

Representations of Heteronormativity and Masculinity Crisis in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema: *Uzak* (2002) and *Kış Uykusu* (2014)

Hatice İlay Karaoğlu, ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, haticelilay@gmail.com

Volume 14.1 (2026) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2026.762 | <http://cinej.pitt.edu>

Abstract

This article examines how heteronormative masculinity is problematized and destabilized in the cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, with particular focus on *Uzak* and *Kış Uykusu*. Rather than assuming a generalized “crisis of masculinity,” the study conceptualizes this crisis as a cinematic process produced through emotional withdrawal, spatial isolation, and the erosion of intellectual and moral authority. Drawing on theories of gender performativity and hegemonic masculinity, the article analyzes how silence, duration, bodily stillness, and dialogic confrontation construct male vulnerability and expose the limits of patriarchal masculine performance. By foregrounding formal cinematic strategies rather than thematic description alone, this study argues that Ceylan’s films reconfigure masculinity not simply as a psychological failure but as a fragile social and aesthetic formation. The article contributes to debates on Turkish art cinema by demonstrating how masculinity is reshaped through cinematic form and by situating Ceylan’s work within broader discussions of gender, power, and modernity.

Keywords: heteronormative masculinity; cinematic form; Turkish cinema; gender performativity



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.

Pitt | Open
Library
Publishing

This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](http://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com).

Representations of Heteronormativity and Masculinity Crisis in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema: *Uzak* (2002) and *Kış Uykusu* (2014)

Hatice İlay Karaoğlu

Introduction

Masculinity, as an identity shaped within rigid and normative gender structures, has historically been associated with power, control, and authority. However, contemporary social transformations have increasingly unsettled these associations, revealing tensions and instabilities within dominant models of masculine identity. Heteronormative masculinity, which prescribes emotional restraint, autonomy, and social dominance as central masculine virtues, limits individual modes of self-expression and produces significant psychological and social pressures. These tensions are often conceptualized as a “crisis of masculinity,” a condition that emerges when men fail to perform the ideals of hegemonic masculinity successfully. Rather than treating this crisis as a purely sociological phenomenon, this article approaches it as a cinematic construction shaped through narrative, spatial organization, and aesthetic form. This study examines how heteronormative masculinity is destabilized in the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose cinema persistently engages with themes of loneliness, alienation, and emotional vulnerability. Ceylan’s characters frequently inhabit spaces marked by disconnection—between rural and urban settings, between intellectual aspirations and

affective failure, and between social authority and personal insecurity. These tensions provide a productive framework for analyzing masculinity not as a fixed identity but as a fragile and contested performance shaped by both social expectations and cinematic representation.

Focusing on *Uzak* [Distant] (2002) and *Kış Uykusu* [Winter Sleep] (2014), this article investigates how male characters negotiate heteronormative masculine norms through experiences of isolation, emotional withdrawal, and the erosion of intellectual and moral authority. In *Uzak*, the character of Mahmut embodies a masculinity marked by silence, spatial withdrawal, and sexual disengagement following marital and professional failure. His everyday routines and bodily stillness articulate a form of masculine subjectivity defined less by dominance than by emotional absence. In *Kış Uykusu*, masculinity is explored through the figure of Aydın, a hotel owner who constructs himself as an intellectual and moral authority yet gradually confronts the limits of this position through dialogic conflict and social exposure. Together, these films reveal masculinity as a site of tension between social power and affective vulnerability. By situating these cinematic representations within debates in gender and masculinity studies, this article seeks to deepen understanding of how Turkish art cinema reconfigures dominant masculine ideals. Rather than assuming a generalized collapse of masculinity, the study analyzes how cinematic form, through silence, duration, spatial

composition, and dialogic confrontation, produces meanings of masculine fragility and failure. In doing so, it demonstrates that Ceylan's films construct masculinity not merely as a psychological condition but as a social and aesthetic formation shaped by broader transformations in gender relations and modern subjectivity.

Heteronormative Masculinity as Cinematic Performance: Theoretical Framework

Heteronormative masculinity operates not as a stable essence but as a socially regulated performance sustained through repeated behaviors, gestures, and expectations that define what is considered “proper” masculine conduct. This performance requires emotional restraint, self-control, and the continuous display of authority in both private and public contexts. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a key framework for understanding this process, defining gender not as an innate quality but as the effect of reiterated social acts (Butler, 1990). Masculinity, within this perspective, is constantly produced through everyday practices, and moments of disruption expose its constructed and contingent nature. Such moments allow scholars and viewers to question how heteronormative norms limit male subjectivity and to consider alternative modes of expression that resist dominant ideals.

Jack Halberstam (1998) further challenges conventional definitions of masculinity by separating it from biological sex and emphasizing its performative and social dimensions. By describing hegemonic masculinity as an “empty model,” Halberstam (1998) underlines the

difficulty of sustaining coherence and emotional control, thereby revealing tensions between cultural expectations and individual capacity. bell hooks similarly argues that men's emotional suppression is not merely personal but structurally produced by patriarchal systems that enforce rigid behavioral codes (hooks, 2004). Together, these perspectives shift the analysis from masculinity as a fixed identity to masculinity as a set of relational practices shaped by power, affect, and social regulation.

Sociological scholarship frequently conceptualizes these tensions as a “crisis of masculinity,” particularly in relation to economic and social transformation. Beynon (2002) links this crisis to post-industrial changes in labor and family structures, while Kimmel (2013) situates it within wider cultural shifts, including feminism, LGBTQ+ visibility, and changing sexual norms. Rather than treating this crisis as a given social condition, the present study approaches it as a cinematic construction, examining how uncertainty, emotional exposure, and the weakening of authority are rendered visible through film form. Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is central to this approach, as it explains how heteronormative systems privilege specific male behaviors while marginalizing others (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity not only sustains patriarchal dominance but also organizes emotional conduct, interpersonal relations, and social legitimacy among men. Failure to meet these

standards often produces inner conflict, relational strain, and withdrawal, dynamics frequently explored in contemporary art cinema.

Cinema thus becomes a critical space for investigating how masculinity is produced and questioned. Tasker and Negra (2007) argue that contemporary films increasingly foreground male vulnerability, hesitation, and fractured authority as central narrative and aesthetic concerns. These representations do not simply mirror social change; they actively construct masculinity as a contested and unstable performance shaped through form, space, dialogue, and duration. Building on this theoretical foundation, this article examines how heteronormative masculinity is destabilized in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema. His films depict male characters negotiating social expectations, emotional isolation, and ethical uncertainty. Through prolonged takes, spatial composition, bodily stillness, and confrontational dialogue, Ceylan visualizes the tension between social authority and subjective vulnerability.

In addition to the theories mentioned above, this study also draws on selected works in Turkish film scholarship to inform its scene-based analysis. Rather than using these studies directly as theories of masculinity, they are employed as interpretive frameworks for reading spatial organization, emotional withdrawal, and character relations in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema. These works support the close reading of cinematic form and narrative situations in

relation to the article's central theme of heteronormative masculinity. While these works do not explicitly address masculine identity, they provide analytical frameworks for understanding spatial composition, urban and domestic settings, and emotional dynamics within Turkish cinema. By applying these perspectives, this study interprets the depicted scenes in *Uzak* and *Kış Uykusu* in a manner consistent with its focus on heteronormative masculine performance, using the insights from these sources to support and nuance the analysis of how male characters navigate social, emotional, and spatial pressures.

The theoretical perspectives of performativity, hegemonic masculinity, and male affect function here not as abstract categories but as analytical tools for interpreting cinematic strategies. By linking theory directly to film form, this study moves beyond generalized claims of a masculinity "crisis". Instead, it demonstrates how masculinity is made visible, unsettled, and critically examined through aesthetic choices. Masculinity emerges not as a natural condition but as an artistic and social construction shaped by cinematic language and cultural power relations.

Representations of Masculinity in Turkish Cinema from Past to Present

Masculinity in cinema has long been associated with ideals of power, authority, and emotional restraint. Raewyn Connell (1995) argues that masculinity is socially constructed through cultural norms and institutional practices rather than determined by biology alone.

Cinema, as a cultural form, both reproduces and questions these norms by visualizing dominant masculine ideals while exposing their internal contradictions. In the Turkish context, representations of masculinity have shifted alongside political change, modernization, and transformations in family and social structures. Tracing this evolution reveals how cinematic narratives negotiate the relationship between gender expectations, social authority, and individual subjectivity. During the Yeşilçam era of the 1950s and 1960s, male characters were predominantly portrayed as physically strong, emotionally controlled, and socially dominant. Films reinforced patriarchal values by depicting men as heads of households and guarantors of social order. Characters such as Sadık in *Vesikalı Yarım* (1968) exemplify this model, in which masculinity is defined by responsibility, sacrifice, and conformity to moral codes. Emotional vulnerability was largely suppressed, while female characters were confined to passive or sentimental roles. These melodramas functioned as moral narratives that instructed audiences on appropriate gender behavior, sustaining rigid hierarchies between men and women.

The late 1970s marked a shift in Turkish cinema toward narratives centered on ethical choice and emotional responsibility rather than heroic or authoritarian masculinity. *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* (1977) exemplifies this transition by foregrounding a male protagonist torn between romantic passion and moral duty. Masculinity is no longer defined primarily through power or dominance but through care, sacrifice, and relational commitment. This

period introduces an early tension between personal desire and social responsibility, signaling a transformation in masculine ideals rather than a fully articulated political crisis. The early 1980s brought a more explicit confrontation with social and institutional constraints following political repression and forced modernization. In *Yol* (1982), male characters face surveillance, punishment, and moral conflict, revealing masculinity as shaped by state power and collective trauma. Similarly, *Hakkâri'de Bir Mevsim* (1983) presents male subjectivity through isolation and ethical struggle, emphasizing endurance and conscience over authority. By the late 1980s, *Muhsin Bey* (1987) extended this trajectory by portraying a male protagonist confronted with cultural displacement and the collapse of traditional moral codes in an urbanizing society. Masculinity here is marked by nostalgia, ethical rigidity, and social marginalization, reflecting the growing distance between inherited masculine ideals and contemporary realities.

In the 1990s, postmodern sensibilities further destabilized traditional masculine ideals. Films such as *Eşkîya* (1996) portrayed men navigating alienation and moral uncertainty in a rapidly changing society. At the same time, representations of non-heteronormative masculinity challenged patriarchal assumptions. *Hamam* (1997) offered a depiction of homosexual identity that exposed masculinity as fluid and performative rather than fixed or biologically determined. These films emphasized that masculine subjectivity is shaped by cultural discourse

and cinematic form, rather than by stable social roles. From the 2000s onward, Turkish cinema increasingly foregrounded emotional complexity and relational tension. In contemporary art cinema, masculinity is presented as socially contingent and psychologically fragile. Long takes and carefully composed interiors render masculinity visible as a performance shaped by ethical conflict and emotional distance. Rather than celebrating dominance, contemporary films explore vulnerability, isolation, and moral uncertainty as defining features of male identity.

Across these historical phases, Turkish cinema has moved from rigid patriarchal archetypes toward nuanced representations of masculinity as a conflicted and relational construct. From Yeşilçam's heroic models to contemporary art cinema's introspective figures, masculinity appears not as a natural essence but as a socially mediated and aesthetically constructed identity. This trajectory provides a critical framework for analyzing how Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films visualize the fragility, ethical dilemmas, and relational tensions of male characters. His cinema does not simply depict masculinity but interrogates its contradictions, revealing how heteronormative and patriarchal expectations generate psychological strain and emotional disintegration. This historical overview thus establishes the context for examining the masculinity crisis in *Uzak* and *Kıy Uykusu* as part of a broader transformation in Turkish cinematic discourse.

Analysis of Masculinity Crisis in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Cinema

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema¹ examines masculinity not merely as a psychological or personal phenomenon but as a socially and culturally mediated performance shaped by heteronormative norms. His male characters frequently exist in tension between social expectations and their emotional and ethical capacities, navigating states of introspection, conflict, and occasional resistance. These tensions can be productively understood through Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, which defines gender not as an inherent identity but as a set of reiterated practices that sustain normative structures (Butler, 1990). Within this framework, Ceylan's characters both reproduce and question the masculine roles imposed upon them, exposing the contingent and vulnerable nature of heteronormative masculinity (Halberstam, 1998).

In Ceylan's films, masculinity appears as a precarious construction continuously negotiated between external demands and inner desires. In *Uzak* (2002) and *Kış Uykusu* (2014), male protagonists confront the pressures of social authority, emotional discipline, and interpersonal control, while simultaneously revealing vulnerability, hesitation, and ethical ambiguity. These representations suggest that what is often described as a "masculinity crisis" emerges from the conflict between socially prescribed roles and personal capacities rather than from individual psychological failure alone (hooks, 2004; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Mahmut's retreat from professional and familial responsibility in *Uzak* and Aydın's unstable intellectual authority in *Kış Uykusu* exemplify how normative expectations both structure and destabilize masculine identity. Ceylan renders this tension visible through cinematic form, employing silence, spatial organization, and prolonged takes to highlight the subtle breakdowns and negotiations of masculine performance. His aesthetic strategies draw attention to moments of pause, distance, and emotional restraint, allowing the viewer to observe masculinity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state. By placing his characters at the intersection of social norms and personal reflection, Ceylan frames heteronormative masculinity as inherently uncertain and internally conflicted. Male identity is therefore simultaneously enacted and interrogated, revealing how emotional struggle, relational failure, and cultural pressure converge to produce complex and affectively charged representations of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Butler, 1990).

This conceptual framework provides the foundation for a closer examination of how *Uzak* and *Kış Uykusu* articulate masculinity crisis through narrative structure, characterization, and cinematic technique.² Rather than presenting masculinity as a stable category, Ceylan's cinema exposes it as a fragile and contested formation shaped by both social authority and subjective experience.

Isolation and Failed Masculinity in *Uzak* (2002)

In *Uzak* (2002) by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Mahmut's emotional withdrawal and persistent loneliness function as key elements that challenge heteronormative models of masculinity. The relationship between Mahmut, an urban photographer, and his cousin Yusuf, a young man arriving from the countryside in search of work, foregrounds two contrasting experiences of masculinity and social belonging. While Yusuf enters the city with optimism and expectation, Mahmut remains confined by past disappointments and the repetitive routines of metropolitan life. The emotional distance between them highlights Mahmut's social isolation and reveals a deeper solitude shaped by his inability to communicate and connect. This detachment situates him outside the culturally dominant image of the active, decisive, and emotionally disciplined male subject, thereby exposing the instability of hegemonic masculinity within a contemporary urban setting (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

From a theoretical perspective, Mahmut's withdrawal can be interpreted through Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). Instead of performing a productive or authoritative form of masculinity, Mahmut occupies a position marked by passivity and stagnation. His solitude and emotional restraint disrupt the normative script of masculine behavior. Ceylan translates this disruption into visual form through careful spatial design and restrained mise-en-scène. In scenes such as Mahmut sitting alone at home and gazing outside

(Fig. 1.1), the minimalist composition accentuates his separation from both social life and emotional engagement. Here, masculinity is articulated not through action or dialogue but through stillness, absence, and spatial distance.



Figure 1.1: Mahmut sits alone at home, gazing outside.



Figure 1.2: Mahmut sits silently on a bench for an extended period.

Prolonged silences and contemplative long takes, particularly in moments when Mahmut sits quietly on a bench (Fig. 1.2), intensify the psychological weight of his isolation. These

formal strategies—static camera, limited movement, and the dominance of negative space—operate as visual metaphors for his disengagement from social relations and normative masculine roles. The cold, muted color palette and the emptiness of urban landscapes further reinforce the sense of emotional and existential displacement that defines his identity. Through these aesthetic choices, Ceylan renders masculinity as a fragile, unsettled performance, shaped by loss, introspection, and failure to conform to hegemonic expectations.

Scenes in which Mahmut appears alone on the street (Fig. 1.3) and the recurring images of wide, snow-covered roads (Fig. 1.4) extend the visual motif of isolation by transforming the environment into a projection of inner conflict. In these sequences, masculinity is no longer presented as a stable social identity but as a precarious construction exposed to emotional and psychological pressure. This representation resonates with R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which emphasizes the hierarchies and normative demands that regulate male social performance (Connell, 1995). The visual emptiness of the streets and the frozen landscape reflects Mahmut's internal state, suggesting that masculinity here is experienced as psychological tension rather than as authority or control. Through these images, Ceylan demonstrates that masculinity functions not merely as a social role but as a vulnerable formation shaped by detachment and emotional exhaustion. The repeated framing of Mahmut within

expansive yet empty spaces underscores the contradiction between social visibility and inner withdrawal, revealing how masculine identity is sustained through isolation rather than dominance.



Figure 1.3: Mahmut is alone on the street.



Figure 1.4: A wide, snowy road scene.

Mahmut's solitude in the city makes the psychological pressures of urban male identity visible. Suner (2010) interprets this motif of loneliness as a "dialectical relationship between

urban space and individual isolation,” reading Mahmut’s images of walking through empty streets as both a physical and emotional distance. Similarly, drawing on Gürkan’s (2017) analysis of male subjectivity in contemporary Turkish cinema, Mahmut’s silence can be understood not only as a withdrawal from social engagement but also as a subtle resistance to hegemonic masculinity, reflecting an inner conflict shaped by societal norms. In this sense, Mahmut’s passivity and quiet stance reflect not only personal melancholy but also the psychological burden imposed by urban masculinity and modernization.

The scene in which Mahmut speaks with his ex-wife on the phone in the bathroom (Fig. 1.5) offers one of the clearest emotional articulations of his masculinity crisis. Dominant cultural expectations associate masculinity with decisiveness, emotional control, and authority, yet Mahmut’s hesitation and inability to verbalize desire expose the tension these norms generate. The spatial configuration of the scene is crucial: the narrow, enclosed bathroom serves as a visual metaphor for psychological confinement, transforming private space into an image of social and emotional restriction.

After the call, Mahmut remains seated in silence, motionless and withdrawn (Fig. 1.6). His immobility and the absence of speech emphasize a suspension of emotional and social movement. This moment foregrounds the internalized pressures of masculinity, illustrating how

its demands produce vulnerability alongside a muted form of resistance to hegemonic ideals. The bathroom, as both confined and private, becomes a spatial metaphor for inner isolation, where the contrast between emotional fragility and the social ideal of male strength exposes the instability of heteronormative identity.



Figure 1.5: Mahmut speaks with his ex-wife over the phone in the bathroom.



Figure 1.6: Mahmut remains seated in the bathroom after the call.

Mahmut's behaviors at home reveal the role of private space in shaping male identity. Güven (2025) argues that in Turkish modern cinema, domestic spaces often stage male identity; Mahmut's solitude in the bathroom or living room can be read as a spatial manifestation of emotional and social inadequacy. This spatial isolation is not merely personal confinement but also a visual representation of the pressures exerted by gender norms.

Mahmut questions and partially resists dominant masculine norms; however, this questioning does not result in liberation. Instead, he remains burdened by the very performance he continues to reproduce. His distant relationships, preference for solitude, and persistent effort

to maintain masculine composure, even in isolation, intensify his crisis. Ceylan conveys this tension through spatial restriction, bodily immobility, and the near absence of communication. Mahmut thus emerges as a cinematic figure of the erosion of heteronormative masculinity. He departs from the culturally idealized image of the powerful and emotionally controlled male subject and is left with loneliness and passivity as defining traits. The responsibilities attached to masculine identity deepen his inner conflict while simultaneously generating a silent rupture in the continuity of hegemonic norms. Mahmut's inability to fully perform masculinity can therefore be interpreted not only as weakness but also as a disruption of heteronormative coherence. His failure reveals the performative nature of masculinity and its dependence on repetition, control, and social recognition.

Ceylan's cinematic style—marked by spatial confinement, prolonged static shots, and minimal dialogue—conveys Mahmut's masculinity crisis not through dramatic confrontation but through a slow, almost imperceptible process of disintegration. Mahmut's partial rejection of social expectations, combined with his continued attachment to masculine posturing even in solitude, deepens this tension and positions him as a compelling figure of instability and fragility within heteronormative masculinity. The film further aligns with Michael Kimmel's notion of a masculinity crisis (Kimmel, 2013), as Mahmut's economic independence fails to

translate into emotional or relational competence. This disconnect demonstrates that masculinity is a contingent social construction, vulnerable to disruption when authority and affect fall out of alignment.

Through its careful visual composition, *Uzak* shows how silence, stillness, and spatial isolation communicate the breakdown of heteronormative masculinity. Mahmut's limited interactions, his withdrawal from intimacy, and the positioning of his body within both confined interiors and empty urban spaces foreground the tension between inner desire and social expectation. He departs from the idealized male subject, leaving emotional fragility, passivity, and solitude as central markers of his cinematic identity. Ceylan's work thus emphasizes the psychological and spatial dimensions of masculinity, suggesting that its performance is culturally enforced yet inherently unstable, and that masculine crisis can be rendered visible as much through absence as through action.

Authority and Emotional Collapse in *Kış Uykusu* (2014)

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Kış Uykusu* offers a deeply introspective examination of masculinity within a heteronormative framework, presenting male identity not as a stable or inherent essence but as a fragile social and psychological performance. The film addresses the crisis of masculinity in a more complex, multilayered manner than *Uzak* does. Its protagonist, Aydın, appears outwardly as a respected intellectual figure who embodies moral responsibility and

social authority. However, his emotional detachment, intolerance of criticism, and progressive isolation reveal a persistent tension between hegemonic masculinity expectations and his personal vulnerabilities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Through a careful interplay of mise-en-scène, extended takes, spatial restriction, and strategic silences, Ceylan visualizes the gradual erosion of Aydın's masculine authority and exposes the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures on individual subjectivity.



Figure 2.1: Aydın and Necla discussing Aydın's writings.

Aydın's interactions with his sister Necla constitute the first significant rupture in his performative masculinity. In the scene shown in Fig. 2.1, Aydın seeks to assert intellectual and moral superiority by discussing his published writings and charitable actions. The visual composition reinforces this claim to authority by placing him in a dominant position within the

frame. Medium close-ups emphasize facial expressions and subtle gestures, allowing power relations to unfold through dialogue and bodily posture. Necla, however, destabilizes this position by questioning the sincerity of his moral stance and framing his charity as self-serving rather than ethical (Fig. 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Necla criticizing Aydın.

This confrontation transforms the scene into a site of ideological and emotional struggle. Necla's critique interrupts Aydın's attempt to sustain symbolic superiority and exposes the performative nature of his masculinity. Her challenge operates not only on a narrative level but also visually, as the balanced framing between the two characters reduces Aydın's dominance and introduces spatial equality that mirrors the erosion of his authority. Aydın's hesitant response (Fig. 2.3) reveals the fragility of his intellectual ego. His authority, previously grounded in knowledge and moral self-certainty, collapses in real time under critical scrutiny.

This moment exemplifies Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity: masculinity must be continuously enacted and socially recognized in order to sustain itself. Once this recognition is disrupted, the performance falters. The cinematic framing—marked by sustained eye-level shots, measured distance between the characters, and prolonged pauses—renders this destabilization visible. Silence becomes a narrative device that exposes the limits of Aydın's verbal control and reveals the vulnerability beneath his rhetorical confidence.

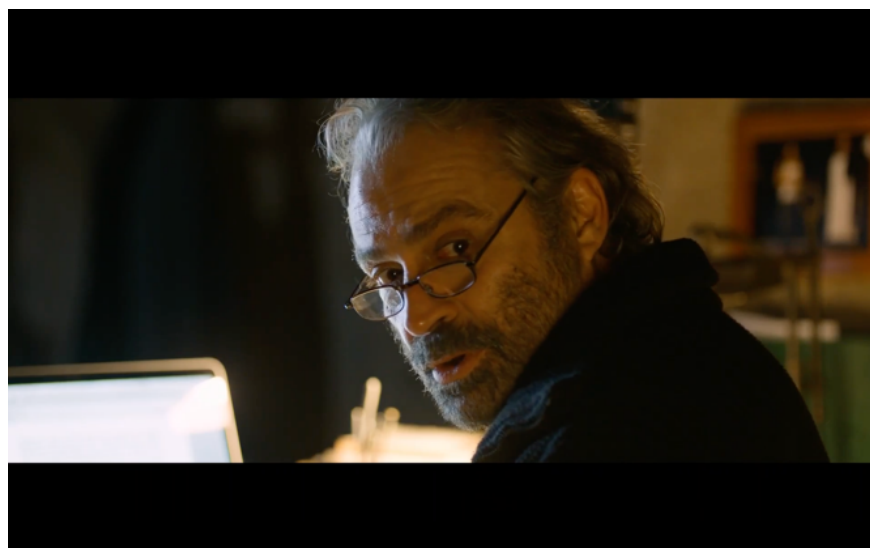


Figure 2.3: Aydın responding to his sister Necla's criticisms.

The domestic sphere becomes another crucial arena in which Aydın's masculinity crisis is staged. In his confrontations with his wife, Nihal, Aydın's attempt to regulate her behavior and impose moral authority reflects the pressures of heteronormative patriarchy. In Fig. 2.4, he questions her charitable activities in a condescending, supervisory tone, positioning himself as

the rational, ethically superior subject. This interaction reveals how masculine authority is constructed through intellectual dominance and moral judgment rather than emotional reciprocity. Nihal's emotional outburst (Fig. 2.5) functions as a direct challenge to this authority, exposing the limits of Aydın's control and the emotional dimensions of masculine power. Her refusal to accept his intervention disrupts the household's hierarchical order and transforms the domestic space into a site of conflict and negotiation.



Figure 2.4: Aydın questioning Nihal's actions regarding the donation.

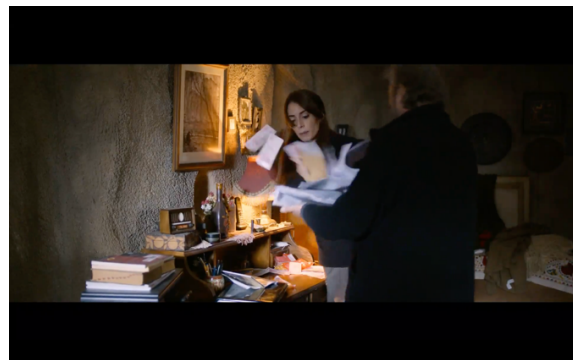


Figure 2.5: Nihal experiencing an emotional outburst.

By accusing Aydın of being “cold” and “arrogant,” Nihal explicitly confronts his masculine posture within the household (see Fig. 2.6). The moment in which she collapses onto the bed crystallizes the emotional rupture between them and renders Aydın's vulnerability visible. Ceylan employs wide shots, negative space, and extended diegetic silence to intensify the psychological weight of the scene. The domestic interior, traditionally coded as a space subordinated to male authority, becomes a visual field of resistance and breakdown instead.

This spatial transformation foregrounds the instability of masculinity under heteronormative pressures (Connell, 1995; Bourdieu, 2001).



Figure 2.6: Nihal throwing herself onto the bed and starting to cry.

Toward the end of the film, sequences in which Aydın is left alone most clearly articulate the internal dimension of his masculinity crisis. After the confrontation with Nihal, he begins to confront the consequences of his intellectual and emotional collapse. However, his self-reflection remains evasive and incomplete, marked by hesitation rather than transformation. Solitary scenes intensify this tension through the interaction between environmental symbolism and inner disintegration.

In the scene where Aydın observes the snow-covered railway tracks (Fig. 2.7), spatial symbolism conveys social exclusion and the erosion of control. The train, moving

independently of his presence, signifies the continuity of social forces and normative expectations from which he has become increasingly detached. Masculinity here is no longer expressed through authority or action but through immobility and observation. These moments articulate multiple layers of crisis—intellectual, emotional, and existential—revealing the gradual disintegration of heteronormative masculine identity. Aydın’s understanding of masculinity is grounded in control, authority, and moral superiority. However, the resistance he encounters from both Necla and Nihal, combined with his own internal uncertainty, destabilizes this framework, replacing it with isolation and powerlessness.



Figure 2.7: Aydın watching the train on the snow-covered railway.



Figure 2.8: Aydın silently observing his surroundings alone.

In Fig. 2.8, Aydın’s solitary observation of his surroundings communicates profound emotional withdrawal and the collapse of both intellectual and domestic authority. Ceylan’s use of long takes, subdued natural lighting, and expansive framing renders the internal dimensions of this crisis visible. Masculinity is shown to depend on external recognition and relational

power, both of which gradually disintegrate in Aydın's case.

These representations demonstrate how Ceylan's cinema critiques traditional masculinity by foregrounding scenes in which male characters confront emotional fragility and loss of control. The masculinity crisis is reinforced through cinematic elements such as spatial confinement, extended dialogue, silence, and visual solitude. Rather than presenting masculinity as a fixed or stable identity, the film exposes it as a precarious performance shaped by patriarchal and heteronormative expectations. Aydın's interactions with Necla and Nihal show the delicate balance between social recognition and the performance of masculinity. Aydın's responses to criticism make the fragility of hegemonic masculinity visible, presenting his crisis as both social and psychological. This perspective allows Aydın's silent observational positions to be interpreted not only as internal conflict but also as a compulsory adherence to social norms and a failure to meet them.

Aydın's observation of the train station or snow-covered outdoor spaces signifies not only individual isolation but also the continuity of societal norms and the contrast with personal inadequacy. Drawing on Tugaytimür, Açıkan, and Durualp's (2025) study, it can be interpreted that these spatial symbols materialize vulnerability in male performance, as male characters confront their inadequacies while navigating societal expectations. Ceylan's cinematic world

thus reflects the psychological and social consequences of patriarchal structures, showing how male identity in modern society emerges through layered conflicts. His male characters do not fully conform to heteronormative ideals but instead reveal the contradictions embedded within them. Aydın's emotional breakdown illustrates the vulnerability of masculine performance and the damaging effects of sustained social pressure.

Ultimately, in *Kış Uykusu*, the crisis of masculinity unfolds in relation to social power and intellectual authority. Although Aydın occupies a privileged position within his environment, his emotional and subjective conflicts allow Ceylan to interrogate masculinity from a critical perspective. Aydın becomes a striking example of a character caught between the effort to maintain social roles and the inability to internalize them. When considered alongside *Uzak*, *Kış Uykusu* deepens the exploration of the masculinity crisis. Mahmut's withdrawal and Aydın's collapse of authority represent different yet interconnected forms of failure within the heteronormative order. While Mahmut's masculinity dissolves through silence and isolation, Aydın's disintegrates through confrontation and the loss of intellectual dominance. Together, these figures demonstrate how heteronormative masculinity in Ceylan's cinema is persistently questioned and ultimately destabilized.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema offers a critical reconfiguration of masculinity by foregrounding the subjective crises experienced by male characters within patriarchal and heteronormative structures. Through close analysis of *Uzak* and *Kış Uykusu*, the article has shown that masculinity is not presented as a stable or natural identity but as a precarious formation shaped by social expectations, relations of authority, and emotional regulation. Rather than reproducing masculinity as a coherent and socially validated role, Ceylan shifts attention to characters who fail to embody hegemonic masculine norms fully and who experience their identities through loss, uncertainty, and internal conflict. Mahmut and Aydın represent two distinct yet interconnected trajectories of masculine crisis. Mahmut's crisis unfolds through withdrawal, silence, and emotional detachment, whereas Aydın's emerges through confrontation, intellectual insecurity, and the erosion of domestic and social authority. These contrasting paths reveal that heteronormative masculinity is destabilized both through isolation and through relational struggle. Masculine identity in Ceylan's cinema is thus shown to be contingent on recognition, dialogue, and power relations rather than rooted in fixed social roles.

The analysis further demonstrates that Ceylan's cinematic language plays a central role in articulating this crisis. Confined interiors, prolonged dialogues, extended silences, and

moments of solitude function as formal strategies that translate abstract social pressures into visible cinematic experiences. Masculinity is not only questioned in narrative content but also deconstructed through spatial organization and cinematic temporality. Long takes and pauses register emotional exhaustion, while domestic interiors become sites of power negotiation and identity fracture. In this way, film form itself becomes an analytical medium through which the contradictions of patriarchal masculinity are rendered perceptible. Ceylan's representations resonate with Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity, as masculinity appears as a role sustained through authority, moral superiority, and emotional restraint. The failure of these performances exposes the vulnerability of masculine identity and the contradictions embedded within heteronormative structures. Importantly, male crisis is not framed as an individual psychological deficiency but as a condition produced by broader social and cultural expectations. Within the context of Turkish society, where masculinity has traditionally been associated with dominance and emotional control, Ceylan's films reveal the psychological costs of these norms and the alienation they generate.

Ultimately, this study argues that Ceylan's cinema opens a critical space for rethinking masculinity in Turkish cinema by foregrounding fragility, failure, and emotional conflict. His films invite audiences to question the rigidity of patriarchal and heteronormative identities and to imagine alternative forms of subjectivity that move beyond domination and control. This

approach constitutes not only an aesthetic strategy but also a cultural intervention that challenges the normalization of masculine authority. More broadly, the analytical framework developed in this study may be applied to other contemporary art cinema contexts in which male identity is negotiated through vulnerability, isolation, and relational tension. By demonstrating how masculinity is constructed and destabilized through cinematic form, this article contributes to ongoing debates in gender studies and film studies on the performative and fragile nature of identity. Ceylan's cinema thus exemplifies how film can expose the internal contradictions of social norms and create space for critical reflection on gender, power, and subjectivity in modern society.

REFERENCES

- Adak, H., & Akser, M. (2023). On land, memory, and masculinity: Unearthing silences around myths of Gallipoli in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Ahlat Ağacı* (*The Wild Pear Tree*). *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 69, 74–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2023.9>
- Arslan, S. (2011). *Cinema in Turkey: A new critical history*. Oxford University Press.
- Atıf Yılmaz. (Director). (1968). *Vesikalı yarım* [My Prostitute Love] [Film].
- Atıf Yılmaz. (Director). (1977). *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* [The Girl with the Red Scarf] [Film].
- Başcı, P. (2015). Gender and memory in the films of Tomris Giritlioğlu and Yeşim Ustaoglu. *New Perspectives on Turkey*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2015.21>
- Bazin, A. (1967). *What is cinema?* (Vol. 1, H. Gray, Trans.). University of California Press.
- Beynon, J. (2002). *Masculinities and culture*. Open University Press.

- Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the fiction film*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Polity Press.
- Bruno, G. (2002). *Atlas of emotion: Journeys in art, architecture, and film*. Verso.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Ceylan, N. B. (Director). (2002). *Uzak* [Distant] [Film].
- Ceylan, N. B. (Director). (2014). *Kış uykusu* [Winter Sleep] [Film].
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- Daldal, A. (2018). Ceylan's *Winter Sleep*: From ambiguity to nothingness. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 6(2), 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2017.180>
- Deleuze, G. (1989). *Cinema 2: The time-image* (H. Tomlinson & R. Galeta, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Diken, B., Gilloch, G., & Hammond, C. (2018). *The cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan: The global vision of a Turkish filmmaker*. I.B. Tauris.
- Dönmez-Colin, G. (2023). Introduction. In G. Dönmez-Colin (Ed.), *ReFocus: The films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan* (pp. 1–18). Edinburgh University Press.
- Flanagan, M. (2012). *Slow cinema: Temporality and style in contemporary art and experimental film*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Güney, Y., & Gören, Ş. (Directors). (1982). *Yol* [Film].
- Gürkan, H. (2017). The representation of masculinity in cinema and on television: An analysis of fictional male characters. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5, 402. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejms.v5i1.p402-408>

Güven, Z. C. (2025). Slowness and diverging aesthetics: Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz in new Turkish cinema. *İnsan ve İnsan*, 12(40), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.29224/insanveinsan.1658448>

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Duke University Press.

Harvey-Davitt, J. (2016). Conflicted selves: The humanist cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 14(2), 249–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2015.1136123>

hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love*. Atria Books.

Masdar Kara, F., & Eşitti, Ş. (2018). Women in the cinema of Nuri Bilge Ceylan. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 6(2), 200–221. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2017.186>

Kıral, E. (Director). (1983). *Hakkâri’de bir mevsim* [A Season in Hakkari] [Film].

Kimmel, M. (2013). *Angry white men: American masculinity at the end of an era*. Nation Books.

Liktor, C. (2020). Wild pear trees, patrimonial legacies: Father-son relationship in Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *The Wild Pear Tree*. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 8(2), 119–149. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2019.233>

Parlak, Z., & Işık, M. (2018). Presentation of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and his cinema in the Turkish media. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 7(1), 30–57. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2018.185>

Özpetek, F. (Director). (1997). *Hamam* [Steam Bath] [Film].

Serdaroğlu, F. (2024). Ethics and aesthetics in Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s cinema. *SineFilozofi*, 17(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.1239209>

Suner, A. (2010). *New Turkish cinema: Belonging, identity, and memory*. I.B. Tauris.

Tasker, Y., & Negra, D. (2007). *Interrogating postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture*. Duke University Press.

Tugaytimür, Z., Açıan, M., & Durualp, E. (2025). Nuri Bilge Ceylan sinemasında toplumsal cinsiyet: Kış Uykusu üzerinden nitel bir inceleme. *Kadın/Woman* 2000, 26(1), 267-292. <https://doi.org/10.33831/jws.v26i1.526>

Turgul, Y. (Director). (1987). *Muhsin Bey* [Film].

Turgul, Y. (Director). (1996). *Eşkİya* [Bandit] [Film].

ENDNOTES:

¹ Several scholars have previously examined aspects of Nuri Bilge Ceylan's cinema, including analyses of gender representation (Kara & Eşitti, 2017), media framing of Ceylan's work (Parlak & Işık, 2018), thematic and aesthetic readings (Diken, Gilloch & Hammond, 2018; Serdaroğlu, 2024), and qualitative studies on gender roles in Kış Uykusu (Tugaytimür, Açıan & Durualp, 2025). These works provide valuable contextual insights for interpreting Ceylan's films and scenes discussed in this article.

² This study draws on scholarship in art cinema and modern film aesthetics in order to interpret the cinematographic strategies of the analyzed scenes, particularly focusing on how long takes, silence, slow cinema, and cinematic space make psychological tension and vulnerability visible through form (Bordwell, 1985; Deleuze, 1989; Flanagan, 2012; Bazin, 1967; Bruno, 2002).