Introduction

> I am angry with those who write their memoirs. I say of course nothing against those who have been part of important events either as actors or simply as witnesses. However, though they be referred to as 'memoirs,' even the texts written by such people should be considered the same as history books, and read as such. What anger me are the ones who seek to occupy us by telling us all about only what happened to themselves. And no, I have not forgotten about the great autobiographers like Saint Augustine, Rousseau, and Gide; but they gave us their literary works first, and told us their life stories only later. Furthermore, every principle has its exceptions, so we can say that each of their works is such an exception…[1]

These words that the Turkish literary critic Nurullah Ataç wrote in an article on "memory books" (*hatırat kitapları*) for the popular magazine *Yedigün* in 1934 demonstrate a resentment towards autobiographical texts, a type of text which has in recent years become more widespread in Turkey. The fear that an autobiographer might not "tell the truth," as Ataç complains in this essay, had for a long time led to a general mistrust towards autobiographical writings on the part of Turkish historians, while scholars of Turkish literature meanwhile have ignored the genre as a generic hybrid of history book and novel. However, recent developments in literary and critical studies, such as post-structuralism and postmodernism, feminism and post-colonialism, have profoundly influenced Turkish society and culture. It is a world of "Inter"s, "Post"s, and "Trans"es that we are living in, and in this context the autobiography–or, more generally, autobiographical writing–is a genre that is especially suitable as an object of scholarly interest.

Inspired by this tremendous potential for further scholarly discussion, the Orient-Institut Istanbul and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, decided in 2002 to hold a symposium on autobiographical writing in Turkey. The initial starting point was to focus fundamentally on whether there were any differences between autobiographical texts in the Middle East and Turkey versus Europe/the "West," as has been argued by scholars such as Franz Rosenthal, Gustav von Grunebaum, Marvin Zonis, Georges Gusdorf, and Philippe Lejeune. Other questions to be tackled included: Does Middle Eastern/Turkish literature really lack introspection? To what degree is the issue of introspection really so central for autobiographical texts in the West? If there are so few texts that fit the classical definitions of "autobiography" even in the West,

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1 Hatıralarını yazanlara kızarım. Bittabi büyük hadiselere, gerek bir iş görerek, gerek sadece şahit sıfatı ile karışmış olanlara bir diyeceğim yok; fakat onlarınkileri–isimleri istediği kadar "hatırat" olsun–gene bir tarih kitabı sayıp öyle okuyabiliriz. Benim kızdığım sırf kendi başlarından geçenleri anlatarak bizi alâkadar etmek isteyenlerdir. Saint Augustin, Rousseau, Gide gibi büyük hatıratçıları unutmuyorum; fakat onlar bizi evvelâ eserleri ile celbetmiş sonra hayatlarını anlatmışlardır. Hem her kaidenin istisnaları vardır; diyelim ki onların eseri de birer istisnadır. Nurullah Ataç: "Hatırat Kitapları," *Yedigün* No. 58, 18 April 1934. 5-6.

shouldn't we revise these definitions? The aim of our prospective symposium was to contribute to the discussion of such questions, which began to be posed in the 1990s with regard to autobiographical writings in both Western and non-Western cultures and literatures. We decided to take up "autobiographical writing" *rather than* "autobiography" because the former enables us to use a larger framework. We avoid the term "autobiography" because of its exclusive and reductionist implications and undertones, preferring instead the term "autobiographical writing," which is inclusive of all self-narratives and presentations, such as memoirs, confessions, diaries and personal notes, and autobiographical fiction and poetry.

The symposium, which took place at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, on 15-17 May 2003, consisted of scholarly papers on topics ranging from recent developments in autobiographical studies to practices of autobiographical writing in Europe and the Middle East in comparative perspective, and finally to the questions of self and the Other, history and community, and fact and fiction in Turkish literature. This collection is based on substantially revised versions of the papers presented at the symposium. It starts in a rather unconventional manner, that is, by relating its own autobiography. In her triple-layered text, in which she relates the story of her own speech and article parallel to the story of the symposium and this collection, all of which is wrapped around a core text analyzing the autobiographical novel of Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai*, Olcay Akyıldız paves the way for the articles that follow. Akyıldız states that, although the author does not point out the autobiographical features of her text, critical studies on Özdamar's novel have usually approached it as autobiographical fiction. In order to consider the authenticity of Özdamar's story, Akyıldız starts by looking at the question of fact and fiction in the novel. However, admitting the failure of such an approach, Akyıldız instead goes on to focus upon how Özdamar succeeds in combining the public story of the Turkish Republic with her own private story of the same years.

The three chapters of this book are entitled "Theoretical Dimensions," "The Past and Present of Autobiographical Writing in Turkey," and "Comparative Perspectives." The articles in the first chapter vary in terms of the specific issues they address, but they all have one thing in common: their opposition to essentialist and ontological distinctions in conventional autobiographical studies mentioned above. The first part of this collection opens with Susanne Enderwitz's article in which she offers a critical survey of autobiographical studies focusing upon the Muslim world as their subject. Attempting to challenge the established norms of the Western oriented concept of autobiography, Enderwitz argues that the European humanities' concern with autobiography, which started in the seventies of the last century, only recently has begun to be taken up in the field of Islamic studies. For decades, Franz Rosenthal's *Die arabische Autobiographie* (1937), with its unfavorable judgment on classical Islamic autobiography, went more or less uncontested. From the second half of the nineties onward, however, a number of

studies of Modern Arabic autobiographies appeared and served to reformulate questions of methodology. One of the most recent publications, *Interpreting the Self* (Dwight F. Reynolds, Ed., [2001]) is thoroughly concerned with classical autobiography, i.e., with autobiography from within a predominantly Islamic structured society. Contrary to Rosenthal and others, *its major aim is the inclusion—and not exclusion—of as many texts as possible within the autobiographical genre.*

Like Enderwitz, Özkan Ezli also provides a critical evaluation of scholarly approaches to autobiographical writing. He asserts that scholarly discussions on the definition of autobiographical narratives in the West have focused fundamentally on the partition of reality and fiction. By comparing Philippe Lejeune's famous definition of autobiography from the 1970s with the ideas of Michel Foucault in his lecture, "What is an author?" Ezli argues that Lejeune's definition of autobiography ignores the inherent uncertainty of writing. This is because, he states, for Lejeune there is an authentic reference if the text is signed with a proper name. This autobiographical pact, as it is called by Lejeune, equates the author with the narrator, ensuring both his/her identity and authenticity. In contrast to Lejeune's understanding, Ezli insists that the division between reality and fiction is actually a discursive one, in the Foucaultian sense, and not one that can refer to the reality beyond the autobiographical discourse.

Herrad Heselhaus continues Ezli's theoretical discussion of autobiographical writing by looking at the question of autobiography and age. While there are many studies on the "auto" and the "graphy" of autobiography by literary critics like Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lejeune, and Paul DeMan, Heselhaus claims that the "bio" element has been relatively neglected. Heselhaus aims to contribute to filling in this gap with her study on "autobiography and aging." Even though autobiographical texts vary in their patterns of textual organization (and not only according to genre: memoirs, confessions, diaries, anecdotes, and fiction), Heselhaus says, they tend to follow "the course of life." As the autobiographic text unfolds, the related life continues. But yet another highly important aspect of autobiographies is memory. The autobiography *per se* is immanent, of this world. While it reaches a definitive conclusion, its author (and hero) is still alive, maybe famous, and certainly old. In the theories of the psychology of aging, "biographic analysis" is used as a means of understanding the aging process as well as the construction of personal identity. The literary genre of autobiography is certainly at the very core of this problem. What is screened by the threefold term of "auto," "bio," and "graphy" is the fundamental human experience of time as life and memory.

This part of the collection ends with Gabriele Jancke's discussion of autobiography as social space in early modern Germany. Taking the communicative aspect of autobiographical writing as her central point, Jancke proposes a new approach to autobiographical studies. According to her, scholars active in this field should contextualize autobiographical texts in their social surroundings and

look at the texts' languages and audiences. Such an approach, she claims, will enable us to reconstruct the writers' ways of using autobiographical writings as social practice. Concentrating on autobiographical material from the early modern period, Jancke concludes that this approach will broaden our understanding of individual texts–for example, that of Nicolaus Cusanus–as well as our range of theoretical and methodological tools in autobiography studies.

The second part of this book, entitled "The Past and Present of Autobiographical Writing in Turkey," forms the "main body" of the discussion. It focuses on a number of examples of autobiographical narratives in Turkish literature from a variety of periods. It starts with Derin Terzioğlu's analysis of autobiographical practice in Ottoman Turkey. Terzioğlu more specifically examines the recent discovered personal miscellanies of scrapbooks produced by Ottoman literati from 1500 to 1800 in order to show the practice of life writing in a non-Western culture from that period. She addresses questions such as what these personal narratives meant to their composers and how they were perceived and read. She argues that a substantial portion of literary production that might easily be considered " autobiographical" today was not perhaps perceived as such in Ottoman times; however, the Ottoman literati appear relatively conscious in their textual utilization of the autobiographical register. Terzioğlu concludes that some Ottoman literati also participated in certain practices of reading and writing that were conducive to autobiography in the wider sense.

Nüket Esen analyzes the first Western style autobiography in Turkish literature, the work *Menfa* written by the first Turkish novelist, Ahmet Midhat, in 1876. Esen argues that in *Menfa*, Ahmet Midhat attempts to reason out his political choices, which will be more clearly established after Abdülhamid ascends the throne. Ahmet Midhat would eventually go on to write three infamous books about the Ottoman Empire in which he expressed his support for Abdülhamid's autocratic regime. *Menfa* is the first step towards Ahmet Midhat's political stance in opposition to the Young Ottomans' political ideas.

Halim Kara's study deals with the autobiographical narratives of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, one of the leading figures of modern Turkish literature. Kara attempts to show that Yakup Kadri actively participated not only in the cultural, social, and political events of the last years of the Ottoman Empire, but that he contributed to the Turkish national struggle as well. Like many members of his generation, Yakup Kadri was also an active figure in the foundation of the new Turkish Republic and an advocate of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's social, cultural, and political policies. Therefore, Yakup Kadri's autobiographical writings superficially appear to describe the story of his life as a part of a society, nation, or history. Kara maintains that Yakup Kadri's narratives disclose more about his personality and individual identity than one might assume. He concludes that Yakup Kadri regards identity as relational, and that the autobiographical narratives

he produces are also relational, because the story of his nation provides the key to his own individual identity and character.

Hülya Adak's paper looks at the question of oppositional autobiographical writings in Turkey. According to her, prior to the delivery of *Nutuk*, the political opposition to Mustafa Kemal's single-party regime was silenced and some of the opponents fled to Europe to avoid persecution by the Independence Tribunals. Unable to publish or narrate their version of the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Independence Struggle, and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in Turkey, these political leaders and writers wrote their autobiographies in exile. In the sixties, both the oppositional autobiographies written in exile and the ones written in Turkey were published only after undergoing serious censorship. The publication of these autobiographies, however, did not bring them credibility because, as a sacred text of the Turkish Republic, the premises in *Nutuk* remained mostly unchallenged. Her article analyzes one such oppositional autobiography, Dr. Rıza Nur's *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, in the way the text, written clandestinely in the twenties and entrusted to libraries in Paris and London, narrates Rıza Nur's involvement in modern Turkish history in a tensile relationship with the narration of events as told in *Nutuk*. While approaching Nur's memoir in relation to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's *Nutuk* and in the context of the other oppositional autobiographies written by Rıza Nur's contemporaries, Hülya Adak attempts to reevaluate the significance of Rıza Nur and his much discredited self-narrative in modern Turkish history.

Erika Glassen talks about a different type of self-representation that became very popular in Turkish literature in the early twentieth century: collections of biographical essays (*edebiyat anıları*). She emphasizes that by writing biographical sketches, which are generally first published in magazines and newspapers, and then later having them bound together in a book, the author of such works assembles around herself/himself a group of intellectuals and famous poets, as well as her/his former teachers of the older generation, and friends and colleagues of her/his own generation. Thus does s/he represent herself/himself as a sociable personality, a member of the literary community. The literary community seems to be a memory community creating "family history" by conversational memorizing, which means permanent real or imaginative conversation. The individual writer participates in the collective identity of the community but at the same time asserts his position among the others, and his autobiographical memory contributes important material to the communicative memory.

The contribution of Sibel Irzık focuses on another aspect of communality in connection with autobiographical writing. Irzık analyzes the autobiographical elements in the works of Latife Tekin, one of the most important female authors of the post-1980s, as a "claim to a communal voice," which is supported by the author's initial attribution of a political meaning to her writing. The autobiographical claim of the author contrasts in her first two novels with the imper-

sonal narrative voice of her writings, which Irzık sees as an "attempt to disavow authority and appropriation by concealing their own written and autobiographical character". In her latest novel, Irzık argues, Tekin marks her text from within as autobiographical by using the pronoun "I"; however, Tekin still does not present her life as it exists outside her writing, but rather as a contest between her life and writing.

Börte Sagaster's article deals with general trends in Turkish autobiographical literature since the 1980s. In the perception of writers as well as of readers and critics, autobiography has shifted within recent decades from the field of "history" towards the vast territory of fiction. Consciousness about the unattainability of (historical, personal) "truth" shapes many contemporary Turkish writers' attitude towards autobiographical writing. Consequently, Turkish literature has become more experimental when dealing with autobiographical themes.

The third and last section of the collection starts with Catharina Dufft's examination of the concept of "autobiographical space" by means of a comparative analysis of Orhan Pamuk's literary work. Based upon Theodor W. Adorno's argument that childhood experience plays an important role in "autobiographical space," Dufft aims to show that Nişantaşı can be seen as an important early "autobiographical space" for Orhan Pamuk's work. For this, she focuses specifically on Pamuk's short story "Bir Hikaye: Pencereden Bakmak," and compares it with texts by two other authors, Theodor Adorno and Marcel Proust. In doing so, she demonstrates how authors from different times and areas have used similar strategies to make their life stories fruitful for their literary works.

Stephan Guth's article on the narratives of three Arab authors and one Turkish author who did not use their mother tongue to write their autobiographies shows just how manifold the motives of language migrants preferring to write their autobiographies in a "foreign" language can be. This paper is also an attempt to introduce some new aspects to the theories on language choice in literature, theories which necessarily deal with autobiographies written by bilinguals. Guth's article is followed by Angelika Neuwirth's discussion on the famous Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish, extending the field of autobiographical writing to the genre of poetry. Neuwirth shows us how Darwish's poetical image of the martyr and the changes it underwent over time can be read with respect to an underlying autobiographical text or, as Neuwirth calls it, "meta-literary" autobiography.

The book ends, as it started, with an article that is rather autobiographical itself. In her contribution on the Iranian poetess Forugh Farrokhzad, Farzaneh Milani links Farrokhzad's life to her own life as an exile living in the United States. She tells us how her research on Forugh Farrokhzad's biography together with her gradual acclimatization to American society shaped the course of her own life. In the course of her research, during which she faced many obstacles due to the difficulties of obtaining details about an Iranian woman's life, Milani was first led to the conclusion that life-narratives were misfits in the Islamic world

while the Western world was completely open and frank about matters of the self. However, later on she came to realize that neither is the "East" as closed as it seems, nor is the "West" as open as it is so often claimed to be. This is because Milani has come to the conclusion that telling about oneself can take on many different and varied faces. Iranians narrate their lives in many different ways–in poetry for instance, as Farrokhzad does–and, as Milani discovered, it was only necessary to change perspective in order to find the right places to look for these stories. Therefore, Milani's version of Farrokhzad's life narrative with *yeki bud yeki nabud* (once upon a time), just like the fairytales she heard as a child, and Ezli's insistence on writing's inherent uncertainty, can actually be read as a response to Nurullah Ataç's concern regarding the question of truth in life stories. Seeing as "truth" is impossible, people should tell and share their own versions of stories, as we hope to have done in this collection.