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Domesticated Souls: Vâlâ Nureddin (Vâ-Nû) on Womanhood

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ABSTRACT *This study focuses on the treatment of women and the construction of female identity in the works of Vâlâ Nureddin (Vâ-Nû) (1901–1967), a Turkish journalist and author. A reinterpretation of his works is critical in the sense that they have the potential to provide the reader with necessary knowledge concerning the roots of the unequal status of women in contemporary Turkey. The major argument of this study is that Vâ-Nû appears to represent the still-valid gendered common sense, which bases itself on the approval of the subordinated position of women. Throughout his works, Vâ-Nû reformulates an essentialist worldview in which women are treated solely with an emphasis on an allotted nature. This essentialism, however, does not display a celebration of womanliness, but rather is utilized as legitimization for the identification of women with the private sphere, as well as for the restrictions that they face in the public sphere.*

Women's history has long been an unexplored field of study in the Turkish academic world. It was only after the 1980s that the topic attracted scholarly attention. This increasing awareness is mainly due to two interrelated factors. First, the process of research was accelerated through the approval of women's studies as an academic discipline in Turkey, which was accompanied by the rise of the feminist movement in the country in the post-1980 era. Second, the increasing attention to the issue can be placed within a wider context: that is, the emergence of women's history as a new field of study in the West in general, beginning in the early 1970s. The concerns regarding the invisibility of women in the standard study of history had been a critical motive in this respect. The major aim behind the efforts to establish a new perspective towards history was the desire to overcome the hegemony of the masculine perspective that universalized the story of men as if it represented all humans. Departing from the incompleteness caused by the invisibility of the “other” half of humankind, the feminist approach to history defined women—and later gender—as a fundamental category in historical inquiry. In this context, this new approach tries to transform the invisible/lost sex to visible subjects, adopting an inclusive perspective. However, the field of women's history does not concentrate solely on the inclusion of women

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