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# The Collective Phallic Gaze, the Evil Eye and the Serpent in John Keats' *Lamia* and Yashar Kemal's *To Crush the Serpent*

John Keats'in *Lamia* Şiiri ve Yaşar Kemal'in *Yılanı Öldürseler* Romanında Eril Kolektif Bakış, Kem Göz ve Yılan

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## Abstract

The gaze is not only an act of seeing but also a collective control and oppressive mechanism used for suppressing deviations from the standard social norm. The evil gaze is the one that should be subjugated by the sacred patriarchal gaze and be pushed outside the reach of social life for the welfare of humanity. In anthropological terms, the most common emblems of the evil gaze are the evil eye and the serpent. The English Romantic poet John Keats' *Lamia*, a narrative poem relating a mythological serpentine woman's love affair with a young man named Lycius, depicts how the collective gaze operates for her destruction in the patriarchal world of Corinth, the term collective gaze being employed from Durkheim. Of particular importance is Apollonius' gaze, which plays a crucial role in *Lamia*'s destruction. In Yashar Kemal's *To Crush the Serpent* the aim of the gaze is crushing the serpent, that is, Esme, and most characters—especially Esme's mother-in-law—use all the patriarchal strategies in a village setting to persuade Hasan, Esme's son, to kill her. The article discusses the historical, religious, and

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mythological significance of the gaze, its collective function, and its relation to or mythical/historical enmity with the feminine within the framework of Keats' *Lamia* and Yaşar Kemal's *To Crush the Serpent*.

**Keywords:** gaze, evil eye, collective, myth-making, serpent

## Öz

Bakış sadece bir bakma eylemi değildir; aynı zamanda genel toplumsal normlara uymayanları kontrol altına almak için kullanılan kolektif bir baskı aracıdır. Kötü göz, kutsal eril bakış tarafından denetim altına alınması ve insanlığın iyiliği için toplumsal alanın dışında bırakılması gereken gözdür. Antropolojik olarak kötü gözün en yaygın simgeleri kem göz ve yılanıdır. İngiliz Romantik şairi John Keats'in mitolojide üst tarafı kadın alt tarafı yılan olan *Lamia*'nın Lycius adındaki genç bir adamla yaşadığı aşkı anlatan *Lamia* adlı şiiri, Corinth'in erkek egemen dünyasında *Lamia*'nın yok edilmesi konusunda kolektif bakışın işlevini yansıtır. Şiirde, Apollonius'un *Lamia*'yı yokeden bakışı bu çalışmanın amacı bağlamında önemlidir. Yaşar Kemal'in *Yılanı Öldürseler* romanında toplumsal bakışın amacı Esme ile özdeşleştirilen yılanı ezmektir ve birçok karakter, özellikle de Esme'nin kaynanası, Hasan'ı annesini öldürmeğe ikna etmek için bir köy ortamındaki egemen toplumsal söylemin bütün araçlarını kullanır. Makale, bakışın tarihi, dini ve mitolojik önemini, kolektif yönünü ve dişil olanla bağı veya mitik/tarihi çatışmasını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, bu konuları Keats'in *Lamia* şiiri ve Yaşar Kemal'in *Yılanı Öldürseler* romanı bağlamında ele almaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** bakış, kem göz, kolektif, mit yaratımı, yılan

It is an ancient and universal belief that the eye or gaze means much more than a mere bodily organ or its function of seeing. The eye is believed in many cultures to be the mirror of the soul and that part of the person through which his/her evil or protective influence is transferred. Throughout history, people have thought that nearly every unpleasant situation is a direct result of an evil eye caused by jealousy, envy or frustration. Belief in the evil eye is one of the oldest and most common superstitions and goes back to the Stone Age and appears throughout history in different cultures and folklores of the world (Bohigian, 1997: 91). For instance, people in Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, Afganistan and Turkic-speaking countries use the Urdu word *nazar* for the evil eye and think that a human being or animal changes for a worse condition if someone looks at his beauty or well-being with jealous eyes (Woodburne, 1935: 238). Children, pregnant women, brides, rich people, fertile lands, fertile animals like cows, in short, everybody or everything that has an enviable characteristic is an attractive subject for the evil eye. The most common amulet used in many cultures to ward off the malicious effects of the evil eye is the 'blue eye' or blue bead (called "nazarlık" in Turkish). Blue is the favored color because it is the color of the sky and heaven, which is believed to be the home of the gods. For this reason, the blue eye symbolizes the Eye of God that keeps the Devil or the Serpent out of the reach of the human world. The struggle between the evil eye and the 'protecting phallic gaze' that wards off evil are two forms of the gaze common in

different cultures—especially Western, Anatolian and Mesopotomian cultures. The evil eye in many cultures, for example, that of the old man in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Tell-Tale Heart,” the vexing eye of the cat in Poe’s “The Black Cat”— examples can be multiplied—indicate the extensive place of the eye or the gaze in literature and culture. The English Romantic poet John Keats’ *Lamia* and Yashar Kemal’s *To Crush the Serpent* can be studied in terms of the evil eye and the phallic gaze and the enmity between them. In both works, the evil eye is identified with a serpentine woman that is crushed by the phallic/collective gaze.

The struggle between the evil eye and the phallic gaze is a cultural one depending on the society’s codification of the sacred and the profane; that is, it relies on the collective symbolization of good and evil with the binary logic that almost always identifies the sacred with the male and the profane with the female. In *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* Claude Lèvi Strauss states, “it is natural for society to express itself symbolically in its customs and institutions; normal modes of individual behavior are, on the contrary, never symbolic in themselves; they are the elements out of which a symbolic system, which can only be collective, builds itself” (1987: 12). To Levi-Strauss, the mythical drama really boils down to an allegorical dramatization of the thinking process itself, the production of differences (Girard, 1977: 924). Cultural codifications are collective dreams or personified abstractions created with a binary logic, each personified abstraction being created with an opposition. What is note of worth here is that in this allegorical dramatization of the collective thinking process the evil eye is almost always identified with the woman and the protecting blue gaze with the male assigning itself the role of crushing the evil eye. Though in some cultures, including oriental ones like Turkey, the evil eye is represented as blue and someone who has a blue eye is feared of bringing trouble, “a pendant or bead of blue stone, the colour of the sky, [is] propitious and safe- guarded the wearer from evil (Van Buren, 1945: 18). Besides being the colour of the sky, the blue bead is also regarded as God’s eye, which means that it is also the colour of the male as in the male-female binary opposition it is mostly the male being identified with the sacred. The word “phallic” is employed in this article to indicate the psychosexual male ideology behind the codification of the sacred gaze and to signify the binary logic that constructs it as an absolute presence presupposing the absence of the other member of the binary pair.

In the binary phallogocentric logic that symbolizes all cultural reality on the male-female opposition and that almost always codifies the male in the category of the sacred and the female in the category of the profane it is the woman that is commonly associated with the evil eye and constructed by the blue protecting gaze of man. The concept of the gaze and its relationship with femininity needs some elaboration here. As the art historian John Berger argues, women are more object of the gaze than men; they are even object of the gazes of not only other women but also of their own gaze; a woman “has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for normally what is thought of as the success of her life” (1972: 46). When women watch themselves or watch themselves being watched by men or other women, the gaze functions not only as an act of seeing but a way of constructing and representing them in a certain way. When a woman is constructed by the gaze as evil

or sorcerer, the handiest symbol to associate her is the serpent. Throughout the history of culture, mythology, and literature, woman has been associated with the serpent (i.e. Medusa, Lamia, Lilith) and represented as the main source of evil, temptation, enchantment, and magic. Circe, Hecate, Medea, Dido, Medusa, and Lamia are the most important figures in the ancient Greek world that are ‘constructed’ in the male ideational world to be enchantresses, to be serpentine, and to have the magical power of casting an evil eye, which shows how deeply rooted in the male collective consciousness the correlation between women, the evil eye, magic, and serpent is. The phallic/collective gaze fulfils the religio-historical duty of crushing the serpentine woman and keeping it off the sacred realm. Possibly, one of the best examples for the association of male with the sacred and ‘protector’ can be seen in Roman mythology in the term *Fascinatio* or *Fascinum*, which in ancient Roman religion and magic was the embodiment of the divine phallus used as protection against the evil eye (Luck, 1999: 98). For this reason, the blue eye, correlated with the divine phallus, is a collective symbolization of the gaze that aims at keeping the serpentine evil eye out of the sacred realm of men, a struggle that can be said to be ingrained in the collective consciousness.

John Keats’ *Lamia* illustrates this binary symbolization of good and evil and the construction of the serpentine evil eye by the phallic gaze. John Keats is one of the major poets of English Romanticism. He wrote *Lamia* in 1819, the productive period he wrote his odes. *Lamia* is a narrative poem relating a mythological serpentine woman’s love affair with a young man named Lycius. Lamia was seen as belonging to the line of victimized and revengeful women of ancient Greek mythology as Medusa and Circe, and after Christianity she came to be known as a witch who used her power of enchantment to destroy young men and devour children. In Greek mythology, Lamia was the daughter of Belus and the queen of Libya. She was so beautiful that Zeus fell in love with her. As all of her children from Zeus, except Scylla, were killed by Hera, she took her revenge by killing the children of others. She became so cruel that her face turned into a frightening mask. Later, she is said to have sucked the blood of young men after lying with them. Lamia was transformed by Hera into a creature whose head and upper side of body were of a woman but whose lower side was serpentine. She was also known as an enchantress and a scheming expert in love (Graves, 1977: 203).

It is said that Keats based his poem on Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). In fact, Robert Burton’s book was not the first to relate the love story of Lamia and Menippus. In *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* the ancient Greek Sophist philosopher Flavius Philostratus also tells that one of the pupils of Apollonius named Menippus meets an apparition in the shape of a woman and experiences a love relationship until Apollonius tells Menippus that his love is a serpent and that he could not marry her as she is a lamia accustomed to feeding upon beautiful and young bodies. Though Keats’ poem bears similarity to Burton’s and Philostratus’ texts, his version is distinctive in that he takes Lamia not as an evil monster but as a very beautiful woman victimized by Hera; in this respect, Keats makes us sympathize with her and feel that her evil doings are a reaction to her maltreatment. In the poem, as soon as Hermes -the Greek messenger God- transforms Lamia back into human, she meets a Corinthian young man named Lycius and makes him fall in love with her. Enchanted with Lamia’s beauty, Lycius begins to visit her magic house day and night, which she makes up

on the slope of a hill near Corinth to keep away from the public gaze of the meddling Corinthians. They continue their love until Lycius' tutor Apollonius reveals in their wedding feast that the bride is Lamia and that she has enchanted Lycius in her world of deception and illusion. After this disclosure, Lamia's magic world dissolves and she, her house, furniture, and everything she has created disappears.

Although its story is similar to Burton's and Philostratus's versions, Keats's *Lamia* is "reflective of Keats's intense visual imagination and reveals the technique he had learned of describing scenes in a highly detailed and concrete way" (Brotmarkle, 1993: 81). Keats changes the earlier stories by creating a world of romance colored with gods and goddesses chasing each other but with a predominantly melancholic atmosphere. At the beginning of the poem, Keats presents Lamia as a serpent having a feminine attractiveness; she is a "palpitating snake" (Keats, 2001: 45)<sup>1</sup>, "a gordian shape of dazzling hue, /Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue; / Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard, /Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd" (2001: 47-50). She is "full of silver moons" (2001: 51) and "rainbow-sided" (2001: 54), and upon her crest she wears "a wannish fire /Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar" (2001: 57-8). She is "some pinanced lady elf" who has a serpent's head but a woman's mouth "with all its pearls complete" (2001: 60). As seen in these lines, she is presented as the embodiment of beauty. After Hermes metamorphoses her back into human form, she makes Lycius fascinated by her beauty to the extent that Lycius "soon his eyes [drinks] her beauty up, /Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup, /And still the cup [is] full" (2001: 251-3). As these lines suggest, although Keats took the Lamia story from Burton's text and seems to have been familiar with earlier versions such as Philostratus' text, in the poem he deconstructs traditional texts by presenting his Lamia not as an evildoer but as a melancholic figure who is victimized by Hera and by the collective patriarchal gaze of the Corinthians. When we begin to read the poem, instead of an atrocious and revengeful figure, we see a victimized and suffering woman with whom we can sympathize.

Though a victim, Lamia is still depicted with enticing eyes and beauty. When the transformation is complete, she enralls Lycius with her beauty, looks and eyes. Her magic eyes are counter-attacked first by the public gaze of the Corinthians and later by the sage Apollonius' sharp gaze. Her palace is a mystery for the Corinthians, and so she could not avoid their inquisitive and oppressive gaze. However, nothing makes her more uneasy than Apollonius's 'blue fixed gaze,' which can be said to symbolize the collective phallogocentric gaze. She first meets his gaze as she walks timidly with Lycius in the street. Apollonius makes both Lamia and Lycius uneasy with his "sharp eyes," "curl'd gray beard," and "philosophic gown" (Keats, 2001: 362-5). As she sees Apollonius's sharp philosophic eyes fixed on her, she tries to avoid his destructive gaze. In the ancient Greek culture, Apollonius was known as a magician as well as a philosopher and his disclosure of Lamia's identity is a proof of his being a sorcerer (Luck, 1999: 130-1). Noticing his magical power and foreseeing eyes, Lamia tries to avoid his gaze and abstains from inviting him to the wedding feast in the second part of the poem. However, Apollonius joins the feast as an uninvited guest and, as the other guests look with amazement and curiosity at the illusory and artificial nature of the furniture in Lamia's palace, he looks around "with eye severe" and walks inside the palace

“with calm-planted steps” as if unravelling some knotty situation (Keats, 2001: 156). The eye or gaze becomes a focal point at this part of the poem because Apollonius’ eye is posed as the principal threat for Lamia’s wellbeing. During the wedding, Apollonius sets his eyes on Lamia without a wink or stir, “full on the alarmed beauty of the bride” (2001: 247). He gazes into her eyes until she grows pale and cold at first, and then unnaturally hot and dies.

Thus, as seen so far, Keats presents Lamia not as an evildoer and enchantress, as Apollonius proclaims, but as one who is victimized by the public gaze embodied by Apollonius’ gaze. Not Lamia but Apollonius is presented as having the magic eyes because he is able to destroy Lamia by fixing his eyes on her. By killing Lamia, Apollonius also kills his pupil, whom he claims he is protecting from the evil of the serpent. Critics have mostly interpreted the poem as representing Keats’ idea of art and its relationship with philosophy. They usually find the significance of the poem “in the conflict between the two characters, Lamia and Apollonius, between poetry-imagination versus philosophy-reason” (Brotemarkle, 1993: 86). Among the English Romantic poets, Keats’ poetry is distinctive in its representation of and elaboration on beauty. “Ode to a Nightingale,” “Hyperion” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” are only three poems in which he represents beauty and philosophizes on it. “Beauty is truth and truth beauty,—that’s all / Ye know on earth, and ye need to know” is a well-known expression in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” that epitomizes his idea of beauty (Keats, 2001: 49-50). In “Ode to a Nightingale,” he presents the nightingale as a beauteous being symbolizing the ultimate end of art and other imaginative forms. In a similar vein, Lamia is presented as a beauteous form having feminine attractiveness, and Apollonius a sophist philosopher in whose world there is no place for beauty, imagination, fantasy, and magic, which are the constitutive elements of art. Thus, the most common interpretation of the poem is that the struggle between Lamia and Apollonius symbolizes the time-honored struggle between beauty and reason, art and philosophy, and imagination and mind. We can even say that Apollonius represents the Enlightenment man with a fetishized reason, whereas Lamia signifies the Romantic idea of art and beauty.

However, as this article discusses, we can also read the poem in terms of the phallogocentric binary symbolization of good-evil and the sacred-the profane, the first member of the binary pair identified with Apollonius and the second one with Lamia. It follows that Apollonius is symbolized as the embodiment of the phallic blue gaze, whereas Lamia as the serpent and the evil eye. To use Levi-Strauss’ term given in the beginning, we can read the Lamia myth in Keats’ poem as an allegorical dramatization of the collective thinking process in which ‘the evil serpent’ is crushed by the collective gaze of the Corinthians as well as Apollonius’ sharp gaze. We can also argue that the struggle between the two gazes represents the time-honored struggle between reason and emotion, culture and nature, the public and the private spheres, and the sacred and the profane, where the former side of the binary has always been associated with the male and the latter with the female.

While the collective male gaze is embodied with Apollonius’s gaze in Keats’ *Lamia*, in Yashar Kemal’s *To Crush the Serpent* the collectivity of the gaze is more overt and the main representative of the male gaze is a female, Esme’s mother-in-law. Like Keats’ *Lamia*, *To Crush the Serpent* also has a mythic side but, unlike Keats’ poem, this mythic side does not

arise from the dependence of the subject matter on Greek mythology but from the fact that the characters of the novel, in their mythopoeic collective consciousness, create myths and share them with each other for the profanation and lynching of Esme. In “An Inheritor of Homeros and Cervantes” (“Bir Homeros ve Cervantes Mirasçısı”) Yashar Tuncer states that Yashar Kemal’s novel is “a blend of reality and mythos, a mixture of imagination, the imaginative and reality” (1998: 118-119)<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Seza Yilancioghlu states, “in Yashar Kemal’s novel the fantastic and the real are always interlaced. Folk tales, which color and enrich the narrative, are used in his novel to understand human and social psychology. In fact, folk tales were the means of relating social and individual problems in the past” (1998: 128). He adds, “such figures as fairies, genii, monsters, and dragons that belong to this genre, whether given in exaggerated or nonexaggerated way, have the potential of becoming humans... The relationships they form in their fantastic worlds resemble those between humans” (1998: 128). We should note that gaze and evil eye are not directly or literally mentioned in the novel. However, relying on the theoretical background of this study, the struggle between the phallic and the feminine can be said to take place on the symbolic level between two opposing gazes: the public gaze and the counter gaze of Esme.

The eagle and serpent dichotomy is used in the novel as emblematic of the dichotomy between the blue sacred gaze and the evil eye. The eagle and serpent binary is a constant issue in Turkish folklore and is widely used in the novel for the construction of the sacred and the profane, the eagle being identified with the sacred and the serpent with the profane. Our reading of the serpent in Yashar Kemal’s *To Crush the Serpent* is based on the time-honored association of the serpent with the underground, with deceit, darkness, enchantment, and the feminine, which is the most common association in Greco-Roman, Anatolian, and Mezopotomian mythologies and Semitic religions. It is this symbolization of the serpent on which the meanings of the profane and the sacred are constituted; the desire for crushing this serpent or feeling aversion to it is what constitutes the sacred. In the novel the eagle is connoted with the sacred, with the blue of the sky, with the male, and mostly with Hasan, whereas the serpent with evil, with the underground and with Esme. Thus, the eagle and serpent dichotomy can be read as male-female dichotomy.

What is distinguishing in Yashar Kemal’s novel is that the conflict is between two females, Esme and Esme’s mother-in-law, one sounding the male voice and male viewpoint and the other ‘talking back’ to it (as in the fairy tales *Snow White*, *Cindirella*, *Rapunzel*, and *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* and in the medieval romances and novels that have angel-monster polarity). In *Splitting: A Case of Female Masculinity* (1973) R. J. Stoller argues that “phallic women have both femininity and conflicts about it” (as cited in Gardiner, 2012: 600). He claims, “drives and defenses related to having a phallus are ubiquitous in women” so long as the word “phallus” signifies not a penis but its attributes, such as intrusiveness, power and violence (2012:600). Female masculinity is also a topic of dispute in Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert’s “Infection in the Sentence.” Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert mention the angel and monster polarity in the fairy-tale *Snow White* and ask,

If the Queen’s looking glass speaks with the king’s voice, how do its perpetual kingly admonitions affect the Queen’s own voice? Since his is the chief voice

she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the king, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she ‘talk back’ to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint (1996: 290).

Esme’s mother-in-law is a “phallic woman” who sounds like the king, imitates his tone, his phrasing and point of view and functions as the phallic gaze doing her utmost throughout the novel to crush the serpent, who is labeled as such by that gaze. The phallic collective gaze is directed at Esme, a very beautiful woman whose husband Halil is killed by her ex-lover Abbas. In the novel, the whole plot revolves around taking the revenge of Halil’s death from Esme, the *femme fatale* who caused the feud between Abbas and Halil and who is believed by the public to have cooperated with Abbas for her husband’s murder. Later in the novel, we understand that Halil got married with Esme forcing her to marriage by raping her. All the villagers, especially Halil’s brothers and mother, hold Esme responsible for Halil’s murder. The sacred role of crushing the serpent is given to Hasan, her son.

Though the word serpent is used many times in the novel, it is never literally used for Esme, though, metaphorically speaking, she is represented as the main serpent in the novel. The collective myth-making imagination of the public at work, snake imagery is used throughout the novel mostly with relation to Halil who is told to be reincarnated as snake because his revenge is not taken. Different characters’ claim that they have seen Hasan transformed into snake and Hasan’s beginning to dream his father as snake are only two examples for the use of the snake for characters other than Esme. For instance, Hasan is so affected by the tales told by the public about his father’s ghost that he also begins to dream his father as snake. He dreams him stuck in the swamp, not being able to free himself. All of a sudden, his father turns into a snake in front of Hasan’s eyes, and the snake remains so stuck in the swamp” (Kemal, 2007: 59).<sup>3</sup> He tells the people that he has seen his father as a snake, a big rattlesnake (2007: 66). Wherever he goes, the snake follows him (2007: 67). Towards the end of the novel, he is so psychologically impressed by the tale-telling craze of the public that his tie with reality is lost and he begins not only to believe but also to live the tales: “If a new tale is not produced about Halil, he himself created one and lived it. Dream or reality? He forgot about them. His father’s ghost, his mother’s beauty carried him to a world of dream” (2007: 72). He saw “red snakes passing on the rocks in front of him, transparent and illuminated, illuminating the world. His father Halil, wrapped in his white shroud, was killing the red transparent snakes, and in each blow to a snake, flares bursted from it and fell down as stars. After falling down, the killed snake gathered itself and came back to life” (2007: 90). However, though not literally identified with the serpent, the main serpent, as the title suggests, that has caused the social evil and thus should be crushed is Esme, and the whole novel is about how and why to crush this serpent.

Serpent has both positive and negative associations in the history of culture and religion. As a positive symbol, “the healing symbol of the snake is as ancient as the medical art itself. Its use is indistinguishably connected with the ancient Greek god Asclepius and is symbolically associated with ancient deities of earth’s blossom” (Antoniou, 2011: 221). In the anaglyphs Asclepius, the god of medicine, is represented with a serpent entwined on his rod. Similar snake and rod conjunction is also seen in the Biblical mythology about Moses,

in which the snake-rod correlation serves as a symbol of rejuvenation, rebirth, and recovery. In the Old Testament it is said:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Antoniou, 2011: 219).

The origin of Moses' staff is also important for showing the serpent-rod correlation in the biblical mythology. When God exposed Moses to a very dangerous task, Moses was obstinate to take the responsibility. Nevertheless, at the Word of God, he got hold of a snake and God transformed the snake into a rod. Moses' staff is a symbol of rejuvenation and rebirth in that whenever he planted it in the earth, it transformed into a tree—and hence the image of the serpent entwined on the tree in the biblical mythology of Adam and Eve.

In the folklore of Anatolia, Mezopotamia and Iran, the Shahmaran figure<sup>4</sup> serves a similar symbolic function. The serpent has an important place in Turkish folklore, too. The Shahmaran myth, as said above, is also Anatolian and has influences in Turkish mythology. *Yılan Ana* (Mother Serpent), *Erbüke* and *Evrana* are versions of Shahmaran in Turkish mythology and represent the powers of the underworld. In the struggle between good and evil, the serpent is mostly regarded as the symbol of the underworld and evil. In this regard, as we already said in the beginning of our discussion of the novel, the eagle and serpent dichotomy is a constant issue in Turkish folklore. In this binary logic, while the eagle symbolizes the aboveground, the good, the light, and the blue of the sky, the serpent symbolizes the contrary, that is, the underground, the evil, and darkness (Topcu 39). Within the theoretical framework of this article, the eagle can be said to symbolize the blue gaze, whereas the serpent the evil eye. As already presented, though the word snake is used in the novel to signify Halil's reincarnation into different animal forms and to show his belonging to the underground as a dead person, in the mind of the public he is the eagle and Esme the serpent. Yaşar Kemal uses the eagle-serpent dichotomy (like sky-earth and angel-devil dichotomies) in Turkish folklore in his novel and identifies the evil with the serpent (Topcu, 2008: 38). While talking to Hasan about his father, Hasan's grandmother (Esme's mother-in-law) tells Hasan: "If your father were alive and your mother, the whore, behaved in this way...he would throw her carcass to the dogs, to the eagles. Were there anybody like your father? He was like the eagles of Anavarza...My Halil was a Döldül hawk, an Aladag falcon" (Kemal, 2007: 33). A similar Hasan-eagle correlation is also made by the Kurd in the restaurant Hasan has his meal when he runs away from home to keep away from the tale-telling craze of the village (2007: 61). Staying in another village for a couple of days, he dreams a snake following him wherever he goes. Just after he has this dream he sets back home and on the way back he sees eagles flying above the crags (2007: 67).

Based on this argument, we can say that the novel is an allegorical dramatization of the conflict between the eagle and the serpent, the aboveground and the underground, and hence between two gazes: the phallogocentric collective gaze and Esme's evil, serpentine and enchanting gaze. The phallogocentric gaze is identified with the eagle and the aboveground, whereas Esme with the serpent, deceit and the underground. The whole public discourse of

the novel turns around the collective symbolization of Esme as serpent and evil eye, each character contributing to this symbolization process with tales, myth-making and gossip. To crush the serpent is the basis of the mythological drama of the novel, which is in essence a collective experience. As Marcel Mauss argues in *A General Theory of Magic*,

A collective experience, or at least a collective illusion, is necessary before a demon, properly speaking, can be created. Their existence is proved only after the growth of the belief which endows them with respect. Therefore, in the same way that impersonal representations of magic seem to have no reality outside collective traditional beliefs -beliefs which are held in common by a group concerned- in our view, personal representations are also collective (2001: 106).

As a source of magic in the eye of the public, Esme can be regarded as the serpent whose creation and destruction turn into a collective experience in the progress of the plot.

Until the middle of the novel, the plot goes in its usual order, with Esme's dramatic situation and Hasan being psychologically forced by his grandmother, uncles, and other members of the village to kill his mother. However, towards the middle of the novel, the pressure on Hasan gains a collective dimension and the gaze aiming at crushing the serpent becomes a collective one based on myth-making and gossip (false stories). Most characters -especially Esme's mother-in-law- use all the strategies of the male social discourse to persuade Hasan, her son, to kill her. Rumors are spread by Halil's mother and Esme's mother-in-law that Halil's ghost haunts the village in different forms. The person who first begins this rumor, with the psychological propaganda of Esme's mother-in-law, is Hasan's uncle, Mustafa. From this point on, the phallic gaze becomes more oppressive and more efficient with the collective myth-making that constructs Esme as the serpentine and Halil as haunting the village.

The person who does one of the most critical contributions to the myth-making process is Kerim. Kerim tells the villagers that he has seen Halil's haunting ghost, who tells Kerim he is tortured by the hounds of hell and is wandering in the village sometimes as a snake, sometimes as a dog, sometimes as worm, sometimes as frog, and sometimes as an insect.

It's me, Halil, I rose from the dead...because of my coward and Godless mother, ignoble brothers, my shot-up mucous son, and this bloodguilty wife of mine. I don't have a mother Kerim, say this to her. I don't have brothers, go and tell them. My son has shot up, may he haven't grown up; when I rise from the dead, not being able to lie peacefully in my grave, when the hellhounds torture me day and night, I wish I hadn't a son. Don't ask my condition Kerim, he told me...Each day the hellhounds put me in a different garment...One day I become a worm, another day a snake, one day a frog, and one a slug (Kemal, 2007: 52-3).

After Kerim tells these, a social craze begins; whenever they see an animal, they make it part of the myth-making on Halil's haunting the village and use it to force Hasan to take revenge. The entire village gets under the influence of the myth-making process and

collectively participate in the formation of the oppressive phallic gaze. Each person in the village contributes to the myth-making craze with their own story. For instance, a villager named Molla Hüseyin tells Hasan that he has seen his father as a red snake first and then in the form of a dog, which, after a while, turned into a man with a shroud. After telling Molla Hüseyin that he is Halil's ghost, Halil says:

Listen to me brother, listen carefully. I am in a pitiful condition. Blessed be the hell compared with my situation. Three days ago I was the donkey of a poor villager. Once I became a pig. A month ago, I became the dog of my enemy Abbas's mother. Then, I became a grasshopper and was burned. Being a grasshopper, jumping, I saved my life (Kemal, 2007: 79).

The myth-making craze acquires a collective dimension to the extent that the villagers could no longer pass by Hasan, either individually or in groups, without telling him something. Under the influence of these rumors, Hasan begins to have dreams about his father. He even begins to live in a nightmarish world in which his father is sometimes a snake, sometimes a lizard, sometimes an owl and sometimes a frog. He dreams a gorgeous rattlesnake. After a while, his dream world replaces his actual world and he dreams a gorgeous rattlesnake following him, asleep or awake, wherever he goes; sometimes he dreams his father torturing him with his words. The socio-psychological pressure of the gaze continues until Hasan falls victim to it and kills his mother.

As René Girard puts it in "Violence and Representation in the Mythical Text," "there are three types of representations that dovetail perfectly: 1) intimations of a social crisis, 2) the attribution of something like the 'evil eye' to some individual, 3) the collective murder of that individual" (1977: 932). For Girard, typical of these societies is collective violence accompanied with an accusation, which is immediately followed by an act of collective violence against the victim of this accusation. In *To Crush the Serpent* the social crisis caused by the murder of Halil is followed with the accusation of Esme and constructing her as serpentine and evil eye, which is followed by a collective violence towards her. The novel turns into a lynching ritual in which Esme is established as the serpentine evil eye enchanting men with her looks and beauty and the lynchers trying to crush the serpent with their tales. To mention the eagle-serpent dichotomy again, in the allegorical dramatization of the novel, the eagle represents the blue of the sky and thus the blue sacred gaze, whereas the serpent, who is Esme in the novel, represents the underground, the evil, the magic, the evil eye. Constructing Esme as the serpentine and the evil eye and then lynching her are the gist of the allegorical drama of the novel. The presence of the eagle depends on the construction of this serpent because the presence of one side in the binary pair requires the presence of the other.

Though written in different countries, historical periods and socio-cultural backgrounds, Keats' *Lamia* and Yashar Kemal's *To Crush the Serpent* share a similar cultural symbolization of the good and the evil and the sacred and the profane. The binary construction of the evil eye and the protecting gaze and the identification of the protecting gaze with the blue of the sky and with the male and and the evil eye with the female and the underground is common in both works. It does not seem wrong to call the protecting gaze "phallic gaze" because of its attributes of psychosexual power in its relationship with the evil eye. The phallic gaze

constructs its presence by constructing the absence of the other in the binary pair, so the presence of this gaze depends on crushing the gaze of the other. Crushing the gaze of the other requires first its construction as evil. In this respect, Girard's definition of the process of collective violence is also valid for *Lamia*. In *Lamia*, too, the intimation of social crisis begins with Lamia's introduction into human society with her magic and illusory house, which causes all the people of Corinth to question her being and to gossip about her. The tension between Lamia and the Corinthians continues until Apollonius appears in the poem and attributes something like an evil eye to her, discloses her being a lamia, and accuses her of deceiving his student by her magic ways and looks. The pretext of her victimization set, there follows the step of collective violence with the sacred role of crushing the serpent and destroying the evil eye. The gaze that symbolizes this role is Apollonius' gaze, which destroys Lamia by overcentralizing itself on her. Thus, we can say that crushing the serpent in *Lamia* turns into collective lynching ritual embodied by Apollonius' gaze. As we said earlier, Lamia's only wish was to be member of the human world and experience human love, which Apollonius and the Corinthians deny her.

Thus, in *Lamia* and *To Crush the Serpent*, we see the struggle between two gazes, the phallogocentric collective gaze and the counter-gaze of the woman, that of the woman being mostly associated with the profane. The most common emblems of the profane gaze of the woman are the evil eye and the serpent, which are rooted in the collective consciousness and encoded in the allegorical drama of social and cultural life. The phallic gaze, on the other hand, is associated with the sacred and is symbolized with a blue eye, blue being the color of the sky. In *Lamia* and *To Crush the Serpent*, Lamia and Esme are presented as serpentine figures that have magic eyes that pose threat for the sacred male world. In *Lamia*, Lamia's enticing eyes are fought back or crushed by Apollonius, whereas in *To Crush the Serpent*, the whole society participate in the lynching ceremony of Esme and each member of the society feeds the fire that burns her and her gaze. In both works, the social crisis is resolved with an accusation, which is followed by a collective violence aiming at crushing the serpent and warding off the threats of the evil eye.

#### Endnotes

- 1 As in-text citation information, line number is given instead of page number because it is a poem.
- 2 Translations from Turkish belong to the author of the present article.
- 3 Translations from the novel belong to the author of the present article.
- 4 Shahmaran is a supernatural being whose lower side of body is serpent and the upper side human. In Persian *shah* means king and *maran* means serpent. Thus, *shahmaran* means 'the king of the serpents.' Though the word *shah* has male connotations, Shahmaran is mostly represented as female. Like the healing and rejuvenating serpent in the Asclepius and Moses myths, Shahmaran was also a healing serpent, caused rebirth, and guarded Cemshab, the other important figure in the myth. When Cemshab was lost in the labyrinths of her cave and found her in her garden in the depths of the cave, she guarded him, loved him, and hosted him many years in her garden. However, he betrays her when he returns to his friends and family, contrary to his promise, tells her name and causes her death to save the king from a fatal illness (Karakurt, 2012: 679).

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