

Is There A Women's Epic?

On Ayla Kutlu's *Kadın Destanı* and Latife Tekin's *Muinar*

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on Jale Parla's lecture at the Women's Research Club (Boğaziçi University) on March 8, 2008. Here Parla discusses the possibilities of women's epic as a genre. The answer is clear: women's epic does not promise a meaningful means for women's empowerment. Feminist perspective does not ask for heroes, it asks for solidarity, togetherness, and everyday acts as meaningful deeds for the benefit of all living together.

KEYWORDS

Women's epic, Kadın Destanı, Muinar, harlots, heroes



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INTRODUCTION

Today, I will discuss the current state of feminist (literary) criticism with reference to two literary texts: Ayla Kutlu's *Kadın Destanı* (*Woman's Epic*) (1994), and Latife Tekin's *Muinar* (2006). I will reflect on possible implications that a feminist critical lens on these texts would embody. In brief, I aim to share significant and inspiring problematique of feminist criticism.

It is apt to start with the names of both works: The title, *Woman's Epic* pushes one to ask: Considering that epic is the most masculine literary genre Is it possible to come up with a woman's epic? Do women have epics? Our second work is *Muinar*, and we are told that *Muinar* means helper. When there is someone who helps then there should be someone who is helped and something that requires the help. Here we talk about an act and at least two subjects of that act. In other words, through performativity, perhaps we move a bit toward epic – the most performative narrative genre. But for the time being it is early to name Latife Tekin's book as epic. We cannot say so just with reference to its title. And we shall not rush to decide about the epic style of Ayla Kutlu's despite that she names it as such.

Ayla Kutlu's Kadın Destanı

Let's start with *Women's Epic*.

Liyotani, the temple harlot is tasked with finding Engidu and bringing him to the city to save Uruk from Gilgameş's cruelty and irresponsibility. Engidu who grew in the forest with the animals is a sheer savage; but Liyotani bathes him, cleans him, makes love to him and she civilizes him. The enchanted Engidu follows Liyotani to Uruk City. There, as expected, he gets into war with Gilgameş; but unexpectedly he loses the war to Gilgameş. In the meantime, things unfold and two men are involved in a love affair that puts everyone behind. Liyotani is forgotten, too. Moreover, Gilgameş's power and oppression is now reinforced with Engidu's support. One night, Gilgameş, too, visits Liyotani. Liyotani gets pregnant, and as soon as she gives birth to her son they took him away from her, to the mountains. Liyotani is not devastated by losing the child to whom she gave birth with disgust; on the contrary she gains strength. She gives birth to many until she reaches 20. And one day, she decides to leave the temple. Gilgameş, too, leaves the city to search for immortality. Then, Uruk city falls victim to black death. Just in that moment Liyotani returns. She is no more the temple harlot; now she is the high priestess. Gilgameş dies. And Liyotani's son, whom she gave birth years ago meets her as the pontiff of the temple. He was raised in a cave by spiders; and he turned out to be the symbol of wickedness and darkness. The mother and the son involve in a deadly battle for power. They live in the temple for years as enemies. Finally, Liyotani kills her son with a poison that she herself prepares. After she kills him she hugs her son for the first and the last time, and then she locks herself into a room in the temple, waiting to die. In other words, she commits suicide. But as I will note ahead this is a strange suicide.

Before how this story is narrated let us look at the epic elements:

To start with this is a story of liberation: Liyotini is involved in action to liberate the Uruk city from despotic rule. She is a heroine and she adopts heroism by improving and using her "womanhood". She is beautiful; her attractiveness is irresistible. She gives birth and educates. During her years as the harlot of the temple she successfully performs her roles as woman-mother-educator by means of her fertility and by civilizing Engidu. And she introduces her(past)self before she emerges as the temple high priestess, Nippikur. This introduction carries almost all the elements of the biological/cultural (essentialist) sexism that surrounds women by mythical-archetypal imagery:

I mean one who has seen the spring ninety times
Whose body is as thin and dry as
the grasses of the swamp,
Whose hair is as less as the corn silk,
This is me, Nippukir...
In the past my breasts made the jewelry shine:
Such beauty and filled with milk...
I nursed for decades, fed the human beings
offered them to the heart of life...
Nursing was a command, flowing from my brain to my milk
ducts...
That's why the orphans took hostage in my breasts,
They jumped from my laps to the ground, to transcend
Their infinite days, until the day of their harvest...(18-19)

As we turn to the question of epic: As a narration of victory, the epic has to use, repeat, produce the element of power. It renders the experience of a chosen person (here Liyotani) absolute and unquestionable. It glorifies universal wisdom in her success. The epic heroine has power as the looking, seeing, ruling, commanding, dominating, warring, freeing and freed subject. In Ayla Kutlu's narration, if this power changes hands and is used by a woman, such copying of epic – the most patriarchal narrative genre – serves, in the final analysis, to the reinforcement and sustaining of the dominance structures of patriarchy. Is it so? In other words, our question is, even if this epic tells the passage of [a] woman from a powerless and passive position to a powerful and active one, the issue is whether in the end of this process one reaches to a necessary agency or the position that is presented as the woman's act is one that copies the power position entrenched in patriarchy?

Moreover:

Narratives that glorify power, as epics do, can do so only by relying on some essentialist categories. In this epic, too, one can observe essentialist elements. Besides women's mythological motherhood-fertility, Engidu motif is used to imply the nature-culture paradox, that nature contains what is pure and clean and culture spoils it all.

And the part where Liyotani civilizes Engidu is problematic from a feminist viewpoint. First, it repeats dichotomous stereotypes: woman, mother or lover who tames, who is affectionate, sensitive, savior, and educator, immediately recalling its opposite, that is the image of disruptive, destructive, one who kills, who makes one go crazy, wicked/deadly woman. This is certainly nothing but a (cultural) sexist fantasia. Apart from that, even with [the image of] woman who tames/educates, we encounter the question of the guiding norms,

IS THERE A WOMEN'S EPIC?

whether the woman is put into the role of sustaining the patriarchal order or not.

The neglect of the objectification of women's bodies in the narratives, produced by male-dominant cultures weakens feminist struggle against the fantasias that nourish and reinforce sexism. It makes it difficult to reject these fantasias. To the extent that language turns out to be the carrier of these fantasias it is wounded by sexism. Alas, these fantasias feature in this woman's epic; they are glorified by poetry. Liyotani is very beautiful, her body attracts men; sexual power spreads out of Engidu's body and his naturalness.

The fact that all these are realized by a subject who directs the events; although that subject is a woman and a saviour, the fact that now the power is in her hands, now that it changed place, that it is copied by active woman subject contradicts with the fundamental principle of feminist teaching, the aim to disrupt, to destroy relations of power. For the epic heroine is constructed as the powerful subject with extraordinary abilities, who is chosen, has a mission and the capacity to accomplish this mission. How apt it is for a woman to repeat this artefact, this constitution?

Epic is a narrative genre that supports official history. Ayla Kutlu's work is perhaps comes closest to the epic and to the problematic aspects of this genre for feminist purposes. Liyotani-Nippukir commits her great sacrifice to liberate the Uruk city. But the stories of constitution and liberation that are structured around a single liberator serves for the sustenance of hierarchical and hegemonic narrations of official history that are nurtured by myths. Here, too, there is a fundamental question that needs to be answered by the feminists: How should we approach history? Considering women's social positions there is an enormous space for historical settlement that extends from the most theoretical abstractions to the most practical and ordinary lives. How shall we get into that settlement? In order to reveal the relations of power? Or to restore the rights and dignity of the victims? It is certainly difficult to answer this question without getting rid of the traces of the power structures that I noted above. For sometimes, the styles of standing up might be integrated into the system against which we stand up.

Let me repeat the question: may the epic, as the grand narrative of patriarchy be adjusted to come against patriarchy? Could it be adjusted? Underneath this question, lays a feminist discussion and theory that puts its mark into the last quarter of the millenium.

Nevertheless, I still argue that Ayla Kutlu wrote a *feminist* text in the *Woman's Epic*. For in this parody of the epic she effectively turned upside down many categories that are embedded in the routine of epic narrations. Here, the transformation of the heroic woman from Liyotani to Nippukir makes this feminist intervention convincing.

Let's focus on this process:

Uruk city hosts a male dominant violence society where patriarchal oppression is displayed by sexual power, girls are raped and sacrificed to gods: Liyotani who is a poor village girl starts her life in this city as a harlot of temple, or rather, she is forced to do so: Nippukir remembers those days in the third person voice which she strips off personality:

Liyotani continued being the harlot of the Temple
For the abness ordered as such.

She worked hard between the market and the Temple...
between the Temple and the kitchen,
between the kitchen and the tables
She spent the remaining time in men's arms
Floating from one man to another,
She learned to forget her body and not to hear
the things done to her.
She got to know the villagers...The urban dwellers,
and the slaves...
She got to know women... All women and especially the
women slaves....
Thus learned, Liyotani how to best
tell sentiments and telling nothing
about them (50)

After her forced exile comes to an end, and she returns to Uruk with the capacities and tricks to handle life her city offers her the title of abness:

They proved to be so useful, the things she knew:
Having gone through so many experiences,
As she stood by the Uruk door one day,
They called her the White swan: Nippukir...
They offered the title of abness
In a golden tray, as lapis lazuli jewelry:
They were desperate...
And Liyotani's name was now Nippukir.
All the ones who knew her previous name were now
dead.
Nippukir was thirty years of age when she stepped onto
URUK,
Her life started at that age.
Liyotani was just a harlot:
Harlots are left to forgetfulness and they
are lost in sight rapidly as the Haluppu Seeds
(50)

Here is the short story of the transformation for the author-woman who writes the woman's epic.

This transformation contains the conditions for liberation from slavery: The enslavement of Liyotani by another woman representing the power-holders, by the abness; whereafter she puts the knowledge of this "slavery" in use of understanding other slaveries; that her such knowings are useful; in other words, her capacity to display the courage, decisiveness and skill to turn her own, particular experience into action. Most importantly, her cognizance of the fact that this skill relies on 'learning how to best tell emotions and not to tell them at all'. In short, raising the consciousness to resist from within the position of oppressed and returning to the temple with this consciousness. It is clear that in the power struggle launched from within the position of the oppressed, Liyotani-Nippukir will aim to destroy power structures, and not to reinforce them. Hence, the line of progress that she pursues first as the harlot and then as the abness of the temple is quite different from the typical access to power.

This is the line of disgust-murder-suicide.

Disgust, according to the rejection that is conceptualized by Julia Kristeva (2009), is a form of autonomization in the subjectivization process by throwing out the disgusted past, threatful other from the

body. Let's have a look at the excerpt, describing Liyotani's laboring for the son she has with Gilgameš:

She gave birth in the early morning
Her inside was emptied:
Her stomach was emptied, her lungs, her intestines,
things where her female genitals were hidden...
There, a little beyond stood that which came out of her
womb.
A green snake, rat with a human face, a bat as high as
cedar tree...
Was this her child? This, the seed formed
in the testicle of the mortal male?
This, the creature of the mortal female?
Would she love this?
...

The best is to offer him to the gods: his blood should be sacrificed to the last drop (223).

The images here are very picturesque. Through this laboring, a de-corporealization, de-sexualization that takes place by throwing out the internal organs, including the female genitals. What is told next is equally picturesque and bizarre. For it is here, when the mother has decided to sacrifice her son a spider enters the scene. It brings Liyotani and "that she gave birth to" to a cave, passing through hot deserts. As the journey unfolds the creature gradually turns pale, his skin dries.

The creature's umbilical cord is cut in this cave. Then, the spider gets rid of Liyotani and imprisons the creature in this cave, where he hides the entrance by the web it quickly wove. Here grows the son of Nippukir, the abbess of Uruk. But since this son is referred only with alienated terms as "the one she gave birth", "the creature" there is no ordinary mother – child relationship in this birth. What is born is power. The power that enslaves the mother. And it is as if that by such a grotesque laboring process the first step to liberate from the power is taken.

If what is implied by this disgusting creature who is thrown out of the body by labor pains, this malignancy, the child who was born as snake is woman's phallus, in other words if it gave birth to male power (since snake corresponds to phallus in Freudian analysis) from a feminist perspective the decision to throw it out of the body, even to eliminate it is understandable. Here the argument is certainly as such: Women, too, contribute to the creation and production of male dominant structures. Thus, it is the responsibility of women to act toward the liberation of both society and individual from patriarchy - though this contradicts with the most natural motherhood patterns.

And Liyotani knows something else. Power always comes back; it is not possible to escape from it just by throwing out once. One cannot escape from it without knowing it, without resisting it by its very knowledge and without eliminating it with a preset plan. Throwing out the power might be a proper start. But eliminating it requires more that instinctual and reactionary reflex. Hence, Liyotani knows very well what she will have to encounter as Nippukir:

He knows, he is the son of Gilgameš,
And he's the son I left behind..
Scared of his presence...
Someone whom I believed to be dead, or forgot
Wanted to forget.

He was away from people. He was away from
all living beings.
He believes that there is a price to be paid.
I had a reason to leave him with a spider:
He was Gilgameš's son and a monster (21)

[And she explains-as she justifies herself:]
I did not feel guilty. Never did I.
If it were today I'd leave him. He was a
monster fed on my womb, ascending
out,
He broke off Gilgameš's testicle, held on to my
life.
His soul, still the monster (36).

This denial hosts not only the denial of power but also the typical and archetypal motherhood patterns. And starting here gives us the opportunity to offer a different reading of this epic.

Nippukir cannot escape from this power by throwing out; she has to eliminate it by killing the one who represents this power - even if he is her own son. Then she commits suicide. Now she is no longer the beautiful Liyotani she was once in her youth, nor the mother, and even not the abbess. One final transformation awaits this ninety years old woman, "whose body is thin and dry as marsh grasses, whose hair is as less as corn silks", and who locks herself in a room and waits for death (18-19). Eating and drinking nothing, sleepless harlot-mother-abbess-murderer, who tries to survive just for one last act has to write this story. Nippukir, who draws attention to the preceding abbesses who had not attempted to write the story, assuming that someone at one point would write their epics is determined not to die before she finishes her story (41) - "For no one ... will write women's epic", she adds, relying on the straw-pen-penis connotations. If her debt to Uruk is to liberate them from a despot her debt to women is to finish her epic before she dies. This aspiration of hers is accompanied by a prophecy: "Whatever happens to my writings. The feelings of Liyotani and Nippukir /Will someday be discovered" (259). By this prophecy she makes her writings anonymous. Her tellings will one day be known in one way or another. And this knowledge will be spread.

The steps of mens rea race with time.
It wins over time, hence I lose...
Thus, I write sleepless:
No eating, no drinking... As if I am a desert animal,
living on its breath for days (36).

The last corporeal transformation: to a desert animal who lives on its breath, solely on its breath. This is not a familiar metamorphosis for epic heroines. But it also contains a victory: "I did this: I wrote the epic of woman", it reclaims the victory (50). Here, "I" is the prophecy whispered by a wise woman in one breath in the last stage of her life in the desert – a woman who gained wisdom through a variety of transformations she experienced in her life. Liyotani-Nippukir who leaves this world, entrusting the Uruk city to Goddess Inanna, tells: "I hope to reach to women at one point in history that knows nothing but to walk; I have the knowledge to wait for that break when they will be able to understand me. No matter how many thousand years it takes." Thus she defines her act not as one of the liberators but as that of the writer: "You, the writer, tell them. Tell them in women's language!..." (17) Her inheritance is her experience.

Latife Tekin's *Muinar*

In a different women's narration, *Muinar*, too, we see epic characteristics. The most important of such characteristics is that the narration spans over ten thousand years, and that it is embroidered with voices that travels through this long time period till today. These voices are so old and collective that they cannot be owned by anyone, and thus they are positioned out of time. But at the same time for the sake of underlining their plurality they are individualized. This individualization will be presented by a final concretization as "the voice of the world". This text too contains a narration of a transformation story, a story of metamorphoses: a transformation that is completed by the reduction of all voices, human or non-human animals are reduced to the voice of the nature.

Ten thousand years old harridan, *Muinar*, possesses Elime, the writer, to make her start a journey of internship. She is fed up with politics (101-102). In the journey, the test will concern whether nature and writing will integrate or not.

Empire of clouds in the sky.
Daughter of the sun, Siberon, on earth.
Dress up the rain!... One or two boys for each girl,
Siberon opened her eyes...
The world requested her eyes, the purple fire of the
yellow flower with one hundred leaves...
"Dihra mir neretun! The moon, in love with the world, is in
sorrow." (43-45).

Muinar talks through numerous women's bodies - she does not have her voice. Similarly, there is no hegemonic relation among the texts that she produces. They all stand side by side. And none of them moves towards an end. As none of the texts is the main text, the narration is deprived of a central fiction. The writing person of *Muinar*, Elime, gets strength from such an unfinishedness, open-endedness, plurality of voices.

Muinar, a poetic narration of a dream unfolds unconsciously and develops, using fantastic factors. Elime (the writer) feels *Muinar* (thousands of years age harridan who is the inner voice of the writer) in her dreams at nights and starts her journey to climbing the fire tree and rise. In the journey of *Muinar* and Elime, they unite with the birds and look at the world through a bird's eye; people wait for the world and its end that has been long due. But it is Elime-*Muinar* conversation that determines the journey. This is a conversation that is maintained by the talk of *Muinar*, a mythic being who is called by many names (Hadima, Suyla, Fu). Elime-*Muinar* called her by many names; how long the conversation lasts by the calling of *Muinar*; it is maintained by *Muinar*'s call through thousands of women's bodies. This is certainly a multi-voice conversation. But in this conversation, language is that of a "numeration"; a language that "flies from one feeling to another as if it lives in the birds' age" and withers away. *Muinar* is the harridan's spirit who had entered the body of Elime to prevent "the decaying of" Elime's language and to "make her voice valuable" (18). *Muinar* who had waken up in the bodies of many women with extraordinary names such as Bedira, Belinur, Faliha, Azize, Perüzar Zihurba, Güzide, Sümbüle, Nurbiye, Gülcihan. These women are created by the language formed by the image of water, air, soil: "Rainwater piled up on her face, you tend to lean and kiss,

you could not resist the scent of her eyes; her looks shines on the mountains." (21) The poem that Tekin puts in place in this narration is an environmentalist and women's political poem. It might be read as a type of creation song that pairs the world and the human being at the level of vitality and image. It is also mystical. It gets its strength from the "holy knowledge that lays underground"; it is language "that cannot be untied"; but "its nature" can be discerned and understood (25-26).

Once her "nature is discerned and understood" *Muinar*'s environmentalist order becomes hearable. The first order is not "read" but "measure". This is the order to multiply the nature without reducing it; it is *Muinar*'s teaching (36). Latife Tekin tries to form the rhythm of a new language by turning sleep-talk into numeration; and she does so. It is only after understanding this teaching that *Muinar* gives Elime a second order: write! And, Elime starts to write the women's "epic" that is written in bold and italic in the book; she writes what are almost revealed to *Muinar*. Action is the act in Kutlu's *Women's Epic*: The writing act.

Tekin, indeed, tries to create a voice that belongs to no one. She does so by allocating the voices and events in the text among women to whom she gives names that are hard to remember. Just like the voice of the world. The voice that the world makes - in the light of very rich descriptions of nature / world - is, indeed, that of a being that cannot be owned. The world belongs to no one and it belongs to everyone. Therefore, the voice-poem that comes from it has to be anonymous. Accompanying this ban on owning is the theme of freedom of love, especially in the stories that belong to Belinur. Polygamous Belinur represents the living freedom in love, the story of the prostitute of the temple tells about the freedom to love at the mythical level. The prostitute of the temple both loves a man and tells love and sexuality to all the teenagers. Again, as the creative force, integrated with nature and the world.

Muinar and Elime chit chat all the time. These chitchats extend from the simplest gossip to the toughest social satire. In the background lies the poem of the shared rhythm between Elime's body and nature. And hence emerges the story of Hattiben temple from within this poetic and temporal sound. This is a very personal story, presented by a mythical veiling. It, in essence, tells the exile love of a woman. It is extremely private, atypical; it is unique or self-referential; it is an individual story that eliminates communitarian or political narration; it cannot be repeated. Among the stories and lives of so many women it is the singular event, life of a certain woman. It cannot be generalized. Any kind of personal image and experience is put into use in order to make generalization impossible. The story of the woman who follows the man she loves with the pain of a bite on her toe. And certainly, the significance of this text lies in the fact Elime wrote and could write it by the inspiration from *Muinar* but at the same time despite *Muinar*. By the inspiration from *Muinar*, because listening to many women's stories from a ten thousand years old harridan would certainly provoke her to write her own story. Despite *Muinar*, because she encounters the other women's stories that might be generalized and typified in ten thousand years (no matter how atypical the names of the women in question are) with this new, the most fresh, the least typified story. This story which is present in the book in fragments, scattered in bold italic fonts is an action to break down, dismantle the "woman's epic" that risks owning traces of patriarchal vocabulary and images, aspirations and values. Besides, it is a memory, delivered by the voice of the oracle that has been present since the beginning of the book. The oracle that

springs from Muinar permeates Elime's recollection and turns into a story by this memory. As a memory, as a story that belongs only to Elime. Tekin builds many barriers against the generalization of this story and thus not to let the readers own it – as if a world that cannot be owned in any way.

Sihan is the younger sister of Hattinar, Zehlik and Melanik. After a six-year long love education she is sent to the garden of the love god Erunna's temple in the Hattiban country on a raft. She plants a tree there and then she teaches love to the young boys; as an earth goddess: "... timid were the hands of boys that reached to my breasts

I opened their mouths with my breath, heartened their kisses by sweet caresses, water flew to their fingers" (64) and she pursues the role of sacred temple virgin in grand harmony and happiness. She does so until the day comes by, the day when she is exiled from the temple as she was defamed by the slander of jealous Zussupuri. But after her exile Hattiban turns out to be the cursed city; the city of discarded women. Nevertheless, it is implied that through time she will be liberated by the help of another woman, Zihurba. Hence the temple prostitute liberates from this love and reaches the level of writer since Zihurba teaches her how to write. Apart from that Zihurba orders the closing of sacred prostitutes temple (138). In this context, Zihurba is different from Muinar. Muinar is not a performance-action person; she is the fragmented gathering of the ten thousand-year long women's self and voices. Zihurba, on the other hand, by her leader and liberator roles, is close to representing the ideal of active women, envisaged by performative feminism (Butler, 1990).

In such a fragmented narration, it is certain that one cannot talk about the liberator and liberation. It is because this narration is not composed of total and consistent personifications, but voices. It does not have a central woman character around whom the story unfolds. Besides, the fantastic-poetic factors in the narration distinguishes it from chronological-realist narrations that are based on causality; they also deny the epistemology on which these type of narrations rely. The narration begins at that day when "the voices of all those who have addressed [the narrator] since her childhood" fills "into her ears" (61). A personal beginning in all its aspects. These voices are "those of all the people whom she knows and loves, and which has flown through each other" (61). This story is an imaginary tale that springs from the deepest sleeps. Its writing starts with the testimony of a tree branch:

... it was one of those nights, when I wrote, forgetting my hand on the paper and bending on my bed in solitude.

I straightened up with a feeling as if the leaves of an oak tree were entering through the open window and saw that one of the young branches of the tree was approaching my paper; it was reading my sentences... I came to see this in a moment, with the creeps that bursted out of my eyes; my thoughts stuck to the trunk of the tree; it rapidly drew back its branch that caught my eye by the edge of its leaf; the foundation of my house was twitched by the shake it caused.

The pen dropped with that rustle; I rushed and closed the window instantaneously with turning the light off. I sank back into my bed with fear; a sound rose in waves from deep down; my name was called once, then three times, and then three times more... By the voices of all people

whom I have known and loved, those people whose voices have flown through each other's.

The dead were calling me by the voices of the living; the living were addressing the dead through my name... They would be taking me to the sound abyss in the midnight.

In this quotation the tree and the writer are in accord in terms of feelings, but in antagonism in logical terms. The tree rapidly draws back when 'thoughts' are stuck onto its trunk. In this rapidity there should be some anger, at least some violence that it shakes the house from its foundation. As we analyze the quotation we observe that the concept of writer is both attractive and frightening and scary for Latife Tekin's – we had already known this from her previous novels. In *Muinar*, too, the same horror of creativity is repeated under the supervision of the world and nature. There is, again, skepticism toward the language; denial to tell the final say, an authentic startle in the face of what is said, orientation to the sound more than the language – and this is a reason for Tekin's texts to appear as poems in prose – and the aspiration to go deep into a sound abyss by dismantling this sound, to being lost. This is the poem by Latife Tekin, as we know it. At the same time, a quite distinct animalism, a technique that constitutes the fundamental image of poetry: the art of reflection and imputation between one's feelings and the non-living beings. *Muinar* is, thus, a naturalist women's text where one hears these fragmented voices, fragmented stories feature in a variety of forms, and that hosts, in the final analysis, a very personal journey.

What is striking in his text is that fragmented narrations are almost revealed to Elime. "Ownerless sentences started to murmur, my voice deepened and flowed" (43). Elime as the writer is also a nature mystic. Regardless of how much she counts or measures these voices that come to her as revelations carry her to the level of a mystic. And she will also be sent to a temple:

The night you were born we took out the rings from our noses; the moonlight was drawn to your face, your ornaments were stars... They made me drink spicy root juice; my lips were paled by its poison; my breasts shrunk... They praised my beauty under the stars; they whispered down from the morning window; they sent me to the temple of nurse Erunna (57)

In this dream where subject and the object, you and me get mixed, in this moment of "revelation" where sleep and wakefulness, inner and outer voices are mixed, Elime sits on a stone, and she craves for a desert from those very past times, a desert that belongs to temple times:

...that dessert was served at the funerals... Stone is seated in its milk for forty days; the stone melts, perishes in it; its dough is blended by that milk, fit to palms; lightened, a White stone: Do not assume that I analyze and understand everything. To write the epic they tightened rope across the continent and dried the ox kin, they wrote, the earth consumed; not even a sentence was left for today; besides, the swinging of those skins in the moonlight.

Although the shrinking breast is a sign that women's fertility comes to an end, even the stone melts in the milk of the desert that she

craves; and here, in all this perishing one cannot be certain whether writing will stay or not: "They wrote, the earth swallowed!"

The fear that writing might perish is observed in Tekin's writing, as it is in Kutlu's work. But Tekin also brings in the mystic that this perishing might be followed by the existence of the world. This mysticism has always been present in Tekin's writings - starting from the writing that flies out the window and wanders the city in *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm (Dear Shameless Death) and moving to the leaf-page-writing metaphor in Ormanda Ölüm Yokmuş (Death Does Not Exist in the Forest)*. Thus, it might be apt to name Tekin as a writing mystic. Hence, those times when her style tends to poetry this mysticism weighs more: "...perhaps it is written on the tablets; everyone who has called me since my childhood, their voices filled into my ear that night" (61).

And at one spot as they climb a hill with Muinar (Muin – means helper), when they move on to experience a cosmic dream Muinar says: "our road will become steeper from now on; get up, the dream is not seen by the eyes... my dream is you..." (92) Thus realizes Elime: "I am her dream as I also have my own dreams. Thinking of myself as a dream having a dream I stepped out the shade of the tree and walked toward the rock" (92). This dream can also be read as the mystic totality of the subject and the object.

The stone, rock, as the fundamental image of the narration in the book ["I had the same dream again, I measure stones, I measure stones" (108); "I fold papers, out of my grief I measure the word by the stone" (209)] seems to be the metaphor for permanence of writing to compensate for the fear that the word is volatile, and if it has a statement it is that the writer's apocalypse is nearing: "They say that the world is waiting for the last writer! That it would give me this news; I could not help but laughed at the face of the rock" (93). But in the end, Elime has Muinar read her writings. For her this means opening her voices and secrets to the ten thousand year-old womanhood. Elime's legacy, like Nippukir's, is her experiences.

Concluding Remarks

Let me repeat the question I asked in the beginning: Can there be women's epics? I asked this question because there are two meanings of the term epic that would contradict feminism.

1. Epic, as the most male-dominant narration, places an active and powerful individual into the center of the narration. Does a narration that creates such a subject contribute to centralized power discourses even if the subject turns out to be a woman?
2. Epic is the most essentialist narration. Feminism has from the start resisted essentialist epistemology.

I tried to explain that both narrations evade the first trap – i.e., the trap that they might have reinforced centralized, male-dominant power discourses by creating an active woman subject. Ayla Kutlu does so by the performative change of the woman character in the subjectivization process. Latife Tekin does so by multiplying the subject. But I cannot argue that they do not fall into the second trap – i.e., the trap of essentialism. Ayla Kutlu gives credit to heroism, and Latife Tekin does so for naturalism to a certain extent – both are types of essentialism. Moreover, Latife Tekin opens considerable

space for woman-nature-naturality essentialism as she creates a woman in search of a pastoral world.¹

But I should quickly add the following: as Sibel İrzık (2004) notes in her article, "Kadın Olarak Okumak" (Reading as a Woman), "we shall not expect purity in any theoretical concept" (İrzık, 1997, p. 52). Then again, we refer to the "performativity" criteria of feminist theory. Analyzed in this respect, both books are feminist texts; because both Kutlu's and Tekin's woman characters persevere to designate their lives around their performances. Writing is part of this performativity; and this is the most existential act in our novel tradition for both women.

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¹ Reading Muinar with the ecological critique method that has gained importance among critical theories since the early 1990's does not help its essentialist tendencies in terms of woman-nature-naturality. For, a pastoral utopia poem, expressed in terms of women's sensitivity looms large in Muinar.