although they fall in love at first sight and get married immediately, one tragedy follows the other and eventually they are separated. The key point in the film is that Fatoş never believes in the possibility of this love even during their short-lived marriage.

## In Conclusion

Melodrama has been a frequently used mode throughout the evolution and development of 'Turkish Cinema'; it has consistently portrayed, albeit with debatable 'reality,' class relations between lovers. No matter how the class issue is handled, it is significant in itself that class difference between lovers has been a typical melodramatic mode in Turkish film; classes constitute 'boundaries' for love and they delay, 'interrupt' or inhibit happiness. Moral attributes to classes typically polarise, in Turkish melodramatic films, altruistic, sensible, well-meaning men and women of the lower classes, on the one hand, and selfish, greedy, self-indulgent, arrogant persons of the upper classes on the other. This polarisation of 'the villain' and 'the victim' resembles Marx's conceptualisation of classes as polar entities, whether in Feudalism or Capitalism. Although the five stock characters of traditional melodrama, comprised of the hero,

34 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1992) 'Minelli and Melodrama', in C. Gledhill (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: BFI, p. 73.

35 Byars, op.cit. p. 110.

heroine, aged parent, villain and comic servant/friend, defined simply by these roles and their class status, provide representation of class stereotypes, the polarisation of the male and female protagonists is striking in these films. It is tempting to note that the ambiguous concept of class is enthusiastically employed in the equally ambiguous melodramatic mode. These observations beg questions of reality, representation and consciousness.

Issues of class difference are resolved in different ways in the eight films we have reviewed for this study: there is no one pattern, or one typical scenario, or plot, that 'the' Turkish melodrama allows itself into. First and foremost, the diverse endings in similar scenarios may indicate that the 'reality' of these films come in different forms. In films where the class differences of the two protagonists are portrayed as irreconcilable, a 'happy end' is not allowed. This may be interpreted as one representation of class consciousness, as 'the characters', in Elsaesser's words, "collude to become [the] agents" of their respective classes.<sup>36</sup> In other words, although the characters cannot always be attributed class consciousness, at least the audience is not presented with the 'myth' of happiness, transgressing class boundaries. Offering neither a 'happy end' nor a myth, these films do not conform with the melodramatic formulas. In films where the class status of the characters changes, class consciousness may take the form of 'class nostalgia', marked with the return of the protagonists to their 'true' classes. Unlike the first group of films in which a 'sad end' may be associated with class consciousness, in this second group, an unease with upward social mobility – that may be indicative of class consciousness – leads to a same-class 'happy end'. In films where the 'happy end' is afforded by cross-class love, class consciousness may still be argued for, by means of changes in class morality – ironically, upper classes losing *their* class consciousness, i.e., immorality, and acquiring lower class sensibilities. Although in Marxist literature class consciousness is associated with collisions between two classes and struggle rather than alliance, in these melodramatic narratives, it is represented through either alliance or rejection of alliance in the context of cross-class love.

Audience ethnography, a strong suggestion for future research in Turkey, would reveal how these plots could be associated with class-consciousness or false consciousness by the audience, the extent of its identification with the films, and whether the 'cry' instigated by the melodrama is a 'good' one or not. What if it is so hard for lovers of different classes to get together, or in cases they do, to live 'happily ever after'? If melodrama as a modern mode is, indeed, a recognizable cultural sign that can be traced in both cinema and social organisation, there are bound to be links between the social class structure and the films that represent cultural forms of class conceptualisation among the audience. After all, 'cross-class love' can best be handled in 'real life' by means of the melodramatic mode.

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36 Elsaesser, op.cit., p. 65.

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