

**DESIRED AND PORTRAYED CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN
IN MODERN TURKISH LITERATURE: 1960-1980**

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, Türk kadınının 1960'tan 1980'e kadar Türk toplumundaki ve yazarların kaleminden çıkan edebî eserlerdeki (roman, hikaye ve oyunlardaki) yeri ele alınmıştır. Çalışmamız, bahsedilen yıllar arasında kadının Türk toplumunda ikinci planda kalıp kalmadığını ve kendisine sunulan imkanları yeterince kullanıp kullanmadığını hem toplumsal hem de edebî boyutuyla incelemeyi hedefler. Çalışmada, ele alınan roman, hikaye ve oyunlarda yazarların eserlerinde işledikleri kadınlarda, kadınlara verilen hakları nasıl yorumladıkları, onların nasıl bir kadın portresi çizdiği incelenmeye çalışılarak toplumda yaşanan değişimin sanat potasında yoğunluğu gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca, kadına yönelik eski yaklaşımların edebî eserlerde ne kadar devam ettiğine ve bu yaklaşımlarda edebî eserlere yansıyan herhangi bir değişim olup olmadığına ve eğer olmuşsa ne şekilde olduğuna bu çalışmada açıklık getirmek hedeflenmiştir. Bunu yaparken de edebî eserlerde ele alınan kadın karakterlerin analizleri (karakterizasyonları) yapılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk romanı, Türk hikayesi, Türk tiyatrosu, kadın, kadın kimliği.

ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the position of women in Turkish society since 1960, and the portrayal of these women in selected novels, short stories and plays of Turkish authors from 1960 until 1980. It examines whether the subordination of women in society is ascribed in literary works to their supposed innate inferiority as women, or is shown to be a consequence of women's circumscribed position and limited possibilities. This study illustrates the extent to which literature appears to reinforce old ideas and expectations about women, and how much it tends towards a deeper analysis of character and behaviour.

Key words: Turkish novel, Turkish short story, Turkish plays, woman, identity of woman.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1960 and 1980 have seen a growing interest in sociological and anthropological analysis of Turkish society, and through these studies there seems to have emerged a general consensus that the capitalist basis of Turkish society has served to cast woman into the role of consumer, and one who attempts to achieve upward social mobility by conspicuous consumption and through marriage.¹ Women are encouraged to greater and greater expenditure on luxury goods by the mass media and large circulation magazines.² The male and female stereotypes to be found in television advertisements reinforce common ideas: men are to be seen reading, drinking, driving, participating in sport, wearing 'distinguished' clothes and making decisions, while women appear following the fashions, applying make-up, knitting, washing up, doing laundry, cleaning the house and looking after children.³ Formal education also directs women into the role of consumer rather than producer. Gül Ergil's article shows that in three Five Year Plans produced by the State Planning Organisation girls' education has been set the aim of making girls into good housewives or channeling them into 'suitable' occupations; women are thus deterred from breaking out from certain specific 'female' occupations and this in turn hinders improvement in women's status in society.⁴ Furthermore, it has been claimed that the liberation of women increasingly becoming transformed into a "conspicuous consumption item for males" as she has begun to enjoy leisure, rather than being a productive member of society.⁵

Changes in the structure of production have inevitably brought about important developments in the attitudes and value judgements relating to women, who are now in danger of being condemned broadly as parasitic luxuries even though they may be highly educated and credited with as much intelligence as men. Blinded by the desire to satisfy their materialistic acquisitiveness, which is encouraged on all sides, women's political

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¹ Nermin Abadan-Unat, "Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women", *International Migration Review* XI, No. 1, (Spring 1977), p. 45.

² Nermin Abadan-Unat, "Toplumsal Değişme ve Türk Kadını (1926-1976)", in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, Nermin Abadan-Unat (ed.), Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, Ankara 1979, p. 35.

³ Tansı Şenyapılı, "Metropol Bölgelerin Yeni Bir Ögesi Gecekondulu Kadın", in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, Nermin Abadan-Unat (ed.), p. 302. Şenyapılı also states that until the time of writing not one television commercial had shown a woman reading.

⁴ Gül Ergil, "Üç Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planlarında Kadınlara İlişkin Siyasetler ve Dolaylı Sonuçları", in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, Nermin Abadan-Unat (ed.), p. 231.

⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Sex Roles and Social Change: A Comparative Appraisal of Turkey's Women", *Signs (Journal of Women in Culture and Society)* III, No. 1, (Autumn 1977), p. 73.

consciousness is suppressed, and they become alienated from the struggle to improve society and find solutions to the real problems facing society.

The role of consumer, rather than producer, is most widely applicable to urban women, especially upper class urban women, not only because of the obvious practical limitations but also because among the poorer and rural women exposure to either formal education or the mass media is very limited. It is perhaps worth stating that women need not only opportunities to become literate, but also an unrestrictive social environment which will encourage them to use their literacy skills once acquired.⁶ In 1970 the discrepancy in literacy rates between men and women was 7 to 4 in Turkey as a whole⁷ but a survey carried out in 220 villages in 1968 indicates an even wider disparity outside urban centres.⁸ The report by the Türk İktisatçılar Birliği concludes that, cut off from outside influences and knowledge of other ways of life and conditions, women are led to accept their own situation as natural, and not to strive for change.⁹

In the light of the preceding comments, it seems that women generally, whether consumer or producer, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, are unlikely to become a positive force for change in society. Another very important factor must also be taken into account, that is the female socialisation process, which Nermin Abadan-Unat describes thus: "She is taught discretion, chastity and obedience and is constantly encouraged to become mentally ready for situations requiring a high degree of adjustment."¹⁰ Mübaccel Kıray relates the nature of the female socialisation process specifically to the fact that marriage is generally a girl's sole aim. So a girl is brought up ready to adapt to her husband's family and a new environment, and prepared to be a second class member of this new environment.¹¹ Furthermore, in order to be able to assert her influence to any degree at all, when the supremacy of her male relatives is virtually absolute, she has to learn subtlety, dissimulation and the art of persuasion.

The successful working of this process is illustrated in the results of a survey carried out among university girls and their mothers in İstanbul which

⁶ Ayşe Kudat Sertel, "Sex Differences in Status and Attitudes in Rural Turkey", *Hacettepe Bulletin of Social Sciences and Humanities* IV, No. 1, (1972), p. 63.

⁷ Füsün Tayanç and Tunç Tayanç, *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Tarih Boyunca Kadın*, Toplum Yayınevi, Ankara 1977, p. 145.

⁸ Ahmet Tuğaç, "Indices of Modernization: Erenköy, A Case of Local Initiative", *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives*, Peter Benedict *et al* (eds.), E. J. Brill, Leiden 1974, p.160.

⁹ Türk İktisatçılar Birliği, *Türkiye'de Kadının Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumu*, TIB Yayınları, Ankara 1975, p. 70.

¹⁰ Abadan-Unat, "Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women", p. 37-38.

¹¹ Mübaccel Belik Kıray, *Ereğli: Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası*, T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, Ankara 1964, p. 121.

found that most mothers defined their roles in pre-dominantly domestic terms; and that for many the 'successful' woman could be defined as the 'good mother and wife'.¹² Both mothers and daughters were high in agreement with the suggestion that women should not give priority to their own interests at the expense of domestic harmony.¹³ It should not be forgotten that the ideal of the submission of women to male authority is reinforced by religious tradition, and wide currency is still enjoyed by popular myths that calaim domestic chores and food preparation are integral parts of 'femininity' along with childbirth and motherhood, and that the female brain is incapable of applying itself willingly to serious study. Evidence of this is provided by publications such as *Türk Kadını* (1978) by Hacer Hicran Göze and *Kadın-Aşk-Aile* (1978) by Peyami Safa and by a survey carried out among some *gecekondu* women in the 1960s, which found that 60 per cent of these women considered men more intelligent than women.¹⁴

Despite these rather depressing pictures of women as voracious consumers, or hard-working but ignorant villagers who are invariably submissive, respectful and dutiful wives, we might expect some examples of defiance among those women who have benefited from the opportunities for higher education and whose political consciousness has been raised, who see beyond the seductive lure of consumer goods and seek a more meaningful liberation from traditional lifestyles than merely the freedom to spend money. In the wake of the new constitution of 1961, which seemed to promise true liberation to all the people of Turkey, and in the atmosphere of social unrest which characterised the 1960s and 1970s we might also expect a call from already politically conscious men for women to join them in their struggle against social injustice and oppression generally, and perhaps a call for women take action themselves to achieve self-fulfilment, and to realise their full potential, both as individuals and as a group. In the literature of this period we might expect such 'feminine' characteristics as submission, passivity and resignation to be condemned as qualities contributing to women's enduring acceptance of victimisation and oppression. And we might expect the future to be shown to be dependent on men and women working together to overthrow all forms of exploitation, and on women's active participation in the struggle, as indeed the earlier works of Yaşar Kemal (such as *İnce Memed* and *Teneke*) have shown in the characters of Hürü Ana and Zeyno Karı.

¹² Deniz Kandiyoti, "Intergenerational Change Among Turkish Women", Paper presented to the 9th World Congress of Sociology, Upsala, Sweden, 14-19 August 1978.

¹³ Kandiyoti, *ibid.*, Table 9.

¹⁴ Sabine Dirks, *La Famille Musulmane Turque-Son Evolution au 20e. Siècle*, Mouten, Le Hague 1969, p. 110.

WOMEN IN LITERATURE

The plays *Yalan* (1962) by Orhan Asena and *Merdiven* (1966) by Nazım Kurşunlu do not present any resounding denunciation of society itself, but both are severely critical of the extremely superficial social values held, in the main, by women. In *Yalan* the values attached to feminine beauty and appearances, and in *Merdiven* the value attached to the mere display of wifely attentiveness come under fire. Both plays roundly condemn female misuse of power. The characters in *Yalan* all betray remarkable weakness, not least the male characters, but the mother takes advantage of her husband's weakness to take a lover, while both daughters, the one plain, the other pretty, are so convinced of the importance of physical beauty that the one commits suicide for the lack of it, and the other picks quarrels with her plain sister because she cannot believe that she herself is not really preferred by her plain sister's fiancé.

In *Merdiven*, Şefika is shown to be attentive to her husband's inconsequential needs and desires: she is solicitous and considerate, handing him his hat and coat when he goes out, and such like, but she pays no heed to his more serious wishes and her decisions rule his life, as illustrated on the occasion when he, Hamdi, is interviewed by İsmail, his prospective employer:

“İsmail: He can start work tomorrow!

Şefika: Where?

İsmail: In my office. (Şefika gives Hamdi a worried look.)

Hamdi: What can I do in his office?

İsmail: You won't get tired, don't worry! (...)

Şefika: Say yes, Hamdi accept!

Hamdi: If you don't mind, I'd like to think about it.

(...)

Şefika: All right Mr. İsmail, don't mind him! It is accepted...” (p. 10)

That Şefika's control and management of her weak husband is presented as a negative force is evident in the fact that it is her mismanagement of their lives that results in them falling down the 'ladder' (of social ranking) of the title. From retired civil servant in his own pleasant garden house at the start of the play, Hamdi is reduced to selling on the streets the artificial flowers which his wife makes, and living in a *gecekondu* (unauthorized construction set up in one night, squatter's house). It is the one of the best example for the theme of the weak husband manipulated by an unscrupulous wife in Turkish literature.

In Fakir Baykurt's novel *Yılanların Öcü* (1959) there is another characterisation of a woman in a 'meaning' role, but this time in the context of a mother-son relationship and with a positive interpretation. The woman in question is Irazca and her authority over her son Bayram is made quite explicit very early in the novel:

"Bayram's mother was still alive, and she made her son listen to her in almost everything. She was the head of the household." (p. 9)

Irazca is the one who takes the initiative in resisting encroachments on their household rights, and she does not hesitate to encourage a liaison between her son and another woman as a means of taking revenge against the woman's husband. She is genuinely fond of her daughter-in-law, but does not hesitate to put her happiness at risk for the sake of her own vengefulness and her son's pleasure. She uses her protected position as an old woman to exceed the bounds of behaviour normally tolerated in a small community with strict notions of honour: when she confronts Haceli, the man responsible for the threat to her household's rights, she insults his wife – the woman she later contrives to have her son sleep with:

"Your wife is a slut. Why should we put up with your smelly wife?" (p. 45-46)

In fact Haceli's wife Fatma is only 'slovenly' because of the unhealthy conditions in which she lives, and Irazca actually finds her more becoming than her daughter-in-law Haçca who has lost her youth through hard work and bearing three children. Haçca is portrayed as industrious, considerate, gentlewoman who goes out of her way to avoid arousing comment. For example, when she and Bayram return from working in the fields she insists on alighting from the cart before entering the village rather than create a cause for comment. She has devoted all her energy since marriage to building up the family farm and improving their home, even taking over the work on the land normally done by her husband while he was away doing his military service.

The difference between Haçca, a model of industriousness and devotion to home and family, and Fatma, slovenly and unfaithful to her husband, is implicitly ascribed to the simple fact that Haçca has the good fortune to be married to a 'good' man, while Fatma is married to a low, somewhat despicable fellow. In other words a woman's character is easily moulded by life's circumstances, and has no strong form of its own. This is also applies to the apparently strong character of Irazca, for her personality has been shaped by hardship and strengthened by having to struggle alone, without a man to protect her. She is, like the strong village women created by Yaşar Kemal such as Hürü Ana and Zeyno Karı, implicitly past the age of sexual activity or desire, and is therefore eligible to be endowed with

'masculine' characteristics of rebelliousness, determination, courage and steadfastness in her decisions. She is, in short, a character "drawn with male lines".¹⁵

The predominant feature of Fakir Baykurt's positively portrayed women characters is their industriousness rather than their readiness to do battle against society's wrongs. Among the short stories in the collection *Cüce Muhammet* (1964), in *Beşik Örtüsü Şakkafa's wife* is described: "When she worked she never got tired, it was as if she was relaxing." (p. 74) and in *Keziban Gelin* the woman of the title is introduced:

"You could hardly find a woman as hard working as Keziban, nor one who put up with so much hardship without so much as raising an eyebrow." (p. 105)

In *Bekir Yıldız'* stories women's capacity for hard work is again extolled, but there are also women like *Fatma* in *Yılanların Öcü*: a woman who feels no commitment to be loyal to a husband she feels no affection for and to whom she was married against her wishes. *Bekir Yıldız'* story *Kesik El* (1968) vividly illustrates how the constraints put upon the free development and expression of women's personality begin much earlier than the moment of marriage to an undesired spouse. The story concerns a young girl, *Fadime*. When she reaches the age of 13 her mother makes her start to wear *çarşaf* (women's outdoor overgarment) and *peçe* (veil) when she takes lunch to the men working in the fields:

"*Fadime* set off with the food under her arm.... Along the tracks which she had gone down laughing and skipping one day before, now went her black shadow. It was as if this slight young girl's shadow. Had been flattened like an onion crushed by a blow from a fist..." (p. 16)

Fadime is attracted to one of the village boys, *Osman*, but when he is sent off to do his military service she is forced to marry another. However, when *Osman* returns to the village he visits *Fadime* and she, unable to resist her romantic longing, accepts him into the house despite the risk. The story *Davud ile Sedef* (1969) has a similar theme, although in this case the woman surrenders to purely physical desire, rather than a physical desire within the context of an emotional attachment to the illicit lover. In the same collection of stories *Kuma* (1969) shows a woman so devoted to her husband that she arranges for him to take a second wife, as she has not borne him any children. The story reveals the folly of such blind devotion rather than extolling it. In *Dünyadan Bir Atlı Geçti* (1975) the story *Bir Nazlı Vardı* describes a young wife who is prepared even to suffer death for the sake of her husband, whom she loves; she is innocent and loyal in the face of

¹⁵ İbrahim Tatarlı and Reza Mollof, *Marksist Açıdan Türk Romanı*, Habora Kitabevi, İstanbul 1969, p. 224.

corruption and treachery. The common element in these stories of Bekir Yıldız is the refusal to accept a woman's loyalty and devotion to her husband at its face value as a positive attribute, instead there is the strong suggestion that women should be free to form relationships in which the expression of such qualities will be properly valued and reciprocated.

Hidayet Sayın's play Pembe Kadın (1965) also portrays a woman whose devotion to her absent husband for 30 long years ultimately is proved to have been totally misguided. The woman, Pembe of the title has had a hard life bringing up her daughter on her own, ever since her husband left, promising to return one day. Alone with her thoughts she complains bitterly about his neglect of his family responsibilities, but in front of daughter and in the face of scepticism from other women of the village she is loyal and firm in the avowal of her belief that one day her husband will return as he promised. The woman is obviously obstinate and stubborn, and does not face up to reality: she refuses to marry her daughter in the absence of her husband, even though the girl is now 30 years old and becoming the subject of gossip, if not ridicule, in the village. The girl is portrayed as hard working, respectful to her mother as far as her patience will allow, but slowly becoming exasperated by her mother's dogged refusal to let her marry – an exasperation which finally culminates in a defiant attempt at last to escape her mother's domination. However, her decision to elope with the Ağa's steward is no more rational than her mother's decision to go and seek out her husband, who according to the latest news has become quite wealthy and has married again. Although Pembe is determined to seek out her husband now that she has received news of him, she stands to achieve nothing by confronting him with his neglected responsibilities (herself and her daughter). The daughter Keziban's headstrong action in trying to elope is also foolish, since there is a suspicion that the man in question is no good, and indeed Pembe is convinced that he was involved in an attack on her in which she lost two fingers, so Keziban's marriage to him would undoubtedly alienate her from her mother considerably.

Cahit Atay's play Ana Hanım-Kız Hanım (1964) opens with mother daughter both beomaning the departure of their men, and wondering how they will manage alone. But each is so wrapped up with her own problems that she pays no heed to the other. Kız Hanım is shown as a most solicitous wife, accepting her husband's blows without a murmur, and ministering to his every need. Her husband blames her for the fact that after five years of marriage she is still childless, so she procures a blind girl to join their household as a second wife, in the hope that she will bear children for her husband. The plan does not succeed; once again a woman's self-denial for the sake of her husband fails to secure stability or happiness in the marriage. The same basic question is given a slightly different setting in another play Sultan Gelin (1965) written by the same author. In this play

Sultan is married to a sickly young man who is a complete stranger to her on her wedding night. She feels nothing but pity for him, and shows genuine concern for his condition. He is unable to consummate the marriage, but she is prepared to cover up for him in order to protect his reputation. When he dies Sultan is forced to stay on in his parents' household and wait for the younger son to reach marriageable age. Having played a large part in bringing up this young boy Sultan cannot bring herself to insist that he take her as his wife; instead she helps him to escape so that he can elope with the girl he is in love with. Sultan's self sacrifice and willingness to help others are in sharp contrast to her inability to help herself in any way. Her industriousness serves only to win a higher bride price for her father's benefit, and her generosity of spirit is totally altruistic.

In Kurban (1967) by Güngör Dilmen the heroine Zehra is an even more tragic figure. She is portrayed as a loving mother and a faithful, devoted wife. But because of illness she is not able to satisfy her husband's physical desires. She is quite evidently a woman of intelligence, determination and great moral strength. She is caught in a situation in which her own home is at risk, and she is not prepared to sacrifice her identity for the sake of her husband's passion for another woman. She also sees the introduction of another woman into the household as a threat to the well-being of her children, and tries to persuade her husband to give up this other woman for the sake of both herself and the children. When her husband appears to have had a change of heart Zehra is immediately ready to forgive and forget. Mahmut, her husband, refers to have the conversation Zehra had overheard between himself and Mirza, the brother and guardian of the girl whom he has such passion for:

"Mahmut: (apologetically) Just now there was someone talking to Mirza -you know- in the other room. It wasn't me, I swear it.

Zehra: (understandingly) No, it wasn't you.

Mahmut: Just suppose that you saw a bad dream.

Zehra: Let's forget about it now." (p. 43)

However, the following day when, having been unable to conquer his desire after all, Mahmut arrives at the house with his new bride, Zehra is unshakeable in her determination not to surrender her intrinsic rights to the satisfaction of her husband's irrational passion. She answers all pleas and exhortations from her husband, the bride's brother, the village headman and the wedding party first with silence, then with cool, reasoned refusal even in the face of threats to break the door down:

"Mahmut: What's got into you, woman, making me look ridiculous today of all days?

Zehra: A person's being ridiculous is no fault of others." (p. 96)

"Zehra: My door is not open to uninvited guests.

(...)

Mirza: My sister is coming to her own house.

Zehra: If this house is my home it is not hers." (p. 98)

"Muhtar: If you won't open the door willingly, open it in the name of the law.

Zehra: Has the government brought out a law to force entry into the home of a woman with two children?

Muhtar: Don't twist my words.

Zehra: Your words are already twisted." (p. 100)

Zehra will not allow any compromise on her integrity, but in order to maintain it she is left with no alternative but to cease living in a society which insists on compromise from its women. Zehra is a dramatic representation of the spirit of resistance required of women if they are to gain recognition of the rights that have been granted in law. She is a simple village woman rising consciousness leads her to take tragic action, but in this tragedy lies hope for future generations; the old woman Halime realises the significance of Zehra's action:

"Halime: Then something will happen today. That cry which for a thousand, thousand years the women of Anatolia have stifled within them will perhaps spring from your heart." (p. 81)

*Moving on to characterisations of urban women in this period I shall first consider two very different works by Aziz Nesin. This writer is most famous for his humorous short stories, but I have selected a play, *Tut Elimden Rovni* (1970), which the author himself considers one of his best works, and *Tatlı Betüş* (1973), a sizeable book which first appeared as a serial in 1958, was revised and republished in 1964 and revised again to be published in its latest form in 1973. *Tut Elimden Rovni* features a woman who resists innovation and risk in both her professional life and her private life. She longs for a quiet, peaceful life of domesticity. But she feels guilty that her reluctance to participate in her husband's desires to improve and make changes in the stage act which they perform together is responsible for his constant need for new stimulation and search for a meaning to life. *Mela* is a strong character who has retained her identity even after years of both professional and domestic partnership with her husband. But again the suggestion is here that in an unsuccessful partnership the woman's integrity*

will inevitably be compromised in some way: Mela is virtually an alcoholic – she must escape from the reality of her life in order to continue to survive in it. In his study of Aziz Nesin as a humorist A. Gall finds Mela in *Tut Elimden Rovni* the strongest feminine character of Nesin's fiction¹⁶, although he also points out that few of his stories rely on characterisation and that a striking feature of Nesin's works generally is the paucity of women characters.¹⁷ Certainly the characterisation of the title figure in *Tatlı Betüş* hardly goes beyond the level of caricature. This is a result of the author's technique of presenting different brief impressions of woman 'Tatlı Betüş' as related by a number of men and women who have come into contact with her. Indeed, it is an interesting and curious technique, as it leaves the reader in doubt as to whether or not the same woman in fact being described in each case, and the author thereby creates a sort of composite picture of different aspects of the sensual, immoral woman at all stages of material wealth and destitution, governed throughout by her insatiable sexual appetite.

A somewhat similar character appears in Kemal Tahir's *Karılar Koğuşu* (1974) in the form of Şefika, the newly appointed wardress in a prison where the women prisoners all appear to be presented as prostitutes if not by trade then by nature. The author seems to attribute unmatched powers of seduction and coquetry to Turkish women:

"Flashing their dark eyes in such a vital and meaningful way, as only our women know how..." (p. 115)

The domination of Şefika's life by her sexual appetite is unconvincing in the extreme, and a bitter disappointment after she enters the novel as a hard-working, intelligent, determined and professional woman who, in contrast with the malleable, inefficient and subservient wardress whom she has replaced, does not hesitate to establish her rightful position as equal both in rights and in duties with her male colleagues.

In this period (between 1960 and 1980) have seen a remarkable increase in sales of works by women writers in Turkey. These women have contributed greatly to the realisation of female characterisations which are utterly convincing as real human beings with economic, social, intellectual, emotional and psychological backgrounds.

Nezihe Meriç's book *Korsan Çıkması* (1961) takes the form, generally, of reminiscences by some inner consciousness which seems to be common to but also apart from the two women around whom the book centres. The reminiscences are interspersed with some trivial events of one evening and the technique serves to demonstrate the inner isolation of a woman even within the setting of a close-knit social circle. The two women,

¹⁶ A. Gall, *Aziz Nesin: Contemporary Turkish Humorist*, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1974, p. 228.

¹⁷ Gall, *ibid.*, p. 218.

Meli and Berni, are old school friends; Meli is a teacher and a writer, who derives great satisfaction from her work, but also loves her husband and daughter dearly; Berni is equally well educated but is content to make a career out of being the perfect housewife and mother, she takes a great interest in fashion and appearance, and other trivialities. Both women are intelligent and acring, and consciously seek personal fulfilment in their lives, whether it be wholly through the domestic role or through a combination of domestic responsibilities and career. And yet both women are ultimately lonely: this is the significance of the cul-de-sac of the title. Th two women have had every oppotunity for a happy, satisfying life and to form close, happy and meaningful relationships. Indeed, both women love their husbands and are loved in return and yet they are essentially alone: their level of communication with others leaves them in isolation. The reader is given no clue to the reasons for this failure, and it is difficult to see any cause realting to the characters of the women, for the two are largely complementary: the one tomboyish and unconventional, the other extremely 'feminine' and conservative, to the extent that she sees herself more suited to an earlier era.

The main character, Aysel, of Adalet Ağaoğlu's novel *Ölmeye Yatmak* (1973) is also analysed in great psychological depth. She is also very alone, and the feeling of aloneness is dramatically intensified by placing the book's 'present' in the crucial morning when Aysel has gone alone to an hotel room in order to 'lie down to die'. This lying down to die which gives the book its title, is in fact a process of preparation for Aysel's rebirth, a period of careful self-analysis in the wake of a series of inter-related emotionally disturbing events. She has rediscovered her femininity after years of functioning as an intellectual, professional person, married to a cold, undemonstrative man. She is at last able to reconcile what had seemed to be mutually exclusive elements into a comprehensive, composite being: her new self. The event which first awakens her to the possibility of realising the fusion of these previously disparate parts is her sleeping with her student, a man younger and less educated than herself, for whom her most significant quality is her femininity. She reminisces about the night she spent with her student as she is 'lying down to die':

"I was once again a fresh, full-blooded young girl. My whole mind, knowledge, hair, lips, breasts, waist, outlook on the world, way of smiling, way of speaking were all out in the open. I was at one and the same time both worthy and unworthy of respect, both with and without fault, both clothed and naked. Both woman and human being."(p. 179)

Aysel realises that at last, through the help of her student lover, she has learnt to know herself. It is interesting that nowhere in the book is there a description of Aysel's physical appearance; not even in terms of

compliments from her male admirers, and yet Aysel definitely does take an interest in her appearance, as she goes to have a manicure regularly, and when she is 'lying down to die' she thinks to herself:

"In my own eyes I am growing and becoming beautiful once again." (p. 110)

As a young girl she was keen to go to university, and had no patience for the trivial chit-chat of other girls. The author indicates her contempt for the female preoccupation with artificial beauty, especially in a socio-economic situation where many people can hardly find clothing to cover their backs. Society in general, she suggests, is concerned with cosmetics and not with the reality of the underlying structure. The young Aysel is more perceptive, however, and vows to be of service to her country, alongside the men, who should not have to struggle alone. In a disappointed comment on young girls of his own generation Aysel's young student lover bemoans the fact that most of them are "unaware that they had serious responsibilities" (p.351).

When Aysel was a young girl her mother forever wishing that Aysel would be more like her. She is a woman of simple pleasures and few demands: she could be content in her life if only there were no quarrels between her husband and her children; a trip to the cinema once in a while is quite enough to keep her happy. She has not experienced the inner turmoil created by conflicting currents of thought such as Aysel goes through in her youth, when traditional values are instilled into her at home, socialising her for the 'female' role of wife and mother, while at school she is taught 'modern', 'western' values of male-female equality in public and social life, inspiring her to aim for higher education and an independent career.

Aysel emerges as a character of as great complexity as a real individual. Her most outstanding feature is her determination to control her own life, and to live according to her knowledge of herself. The fact that she only comes to know herself fully at the time when she is facing the change of life serves to indicate that her new-found confidence and peace of mind are independent of physiological changes: she has faced her dilemma and overcome it. She now goes forward into a new life of full consciousness as both a woman and a human being, as an individual and as a member of society.

In *Bıçağın Ucu* (1973) by male author Attila İlhan, the heroine Suat faces a dual crisis of identity. She is married but has no children, and she is faced with the awful realisation that she is slowly undergoing a transformation of her sexual desires. An important factor in Suat's increasing tendency to lesbianism appears to be her feeling of superiority over her husband, whom she regards as a coward, and a person of weak political

commitment. Suat has cut herself off from the world and her husband, retreating into a fantasy world of fiction. The reader is first introduced to her through her husband Halim's reflections about her as he puts off going home in order not to have to face her remoteness:

“Her looks were vacant, her face colourless... she was quite cut off from the world.” (p. 18)

Her escape into the world of French novels serves to elevate her from the role of meticulous housewife, a role which she abhors:

“If there were no books there would be no Suat; or else she would have been like all the other wivws, an ordinary housewife: a woman slowly eaten way by a flat, miserable life...

Apart from this she lived another life in her dreams, one which developed her inner dimensions to the level of the absurd. And this other life was cutting off all her links with other people, and, inevitably her husband too.” (p. 34-35)

This, then, is Suat's second crisis of identity: the clash between her role as a wife and housewife, and her intellectual life. She feels anomie and boredom for her mundane life, and yet she cannot totally cast off her ties with with the reality of day to day life:

“... I thought I was someone else. One night I thought I had found out who I was. From that day on I just haven't been able to decide which one is my real self, this one or that one?” (p. 281)

Evidently the two aspects of her inner conflict are closely related: acceptance of her lesbian nature is a further expression of her escape into fantasy, while the realities of domestic life demand a return to normal relations with her husband. The thought of death as a simple means of escape finally becomes overwhelmingly attractive to Suat when she hears that the woman she fancied herself in love with has married. But she discovers that she is too much of a coward to actually kill herself, and she finally comes to the realisation that she has been a coward all her life, never having lived her life to the full because she has been too afraid. The realisation that she has wasted her own life, while all the time blaming her husband for shortcomings which were in fact more in evidence in herself, brings her to a new understanding with her husband. We are led to believe that her crisis of identity has been resolved by a sudden flash of insight, in something of the same way as Aysel resolves her crisis in *Ölmeye Yatmak* except that in this case the implication is that Suat's rebirth is dependent on the support and loving understanding of her husband, whereas Aysel was prepared to start out alone in her new life. It may be relevant to remember at this point that the creator of Suat is a man, while Aysel's creator is a woman.

Emine İşınsu's heroine Ceren in *Tutsak* (1975) is similar to Attila İlhan's Suat, in that she too is a bored housewife. She is also a artist, but she has lost the inspiration to paint and derives little satisfaction from her domestic duties, since her daily help takes care of the children for most of the time, as well as doing the domestic chores. Ceren feels that she has been left with no personal identity; she has spent her whole life for others and kept nothing for herself. She considers the nature of her marriage to Orhan:

“Ceren felt that the responsibility she had held in her father's house was continuing in an even more burdensome way... ‘Don't let the children cry, see that Orhan's every need is met so that he won't say anything to upset Ceren... Don't let friends take umbrage...’ What had happened to Ceren in this silent storm? Where was she? Did anyone called Ceren exist, that she could have desires or make decisions of her own?” (p. 45)

She sees herself as a prisoner in her own home, and she forbids herself to think any more. She does not know what she wants and yet she blames her husband for his unfeelingness and shallowness. In the end she realises that she has made herself a prisoner by her own choice, by her refusal to consider life outside the limitations of her marriage to Orhan. She had endured suffering and self-destruction for sake of the security of marriage simply because she was afraid of considering any unknown alternative. She is unhappy and sees her husband as the cause of her unhappiness, but there is no evidence to suggest that she is capable of being happy alone. Ceren's friend Selma has already divorced her husband, and is determined to make a success of living alone. But she still suffers periods of self-doubt and lack of confidence. She cannot prevent herself from occasionally longing for the attentions and companionship of a man. The author acknowledges the fact that women may desire to live independently of men, but she leaves their ability to actually do so very much open to question.

Fürüzan, in the collectin of stories *Parasız Yatılı* (1971) is also concerned with the plight of single women in a society which is still geared to family units as the basis of its organasition. The women of these stories are generally very ordinary women, many of whom are socially deprived in some way, for example widowed with a young child to care for, or rural women uprooted from their village and brought to settle in İstanbul and such like. The author attempts to describe both the inner and outer world of women and girls, but she credits them only with thoughts as narrowly confined as their lives are. The stories thus generally take the form of reminiscences or simple hopes and plans or anxieties, and worries for the future. There is little depth or character in her studies of women, and they appear predominantly to be preoccupied with trivialities. For example, the woman in '*Taşralı*' is concerned with her appearance:

“She was struggling to prolong her past beauty by dyeing her hair and wearing the softest beiges and greys.” (p. 32)

Sevgi Soysal also highlights middle-class women’s preoccupation with trivialities in her book *Yenişehir’de Bir Öğle Vakti* (1973), but a more important theme is the disinterest of women in the struggle against the corrupt and corrupting socio-economic system. The book opens with a very unsympathetic generalised portrayal of the housewife out shopping:

“... narrow-minded housewives who consider household needs the very centre of life, who think they can brighten their lives by ceaselessly creating novelty and change among their household effects...captive birds who do nothing but spend money and labour on their cages.” (p. 5-6)

Though she thus clearly dismisses middle-class housewives as parasites she gives praise to the poor housewife who takes a pride in her domestic work; indeed, Ali’s mother is portrayed as the perfect housewife:

“My mother used to wash laundry every day because she thought we deserved the cleanest of sheets.... She used to say ‘Poverty doesn’t mean dirt. You don’t use money to do the laundry.’” (p. 183)

As a middle-class woman Hatice is shown to be a woman of no tolerance or understanding, evaluating people and events at an entirely superficial level. We see her approached by a beggar woman:

“She looked at the beggar woman with loathing, as if she were the sole cause of all hopelessness. The severity of her gaze wished the woman away, anywhere, but far away. But the beggar woman was continuing to beg, in a most experienced way. Hatice lost all hope of the country ever being put in order...” (p. 44)

The apathy of women with regard to political involvement is most explicitly illustrated in the characters of Olcay and Mevhibe. Mevhibe is the daughter of a government minister who, when she was a girl, enrolled her as a member of his political party, not through any real support for women’s rights, but in order to make an example of his daughter in the question of the needs for women to take their place in social life. He did not think it necessary to ask his daughter about it first, and indeed, her party membership remains a dead letter. Mevhibe’s daughter Olcay is shown to be more influenced in her actions by her feeling than by reason or argument: she forms a relationship with Ali, and accepts his ideas. She remains only a passive follower of Ali’s political activity. Soysal points to the conditioning which Olcay has undergone, which has led her to accept the notion of male authority and superiority from childhood:

“...old phrases kept going through her mind: ‘Olcay, don’t go into your brother’s room.’ ‘He is a boy, and older, it’s his right.’ ‘Your brother is

right, he is a man.' 'He is a man, he needs it; he is a man, he must have an education; he is a man, he can do that; he is a man, he can have that...' These phrases from her memories of childhood kept stretching out in front of her. And however much she got angry with them, it was with such phrases as these that she had been conditioned." (p. 203)

But the author's message is that women should now take an active role in reforming society, and clearly the apathy of urban middle-class women with regard to real social problems, their frivolity and parasitic role in society are put under fire throughout the book.

The quality of resignation characterises few of the female characters in the works selected for this period. Where it does occur it is presented as a natural consequence of the denial of any degree of self-determination to women in rural society, in which conformity to social customs and traditions, characterised by subordination and submission to men is demanded of women.

In *Asılacak Kadın* (1979) the female writer Pınar Kür portrays her central character, the woman to be hanged of the tile, as the very embodiment of resignation. The woman does not speak aloud throughout the book, we know her only through her thoughts. She is abused and exploited by almost everyone she comes into contact with and makes no attempt to escape from her miserable existence. Finally, when a young idealistic lover tries to save her by killing her depraved husband she is accused of having committed the murder and stands trial with sentence of death. Her passive resignation to her fate prevents her from speaking out in defence of herself, and therefore brings about her final downfall. In the book, the author does not explain how the sexual exploitation of the woman represents the political and economic exploitation of the masses, while the total passivity and resignation of the woman to her miserable existence and final sentence reflects the apathy of the masses. This political interpretation/message of the novel as a condemnation of the common masses for their resigned acceptance of oppression and exploitation in society at large is overshadowed by the main impact of the work as an extravagant and somewhat fanciful but nonetheless effective statement against the personal quality of resignation.

CONCLUSION

As I stated elsewhere¹⁸, a major development at the end of this period with regard to the portrayal of female character in Turkish literature can be summed up as the greater consideration of the question of the interaction of the 'social' and the 'individual' which has meant that women are depicted with their full economic, social, intellectual and psychological backgrounds, so that they emerge as real individuals and not as idealised types or caricatures. There is an increased tendency to relate 'feminine' characteristics to the effects of life's circumstances and society's attitudes and expectations of women. These trends are especially evident in the works of women writers. On the other hand, the implication that women's character is weak and malleable, with little original or enduring substance of its own, is still in evidence in some of the works by male authors.¹⁹

In line with the expectations outlined earlier, industriousness is indeed a conspicuous virtue. Likewise, laziness is condemned, and often combined with further abhorrent characteristics such as stupidity and the parasitic nature of the voracious consumer. Women endowed with strong, independent characters appear in both positive and negative roles: on the one hand showing courage and determination in defending their own and their families' rights, on the other hand drastically mismanaging their own and their husbands' or families' lives and bringing ruin on them all.

The newly emerging portrayals of very ordinary women show them to be often either in search of their own identity, or conscious of the need to protect their identity as the most precious essence of their being, upon which their integrity depends. The woman who is prepared to compromise her essential integrity for the sake of her family or her husband is no longer automatically the object of praise, and this change of attitude has serious implications for the concepts of female sexuality and honour and shame.

Finally, the call to women which emerges most clearly from the treatment of female character in the works of this period is the call for women to raise their level of consciousness, both political and personal.

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¹⁸ Ramazan Gülemdam, "The Development of a Feminist Discourse and Feminist Writing in Turkey: 1970-1990", *Kadın/Woman* 2000, 2 (1), (June 2001), p. 93-116. See also Saliha Paker, "Unmuffled voices in the shade and beyond: women's writing in Turkish", in Helena Forsås-Scott, *Textual Liberation, European Feminist Writing in the Twentieth Century*, London 1991, p. 270-300.

¹⁹ See Tansu Bele, *Erkek Yazımında Kadın*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 1998.

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