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Gender-in(g) Biography: Ahmet Mithat (on Fatma Aliye) or the Canonization of an Ottoman Male Writer

BY

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Biography as a genre extols its protagonist, sometimes to the extent of advocating hero-worship.¹ Conventionally speaking, the biographical panegyric is told in the third person to enhance the distinction between the narrator and the protagonist.² In contrast to academic scholarship on the work of creative writers, a striking feature of biography is that, as a genre, it emphasizes the precedence of the life story over the analysis of the work of the writer, i. e. the protagonist of the biography.

When the protagonist of the biography is a woman (writer) and the only means of bestowing praise on her life is contingent upon a cliché story told as the combination of »good daughter, good wife, good mother,« or in Virginia Woolf's terms, as »angels in the house,«³ women's biographies become not only uninteresting, but mostly lacking in individuality, uniqueness, cause-and-effect logic, a sense of coherence and order, which are essential to male biographies, particularly of the »Life and Work of Great Men« nature. In the British context, biographies of women saints and queens, as in the case of Elizabeth I do not address the protagonists as women. These protagonists cannot rebel against norms cut out for religion or for women in patriarchal societies, rather they represent the norm and insofar as they comply with the norm can their biographies be written.⁴ In the British context, until Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victo-*

1 Freud analyzed the narrator/biographer-protagonist relationship in biography as »pathography« or biological idealization as a result of the biographer's regressive identification with the »great man« or the ideal »father image,« i. e. the protagonist. Freud, Sigmund: Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. In: Penguin Freud Library, 14, 1910, p. 223.

2 The distinguishing feature of biography, in comparison to autobiography or memoirs is that generally speaking, the narrator is not the protagonist.

3 Woolf, Virginia: Professions for Women. In: Virginia Woolf: The Death of the Moth and Other Essays. New York 1942, pp. 236-238.

4 See Tekcan, Rana: Sessiz Sedasız Yaşayanlar: Biyografide Kadın [engl.: Living

rians (1918) and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), most women's biographies were narrated according to the »good daughter, good wife, good mother« model and did not address a life story based on personal motivation, ambition, a sense of order and completion.⁵ After the rise of feminist criticism in the 1970s, the »good daughter, good wife, good mother« genre of women's biographies were critiqued and feminist biographies proliferated. In the mid-nineteenth century, in the Ottoman and later Turkish context, the novel and auto/biography as genres were taken from the west as a conscious process of modernization in narrative.⁶ Although the novel was very popular, the biography of creative writers did not develop into a popular genre in the Ottoman and later Turkish context. To date, very few biographies of male writers⁷ and hardly any biographies of women writers exist.⁸ This is why *Fatma Aliye or the Birth of an Ottoman*

Silently: Women in Biography]. In: Sibel Irzık/Jale Parla (eds.): Kadınlar Dile Düşünce: Edebiyat ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet [engl.: When Women Fall into Language: Literature and Gender]. Istanbul 2004, pp. 145-157.

- 5 Two prominent examples of this type of biography include Henry Austen's biography of Jane Austen (1818) and Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë (1857).
- 6 Even though innovation in literary form was established to replace the old storytelling tradition, the epistemological foundations of Ottoman culture had not changed. Hence, novels produced between 1870-1890 predominantly asserted apriori, idealist and absolute truths through an authoritative narrator who frequently interrupted the plot in order to dictate didactic morals to a reading group s/he considered needy of education. Parla, Jale: Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri [engl.: Fathers and Sons: The Epistemological Foundations of the Tanzimat Novel]. Istanbul 1990, p. 13.
- 7 Biography in the Ottoman and later Turkish context seems to be reserved exclusively for state leaders. The plethora of biographies of Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Turkish republic illustrates the power of biography in commemorating national heroes, characterizing a nation and its people and defining the nation's reformers and leaders. Not being »biographed« might imply not being validated as »historically significant« in- or »politically in sync« with the political and economic development of a particular nation. In Turkey, besides the multifarious biographies of Mustafa Kemal, a small number of biographies of other national heroes, state leaders and significant business people exist. However, biographies of creative writers are quite rare.
- 8 In the case of women, some of the most important documents essential to biographical writing, such as diaries, journals, and letters were destroyed. A case in point is Şair Nigar (1856-1918), whose twenty-volume diary was partly destroyed by her sons. Nazan Bekiroğlu, in her study, *Şair Nigar Hanım*, tries to construct Şair Nigar's biography through the remaining diaries. See Bekiroğlu, Nazan: Şair Nigar Hanım. Istanbul 1998.

Woman Writer (1893-4) stands as a unique text, i.e. the sole biography of a woman writer, from the mid-19th century to contemporary times. The biography is of Fatma Aliye (1862-1936), one of the first prominent woman Ottoman novelists, written by her intellectual patron, the prolific and popular writer, Ahmet Mithat (1844-1913) who produced roughly two-hundred works on a variety of subjects, ranging from mathematics, physics and chemistry to economics, history, philosophy, law, and education. Mithat's most significant works include *Letaif-i Rivayat*/Pleasant Stories (1870), *Hasan Mellah* (1874), *Hüseyin Fellah* (1875), and *Felâhî Bey ve Rakım Efendi* (1875).⁹

Fatma Aliye (1862-1936): A Bio-Sketch

Fatma Aliye was the daughter of the statesperson and historian, philologist and literary scholar, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (1822-1895). Aliye's passion for learning led her father to provide her with tutors in a period when Ottoman-Muslim girls were not typically educated (particularly not educated in foreign languages). At the age of seventeen, Aliye was proficient in French and well-educated in Islamic history, Ottoman, Arabic and French literature. Aliye's marriage to the military officer Mehmet Faik Bey (1853-1928) at the age of seventeen, prevented her from pursuing her education for eight years. Faik Bey considered it indecent for an honorable married woman to read novels and went as far as to tear several of Aliye's novels apart to underscore his demand that Aliye not continue with her educational pursuits. According to several scholars, eight years of married life defined Aliye's role as a mother to her four daughters, during which she yielded to Faik Bey's intellectual imprisonment. Between 1879-1887, the couple lived in different parts of the Empire due to the various military positions Faik Bey held. After returning to Istanbul in 1887, Aliye started her literary career. Most scholars, including Ahmet Mithat explain Aliye's début as translator, journalist, and novelist through a miraculous change in Faik Bey's opinion, concerning women's education and their right to literary production.

In 1889-1890, Aliye translated George Ohnet's *Volonté* into Turkish as *Meram*/Aspiration, signing the translation, »a woman writer.« Upon the immediate success of the translation, many of her other works had the

9 Mithat also established and wrote in a variety of newspapers, the most prominent of which was *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* [engl.: The Interpreter of Reality].

signature: »the Meram-translator/Meram Mütercimi.« After the publication of the *Volonté*-translation, for five years, Cevdet Paşa tutored Aliye himself. The literary scholar and journalist, Ahmet Mithat, the most productive and popular author of Tanzimat literature, became Fatma Aliye's literary patron, calling her »my spiritual daughter.« Fatma Aliye was profoundly influenced by Mithat's works and literary style, particularly his use of simplified Turkish. Aliye's intellectual admiration of Mithat was mutual. Mithat appreciated Fatma Aliye's talent in writing and supported her entry into journalism. Aliye wrote various articles in journals, such as *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* / The Interpreter of Reality, *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* / The Ladies' Own Gazette, *Mehasin*, *Ümmet* / The Muslim Community and *Inkılâp* / Reform. Mithat allowed most of Aliye's early work to be published in serial form in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. When Aliye started writing novels, she was the second woman novelist and the first most prolific woman writer in the Ottoman context.¹⁰

Hayal ve Hakikat / Dream and Reality¹¹ was Aliye's first attempt at novel-writing. She wrote this novel together with Ahmet Mithat, signed »A Woman and Ahmet Mithat.« The first novel to be published and signed by an Ottoman woman writer was Aliye's *Muhadarat* / Stories to Remember (1891-2). The novel, *Nisvan-ı İslam* / Muslim Women (1891-2), which explores topics related to Islam, sharia, the Muslim perception of Jesus, the wives of Prophet Mohammad, polygamy, and the meaning of veiling, was based on conversations between an Ottoman woman narrator (Fatma Aliye herself) and several western women. The work was translated into Arabic and French. In 1893, the Women's Library in Chicago invited Aliye to an international exhibition which she could not attend. Thus for the exhibition, examples from Aliye's work were requested and her life story was published in the World Exhibition Catalogue.

Aliye's other significant works include *Refet* / Mercy (1896-7), *Udi* / The Lute Player (1897-8), with a female protagonist, whose state of happiness in her profound engagement in music and literature is destroyed because of a disloyal husband. *Levayih-i Hayat* / Scenes from Life (1897-8) is an epistolary novella, exclusively with female protagonists, writing to each other about experiences of married life, betrayal of husbands and fears of arranged marriages. Most characters are aristocratic and well-edu-

10 The first Ottoman woman writer was Zafer Hanım, who wrote a single novel called *Aşk-ı Vatan* [engl.: Love of the Motherland] in 1877.

11 *Hayal ve Hakikat* was published in serial form in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* in 1891 and in book form in 1892.

cated women who discuss women's education and women's role in the marriage institution. It is significant that together with other Ottoman women writers who lived after 1928, Fatma Aliye was forgotten after the adoption of the Latin alphabet and the prohibition of the Arabic script in 1928 precisely because she could not write in the new alphabet. Most of her work was transliterated into the Latin alphabet after the eighties in Turkey, with the impact of feminist criticism and the rising interest in women writers.

The mongrel text

Produced a few years following the publication of Aliye's translation of *Volonté*, the publication of *Hayal ve Hakikat*, *Muhadarat*, and *Nisvan-ı Islam*, the biography of Aliye, as the narrator-Mithat informs us in his introduction, is a mongrel text, »half-autobiography, half-biography.«¹² The narrator of the biography explains his unique advantage of writing a biography of a living writer,¹³ which he exploits to the full by having Fatma Aliye narrate certain passages in the first person.¹⁴ This explains the reason behind describing the text as a biography/autobiography of Fatma Aliye. The emphasis on the hybridity of genre serves not only to narrate first-hand experiences which cannot be told by a foreign pen,¹⁵ but also to overcome the narrator's »anxiety of influence«,¹⁶ with regard to the appropriation of the biographical genre from the west. The Ottoman-Turkish novelist carries the anxiety of influence of having appropriated

12 Mithat Efendi, Ahmet: Fatma Aliye yahut Bir Osmanlı Yazarın Doğuşu (1895). Ed. by Bedia Ermat. Istanbul 1994, p. 13.

13 The biography of a living writer is unique considering that conventionally a person's story becomes worthy of biography only after their death. Mostly, biography is produced as a commemorative act, as a coherent and eulogic narrative of a dead person.

14 The first person account of Fatma Aliye does not exist as an autonomous text. This account was written specifically for *FA*.

15 The original is as follows: »Zira bir takım ahval vardır ki bilkülliye şahsiyat ü hususiyetlerinden dolayı onları herhalde yabancı sayılacak olan bir kalem yazamaz.« Mithat Efendi, Ahmet: Fatma Aliye yahut Bir Osmanlı Kadın Yazarın Neşeti (1895). Ed. by Müge Galin. İstanbul 1998, p. 38.

16 In the *Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom describes post-Enlightenment poetry as the desire to be unique, original and unprecedented while embodying the realization of being influenced by previous works or writers. See Bloom, Harold: *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York 1997.

western literary genres, such as the novel, autobiography, and biography.¹⁷ Therefore the fascination and enmity for the predecessor is a love-hate relationship between a western model and an Ottoman-Turkish successor. The innovation in form in *FA*¹⁸ relieves the tension of the appropriation of the biographical genre from western predecessors as the narrator of the biography emphasizes in the introduction of the work, that such a mix between autobiography and biography »has neither been written in the Ottoman language nor in any other language.«¹⁹

The Auto-biography of the Child-(Woman)

This narrative, produced by Mithat to provide Aliye a safe passage into the public sphere as a woman writer, is not about the adult but more about the child-Fatma and her adolescence. With adolescence, the autobiography or excerpts from Fatma Aliye's narrative in the first person reach an abrupt end. The initial sections of the text provide detailed accounts of Fatma Aliye's childhood and pedantic excerpts from her first memories of her family as well as their visit to various cities in the Middle East. However, Fatma Aliye's account of her life story in the first person is silenced as she becomes an adult, particularly after she is married off to Faik Paşa at the age of seventeen.

Thus, Aliye's encounter with the adolescent/adult body is not narratable. The non-narratability of the adult body in *FA* sets an interesting precedent to autobiographies of Turkish woman writers who produced works in the late twenties and thirties, such as Halide Edib's *Memoirs* (1926) and *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928) and Selma Ekrem's *Unveiled: The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (1930). These three autobiographical accounts are examples of what I would like to call »women's child autobiographies,« which silence personal history and agency, as well the narration of the body (explored in childhood) as the protagonist (»I«) passes

17 Gürbilek, Nurdan: *Erkek Yazar, Kadın Okur* [engl.: *The Male Writer, The Woman Reader*]. In: Irzık/Parla (eds.) 2004, p. 278.

18 For brevity, I will refer to *Fatma Aliye yahut Bir Osmanlı Muharririnin Neşeti* with the acronym, *FA*.

19 The original is as follows: »Bu tarz-ı nevinde bir eser Osmanlı lisanıyla henüz yazılmış olmadığı gibi, lisan-ı Osmaniden başka bir lisanla dahi yazılmamış olmasından emin bulunarak bunu karilerimize öyle bir itimad-ı kalple bittakdim mütalaasından hem pek müstefit ve hem pek mütelezziz olacaklarını bilahavıf u latereddüt temin eyleriz.« Galin 1998, p. 38.

into adulthood. For instance, in Edib's *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*, adulthood is marked by the underscoring of collective and national history at the expense of the narration of personal history. Interestingly, the non-narratability of the female adult body is confined exclusively to the realm of auto/biography, i.e. to texts which make truth-claims. In the context of the fictional work of the same writers, e. g. Halide Edib's *Kalb Ağrısı/Heart Ache* (1924) and *Zeyno'nun Oğlu/Zeyno's Son* (1926), female adulthood is narrated, while female protagonists are embodied.

In *FA*, the narrator allows Fatma Aliye to display disobedience, individuality, agency as child and daughter. Aliye starts learning French on her own, and struggles to buy books and find private tutors clandestinely at a very early age. Her passion for reading is so strong that in all naiveté she believes an old hearsay that eating the leftovers of learned people help a person become educated so she tries to eat the leftovers of a learned woman who visits her mother.²⁰ The agency of the rebellious and individualistic child-Fatma is denied both in life and in narrative as she becomes defined as a *good spouse*, synonymous with roughly eight years of intellectual deprivation. Although Aliye does not wish to get married, she is forced to get married. Although her life-long desire is to read and enhance her knowledge on science, history and literature, she is not permitted access to books when she enters her common life with her husband, Faik Paşa. Hence, in *FA*, the adult-Aliye is denied, not only a »body,« but also a »rational mind.«²¹

Fatma Aliye or the Naissance of an Ottoman Woman Reader

Even though the title of *FA* suggests a birth-story of how a woman became a prominent writer, paradoxically, in this text, Aliye does not practice writing but rather reading. A series of questions are left unanswered, for instance, how did Aliye first start writing? Did she use to keep a journal, a diary? Did she frequently write letters to friends? Was this allowed by her husband? Did she write poems or just prose? Did she hide her writing from her parents as well as from her husband? Did she write anything in the first few years of her marriage? Under what conditions? The

20 Galin 1998, p.46.

21 In *FA*, Ahmet Mithat does not narrate his own body and depicts himself purely as »rational mind.« This body-lessness is unique to *FA* since, in his autobiography, *Menfa*, he does narrate his own bodily experiences. See Mithat, Ahmet: *Menfa*, *Sürgün Hatıraları* [engl.: *Memoirs of Exile*]. Istanbul 2002, pp. 20, 21.

only reference to Aliye's writing or work in this phase, is at the end, where her translation of *Volonté*, particularly the introduction she wrote to the work is much appreciated by Cevdet Paşa, who decides to endorse her work and facilitate her intellectual progress.

Although there is very little information about the writer-Aliye, about the reader-Aliye, there is a plethora of details. Fatma Aliye is described as the reader par excellence of almost all of Ahmet Mithat's works (till the writing of *FA*.) Ahmet Mithat's works in general, including his *Müşahedat*/Visible Entitites, *Bahtiyarlık*/Bliss, *Jön Türk*/Jeune Turc have striking similarities to many other Ottoman and later Turkish novels, with female protagonists who are negatively influenced by the western literary works they read in the course of the novels. The same western literary works these female protagonists were indulged in reading, such as the work of Alexandre Dumas (father and son), Victor Hugo, and Lamartine actually influenced the Ottoman-Turkish novelists themselves; and in our case, Ahmet Mithat. The literary critic Gürbilek explains this as a means of relieving the anxiety of influence which the Ottoman-Turkish author *himself* is experiencing, but which through the feminization of the reader and the marginalization of the female protagonist²² is mitigated in the progress of the work.²³

Fitting the traditional eulogic tone of biography, Aliye and her reading-endeavor is glorified. Indeed, in *FA*, Aliye is a *female* but a *good* reader in the biography, which becomes resolved in Aliye's choice of reading and preferring Mithat's work over all the western, Ottoman, Arabic and Persian sources that she has read thus far. In Fatma Aliye's first-person account, Ahmet Mithat overcomes the anxiety of influence of western literary genres, and western science, while overcoming the anxiety of influence of traditional tales, such as *1001 Nights*, that were quite popular in the nineteenth century Ottoman context and that profoundly impacted Mithat's work.²⁴

22 The female protagonists are mostly *bad* readers in that they imitate all that they read in the western novels, and become excessively westernized or culturally corrupt.

23 Gürbilek 2004, pp. 292-295.

24 Ottoman romances (*aşık hikayeleri*) and the public story-telling tradition (*meddah hikayeleri*) had more impact on nineteenth century Ottoman novelists than they cared to admit in their conscious attempt to break away from traditional narrative forms as a process of westernization. Moran, Berna: *Türk romanına eleştirel bir bakış* 1 [engl.: A Critical Approach to the Turkish Novel]. 4. ed. Istanbul 1991, pp. 21-25.

For Aliye, the critical moment of reading is the discovery of *Hasan Mellah*/Hasan the Sailor²⁵ which makes Aliye an obsessive Mithat-reader. Mithat's anxiety of writing *Hasan Mellah* under the influence of Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1844-5) is relieved as Aliye exclaims in *FA* that *Hasan Mellah* is »unique altogether. The pleasure of reading this text was not over when I finished the book. The events of the novel happened before my eyes for quite a few months after reading it.« It is true that she had read *Monte Cristo*. As she states, »[b]ut the pleasure that I found here in this novel [Hasan Mellah], I could not find in Monte Cristo.« The political scenes in *Monte Cristo* made Aliye terrified and indeed, in order not to remember those horrible scenes, she indicated, »I did not think about that novel. *Hasan Mellah*, on the other hand, I recounted repeatedly to all the *intelligent* people I knew.«²⁶ Starting to read Mithat's work obsessively, Aliye claims preferring to read about Europe and European science through Mithat's work. Mithat's *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi*/Felatun Bey and Rakım Efendi²⁷ gives the child-Aliye a concrete base in all the different governments in Europe. The journal, *Kırkambar*/Forty Granaries,²⁸ focusing on science and philosophy, stands out as »another world, a unique world altogether«²⁹ in Aliye's words. Through *Kırkambar*, Aliye is able to read in Ottoman sophisticated scientific articles cut out for »men of letters.« The same articles she would not be able to understand in French. Considering her level in French, she would need simplified versions of the articles. Thus, Aliye thinks journals like *Kırkambar* are extremely crucial in women's (as well as men's) education, and that such journals should be continued.³⁰

25 This text was originally published in 1875.

26 The original is as follows: »Baktım ki bu bütün bütün başka bir şey. Ondan husule gelen telezzüz ve teessür öyle kitabı bitirmekle geçmedi. O romanın vakaları birkaç aylar gözümün önünde cereyan ediyor ve eşhası karşıma geliyor gibi oldu. Vakıa Monte Cristo'yu da okumuştum. Ama bundaki lezzeti onda bulamamıştım. Monte Kristo'daki meydan-ı siyaset babı pek dehşet vermiş olduğundan o dehşetler teceddüd etmesin diye romanı da tahattur etmiyordum. Hasan Mellah'ı ise daima tahatturla sevdiğim zeki zatlara hikaye dahi ediyordum. Badema *Hasan Mellah* muharriri ne kadar kitap yazarsa aldırıp okumaya başladım.« Galin 1998, pp. 55-56.

27 The work was published in 1875.

28 *Kırkambar* was published by Mithat between 1873-1877.

29 The original is as follows: »Bu bütün bütün başka bir alem.« Galin 1998, p. 56.

30 *Kırkambar* was no longer in publication during the writing of the biography. Galin 1998, pp. 65-66.

Aliye's first person narrative also overcomes the anxiety of influence of Ottoman, Arabic, and Persian literary traditions prevalent in the nineteenth century. Aliye prefers Mithat's *Letaif-i Rivayat* over *Elfuleyle/1001 Nights*, *Elfünnehari/1001 Days*,³¹ and *Hateft Peyker*³² in that *Letaif-i Rivayat* left a pleasing impression in her child's mind without giving her brain too much distress.³³ This work was better than anything she had read till the age of eleven. Through a simplified prosaic form, she would not need to focus on the old styles of poetry. The old styles of rhyme and meter gave her such fatigue that by the time the deciphering phase was through, the content of the material would encounter an exhausted brain.³⁴

Child Pedagogy or Mithat, the literary therapist

The singular example of Aliye provides a general guide to child pedagogy, particularly female pedagogy, as the narrator warns parents and educators against gender bias in education. The prominent French tutor, Ilyas Matar Efendi is reprimanded by the narrator of *FA* for discrimination against girl tutees, because he persists upon a miniscule French dictionary (*Müteakiben Kalfa*) for Aliye, when her capability is far behind the scope of the tiny book.³⁵ The narrator also encourages Muslim girls, just like non-Muslims to be taught European languages, particularly French, in order to follow the progress of Western civilization.³⁶ Lastly, through the example of Aliye, who, oxymoronically, is a *good female* reader, the narrator vouches for the benefits of allowing girls to read novels. Through

31 Both were collections of tales, translated from Arabic into Ottoman in the early nineteenth century.

32 This is a persian poem by Nizami (1141-1209).

33 Galin 1998, p. 55.

34 The original is as follows: »Türkçe bir tarih okuduğumda içindeki elfaz-I Arabiye ve Farsiye'yi halletmek ve seci ü kafiye için teksir ü israf edilen elfazın manalarını arayıp bulmak bir mesele-i uzma olup maksat anlaşılmaaksızın kafa yoruluyor ve nihayetinde alınabilen malumat yorgunlukla karışık bir kafaya giriyor.« Galin 1998, p. 64.

35 Galin 1998, p. 53. Ilyas Matar Efendi makes Aliye study from a tiny dictionary when she could have learnt more vocabulary from a more comprehensive dictionary. Ilyas Matar Efendi is reprimanded by Mithat for underestimating the capability of a girl as opposed to a boy tutee.

36 Galin 1998, p. 57.

novels, girls, like Aliye, can enhance their knowledge of historical and political events and scientific advancements. Mithat's own *Hasan Mellah*, *Pariste Bir Türk*/A Turk in Paris, *Hüseyin Fellah*, *Süleyman-ı Musli* are particularly prone to such a purely historical, political and scientific reading.³⁷

The fear of Ottoman females as bad readers, as mot-à-mot imitators of the content of European novels, is dismissed by the male narrator of *FA*, who heralds Aliye's puritanical reading of novels. Not only does Aliye not care much for the love and sexuality in novels but learns the »evil and dangerous,« i. e. the more realistic aspects of love which she would not be able to learn from fairy tales or legends. The male narrator records that novels did not evoke feelings of love and sexual attraction toward men, on the contrary, they made her fear approaching men altogether.³⁸ The ultimate benefit of such a puritanical and man-fearing pedagogical reading endeavor for girls is to prevent them from spending their time idly, and fantasizing; thus to prevent them from being prone to hysteria. Hence, the right kind of female pedagogy, particularly the consumption of the Mithadian canon is sealed as a prescription against hysterical tendencies. The text then, through the first-person narrative of Fatma Aliye, canonizes Mithat's work for the education of Ottoman children and adolescents. *FA*, turning to not an analysis of Fatma Aliye's work but to an analysis of Ahmet Mithat's, serves as a mini-biography of Mithat, eulogizing Mithat's work without giving the status of writer or authority of biographer to Fatma Aliye. The Ottoman woman writer is reader-ized while creativity is reserved for the male space, the biographer. Ahmet Mithat constructs himself as the *native* literary father for the writer-Aliye or the ideal Ottoman woman reader who despite her wide French and Ottoman reading repertoire, prefers Mithat's work.

37 The following was narrated by the male narrator as having been narrated by Aliye: »Müşarünileyha asar-ı acizanemziden Hasan Mellah, Pariste Bir Türk, Hüseyin Fellah, Süleyman-ı Musli vesaire gibi esasları tarih üzerine müesses ü müpteni bulunan şeylerden dahi roman nokta-ı nazarından pek büyük istifadelere muvaffak olduklarını itiraf eyliyorlar. Romanların bu yolda havi oldukları malumat u muhakemat-ı muvazzahayı başka kitaplarda bulamadıklarından böyle tarihi ve ilmi olan romanları adeta birer kiraat-ı ilmiye ve tarihiye suretinde okuduklarını söylüyorlar.« Galin 1998, p. 67.

38 Galin 1998, p. 67.

Fathers and Daughters as Writers: Juxtaposing Gender Asymmetry

At the age of eleven, she started reading all the works that were produced from my ›worthless‹ pen with a deep curiosity and passion, and even memorized some passages. She could preserve some of these in her memory.³⁹

If Aliye were created by some miracle through an obsessive reading of Mithat's work, then how was it possible for Mithat to overcome the anxiety of *influencing*? The biography was produced in an environment when Aliye's work was mostly accused of being very close in style to Mithat's, as certain literary critics assumed Mithat was writing the work and letting Aliye sign it upon publication.⁴⁰ Even though Mithat finds Aliye's proximity of style to his »natural« considering her choice of reading material, *FA* is organized in such a way as to bring Mithat-the writer and Aliye-the writer into contact precisely in order to differentiate between their styles and modes of writing. In this respect, the individual styles in the relational and differential dialogue between Mithat and Aliye make *FA* strikingly similar to their previous collaborative effort, *Hayal ve Hakikat*/Dream and Reality.

Hayal ve Hakikat operates in a dichotomous gendered space, where the emotional, hallucinatory, and hysterical space of woman (which draws fuzzy boundaries between the female narrator and the female protagonist) is corrected, organised, edited, re-written and dismissed and diagnosed as sick and hysterical by the rational, scientific space of male protagonist and male narrator.⁴¹ The initial part of the novel, written by Aliye, narrates a female protagonist, Vedad, who has no language. With the exception of a short introduction about longing for her beloved, she cannot speak on her own, i.e. without the help of a female narrator. The female

39 The original is as follows: »11 yaşında ›benim‹ değersiz kalemimden çıkmış ne kadar eserim varsa hepsini büyük bir merakla ve istekle okumuş; hatta bazı yerlerini ezberlemiş. Her okuduğunu hafızasında saklayabilmişlerdir.« Ermat 1994, p. 45.

40 Several critics assumed the *Volonté* translation belonged to Fatma Aliye's brother Ali Sedat Bey. In *FA*, Mithat makes sure to point out that Ali Sedat Bey was wholeheartedly against Fatma Aliye becoming a writer, Galin 1998, p. 73. Cevdet Paşa was convinced Ahmet Mithat had edited Aliye's translation, which Mithat refutes in *FA*. Critics believed *Nisvan-ı İslam* was written either by Cevdet Paşa or by Ahmet Mithat.

41 For a similar analysis of gender difference and enactment of hysteria in the Victorian and French contexts see Showalter, Elaine, *Female Malady* New York 1985.

narrator describes Vedad in the third person, but the empathetic and pitying tone and the constant shifts between the first person and third obfuscate the line between Vedad and the female narrator. Not only Vedad's, but the female narrator's account needs to be corrected by the fictional character Vefa who claims to disown all that has been assumed about him by the character Vedad and by the female narrator. Thus Vefa's account is corrective; his rationality and credibility triumph over the hallucinatory and unreliable account of Vedad. The psychoanalyst Mithat enters the text in the epilogue, stamping Vedad hysterical, siding with Vefa's account of the story and giving a scientific discussion of means of preventing hysteria.

The signature of »a woman« to signal Aliye's part in the novel, who cannot participate in name-giving, further underlines the performance of anonymous womanhood, i.e. unanimous hysteria and unreliability, female insanity in confrontation with scientific male rationality. Likewise *FA* creates a set of binary oppositions to highlight the difference between Mithat-the writer and Aliye-the writer, as Aliye recounts her narrative in the first person. In comparison to the rational narrator Mithat, Aliye is the voice of emotions, passion, and hysteria. Unlike Vedad in *Hayal ve Hakikat*, who was fixated on the male object of unrequited love, Aliye's narrative in the first person directs the language of sentimentality, not to men but to books. The »adolescent I« describes her interest in learning French as having »found the degree of love/passion. The zeal to get hold of the French alphabet was so strong as to occupy my dreams at night.« When her tutor brings her an illustrated alphabet, she recalls, »I looked at this page uninterruptedly for four days in a row, not understanding a thing.«⁴² The passion to progress in French could have led her to insanity⁴³ and she wanted nothing but to be locked up in a room with big French dictionaries.⁴⁴ Her passion reaches masochistic levels, particularly upon encountering the multiplicity of books by the author of *Hasan Mel-lah*. »With these concerns, I neither wanted to eat nor sleep.«⁴⁵

Similar to the differential relationship of Charcot to his queen of hysterics, Blanche Wittmann,⁴⁶ the particular dichotomous and gendered

42 Galin 1998, p. 53.

43 The original is as follows: »Elhasil Fransızca'yı ilerletmek için cinnet derecesine varan hevesimi[...]« Galin 1998, p. 51.

44 The original is as follows: »Aklım fikrim yeşil kitaplarda. Ah onlar ile beni bir odaya kapasalar da bildiğim istediğim gibi onları karıştırsam.« Galin 1998, p. 59.

45 Galin 1998, p. 56.

46 Charcot hypnotized and exhibited many hysterical women in his lectures at the Salpêtrière as performances of hysteria. See Showalter 1985, p. 148.

space in *Hayal ve Hakikat* and to a certain degree in *FA* is quite performative. The emotional and uncertain female narrator in *FA*, whose narrative is at times disorganized and chaotic, where the uncertainty is signaled with questions at the end of the passages is in an oppositional interaction with the rational male narrator who answers the questions, edits, and rewrites the particular excerpts of Aliye's first person account.

Traditionally, biographies extol the protagonist and create a hierarchical relationship where the protagonist gains precedence over the narrator. Certain theorists of biography analyze the author/narrator of biography as invisible even when the narrator is the most powerful person in the biography.⁴⁷ However *FA* is a narcissistic biography, which reverses this hierarchical relationship as it prioritizes the narrator over the protagonist. The reversed hierarchical relationship reveals the power relations in the text, organized according to gender and to a certain extent, seniority. The narcissistic biography uses Aliye's first person account to reflect an eulogic mirror image of the narrator. The narrator illustrates how Aliye, the mirror image, is the narrator's own construction, as Aliye is born through a persistent reading of Mithat's work. The narrator's control over the text defeats the initial claim that the text is »half biography, half autobiography« because the autobiographical sections have been evoked »from the female author« in line with »all that I [Mithat] would like her [Aliye] to say from her own pen.«⁴⁸ Lastly, the narcissistic biography imposes itself on extratextual reality, as the controlling narrator announces, »Voilà, *this book is you*, my daughter. I am presenting *you* to you. You cannot refuse, can you?«⁴⁹ (Aliye could not refuse.)

»From Eve, Minerva, Sophia and Galatea onward,« women have been narrated as the »children of male brains, ribs and ingenuity.«⁵⁰ With its textual and extratextual strategies of male control, *FA* obtains a unique place in this complex history of patriarchal mythology and literature where women, and in our case, Aliye, are generated *from, by* and *for* men.

47 Backscheider, Paula: *Reflections on Biography*. Oxford 1999, p. 3.

48 Mithat seems to have exercised control over Fatma Aliye's first-person accounts; however, this does not imply that he wrote those accounts himself. The original of the quotation is as follows: »Muharrir-i müşarünileyhaya kendi kalemiyle söyletmek istediğimiz şeyleri dahi o veçhile söyletmeye muvaffak olabildik [...].« Galin 1998, p. 38.

49 The original is as follows: »İşte bu kitap sensin kızım! Seni sana takdim ediyorum. Kabul etmemezlik edemezsin ya?« Galin 1998, p. 35.

50 Gilbert, Sandra/Gubar, Susan: *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, London 1979, p. 12.

Towards a feminist biography

FA was published (particularly the book form) at a crucial moment in Aliye's passage into the public sphere as a woman writer. Upon the death of her biological father and intellectual patron, Cevdet Paşa⁵¹ (1895), the need for Mithat's intellectual patronage became critical, particularly against a husband, whose endorsement was questionable, a brother and an Ottoman reading public who were not supportive of Aliye's endeavor to continue as a writer. A feminist critique should not be content with a critical reading of a nineteenth-century Ottoman narcissist biography, which narrates a biographer's masculine hubris of subordinating its female protagonist, Fatma Aliye. A critique of *FA* does not explain the absence of biography of women writers in general in the Ottoman-Turkish context. It certainly does not explain the absence of different versions of Aliye's biography after 1895. The critique of *FA* provides us with two rudimentary methods to start writing a feminist biography of Fatma Aliye or any other female writer. First, the critique of *FA* leads us to inquire into Fatma Aliye's agency as adult-woman. A new biography of Aliye, for instance, should try to explain her struggle to become a writer despite her tyrannical husband. Mithat explains this process through a *deus ex machina*, which turns Faik Paşa from oppressive to liberal husband overnight. Mithat's insertion of this *deus ex machina* does not explain or give meaning to Fatma Aliye's personal agency; rather, it portrays Aliye as the »ideal, submissive wife.« Hence, a feminist biography must first kill Aliye-as-»angel in the house« to delineate her struggle to become a writer despite her husband's resistance. The critique of *FA* also points to the absence of an analysis of Aliye's fictional work. Aliye's depiction as a passive reader must be countered by a critical engagement with her creative work. Further, in writing biographies or academic work on women writers, fiction or the fictional contract, i. e. that »overt practice of non-identity between the author and the protagonist«⁵² that realm where most women writers conceal and communicate their autobiographical impulses should be consulted. Fiction, in some women writers, is not only a cipher to communicate autobiographical information in cryptic form but a forum for feminist desire and utopia, a desire not accomplished in life. This desire, for instance, the autonomous, financially and emotionally independent

51 References to Cevdet Paşa as »the deceased Cevdet Paşa« in *FA* signal the fact that he must have died before *FA* was published in book form.

52 Lejeune, Philippe: The Autobiographical Contract. In: Tzvetan Todorov: French Literary Theory Today. Cambridge 1982, p. 203.

female protagonists of Aliye's fiction (e. g. *Udi*) cannot be analyzed apart from Aliye's own life story. Where feminist rebellion might be missing in real life, fiction, as desire, might compensate for the absence. At the end of Aliye's novel *Udi*, when the autonomous protagonist Bedia dies, the female narrator talks about her debt in writing Bedia's life story, »Bedia is gone. That music! That voice! That intelligence! That sentiment! [...] Are all those gone? [...] But these must be written. Because those passions, those feelings are now her will [...].«⁵³ As a tribute to Bedia, to Aliye, and to many women (writers), »these life stories« must absolutely be written and re-written.⁵⁴

53 The original is as follows: »Bedia gitti. O saz! O ses! O zeka! O his! [...] Onlar da bitti mi? [...] Fakat yazmak lazımdı. Zira o arzular, o hevesler artık vasiyet yerine geçecekti [...].« Aliye, *Fatma: Udi* (1899). Ed. by Ferit Ragıp Tuncor. Istanbul 2002, p. 126.

54 Many thanks to Dilek Tokay for her editorial assistance.