No man's land: gender and sexuality in erotic narratives of the Late Ottoman Empire

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Chapter Four

Sexual Politics in the Late Ottoman Empire

Many studies on sex and sexuality in the late Ottoman Empire cite the same quotation from *Maʿrûzât* (Reports) written by the prominent Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (1822-1895). With his work, he wanted to inform Abdülhamid II about the profound change that occurred in the perception of love and intimacy during the nineteenth century:

> With the increase of women lovers the number of boy-beloveds decreased and the sodomites seem to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Ever since then the well-known love for and relationships with the young men of Istanbul was transferred to young women as the natural order of things. (Halaçoğlu 1980: 9)[65]

This quotation became a popular way to indicate the change in Ottoman men's sexual inclination, an inclination that shifted from men to women in the nineteenth century. According to Serkan Delice, through the quotation, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa historicises certain sexual inclinations and essentialises opposite-sex relationships in the Ottoman Empire. Besides, the scholarship wittingly or unwittingly reproduced and naturalised his essentialism by citing his quotation without a critical note (2010: 119).

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[65] Zen-dostlar çoğalıp mahbûblar azaldı. Kavm-i Lut sanki yere battı. İstanbul'da öteden beri delikanlılar için maʿrûf u muʿtâd olan aşk u alaka, hal-i tabîʿisi üzre kızlara müntakil oldu. I benefitted from Ze'evi's English translation. See Dror Ze'evi. *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900.* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006: 164.

Contemporary scholarship has frequently regarded same-sex love and intimacy among men as the 'inevitable' consequence of the absence of women in the public sphere before the nineteenth century. İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu informs us that the reason for same-sex intimacy among men – and also among women – was gender segregation enforced by religious edict especially in cities (1968: 33). In addition, Kemal Sılay draws attention to the way in which gender segregation had an impact on artistic and literary representations due to the absence of women in society (1994: 79-80). The link between gender segregation and same-sex intimacy was not limited to Ottoman society. Dror Ze'evi attributes the marginalisation of women in the public sphere and the growth of male homo-social bonds, which might result in "homosexuality", to Islamic culture (2006: 4). Iranian modernists also assumed that same-sex desire was "a consequence of the unfortunate social arrangement of sex segregation" (Najmabadi 2005: 57). Ultimately, the disappearance of same-sex intimacy has been often seen as a result of the encounter with modernity by which women became more visible in the public sphere in the late Ottoman society as they did in other Islamicate societies. Khaled El-Rouayheb, however, remarks that although there might be a link between gender segregation and widespread pederasty in the pre-modern Middle East, male "homosexuality" was not the mere result of this segregation. Personal interest in boys also played a part (2005: 29-30). Indeed, believing that same-sex intimacy was simply the result of gender segregation, without considering one's own free will or preferences for sexual practices, makes us fall into the trap of heteronormativity by establishing opposite-sex intimacy as the norm.

Until the nineteenth century, there was neither a normative heterosexuality nor any concept of homosexual identity in Ottoman society. The categories that signify same-sex love and intimacy, such as *gulampare*

(male-lover), *zenpare* (woman-lover), *köçek* (male dancer), *mukhannes* (passive), *guzeshte* (young man with beard), *emred* (beardless youth), are not semantically akin to "the homosexual" in the modern sense (Arvas 2014: 148). David M. Halperin underlines the constructionist approach to the history of homosexuality that suggests homosexuality as a modern construction not because same-sex intimacy did not exist before 1869 – when the term "homosexuality" was used in print for the first time –, but because there was no such category that precisely included same-sex practices in the pre-modern and non-Western worlds as the term requires (2000: 89). Because homosexuality is a modern construction and modern gender categories are not invariably convenient for helping us to understand the unfixed and historically contingent Ottoman sexualities, the term "same-sex" is often chosen to avoid being anachronistic when describing sexual practices before the nineteenth century. However, Afsaneh Najmabadi explains that the term "same-sex" is nevertheless problematic, since it puts sex in the centre as the truth that describes these relationships and leads us to consider human relations within the boundaries of their "same-sex-ness" (2006: 17). Besides, all sexual intimacies might actually be regarded as same-sex intimacies before the nineteenth century, because the woman was seen as the "imperfect-man" model (Ze'evi 2006: 23). Therefore, the effort

> [t]o replace "homosexuality" with "same-sex practices and desires," while overcoming its nineteenth-century sexual burden, gives us a term that carries a binarized nineteenth-century gender-burden, anachronistically and inappropriately used for earlier times. (Najmabadi 2006: 17)

Previous to the modern construction of (homo)sexuality as an identity, male same-sex practices in the high classes of Greco-Roman antiquity were less restrictive in certain areas compared to the modern period (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005: 11). In his influential work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault explains how, for the Greeks, "love of one's own sex and love for the other sex" were not two opposites and exclusive choices (1992: 187). Yet, as Paul Veyne states, "[i]t is incorrect to say that the ancients took an indulgent view of homosexuality. The truth is that they did not see it as a separate problem" (1985: 26). In other words, they found the sex of the partner less significant compared to the sexual role. At this juncture, Delice warns us to be aware of the danger of making a sharp distinction between "so-called pre-modern sexual acts and modern sexual identities" (2010: 107). He refers to Judith Butler, who argues against Foucault's distinction between pre-modern and modern, and Delice also abstains himself from praising pre-modern sexual practices while resisting the modern regime of sexuality (2010: 121). Butler remarks that the pre-modern does not come before the modern; instead, the pre-modern has been reconstructed and fictionalised by the modern to tell its own narrative. She accuses Foucault of idealising the pre-modern in order to battle against the modern regime of sexuality (1999: 15-16). Similar to Butler, Halperin suggests restoring the history of sexuality by recognising the importance of transcending historical boundaries within a genealogical analysis of (homo)sexuality, because its modern understanding one way or another forms our understanding of same-sex desire and practices of the past (2000: 90).

Ahmed Cevdet Paşa's famous quotation has also been used by scholarship in a Foucauldian way to demonstrate the extent to which the expanding relations with Europe and modernity silenced specific sexual discourses, marginalised homo-erotic practices and heteronormalised love

and sexuality in late Ottoman society (Delice 2010: 119). Selim S. Kuru notes that during the nineteenth century, male same-sex love and intimacy were not freely spoken of particularly among the educated elite and authors. In the new literary genres such as the novel and the short story, women began to be represented as the love objects of men. Classical literary genres still maintained male beloveds in the late nineteenth century against the upcoming developing modernist literature. Yet, male same-sex love and intimacy mostly continued to exist in the form of the literary anecdote (2010: 7). Moreover, Kuru elsewhere claims that sexually explicit Ottoman Turkish texts are denigrated by "ahistorically subjective readings" that heteronormalised and marginalised "Ottomans" by depicting Ottoman Turkish literature as perverse due to the nationalist discourses (2007: 159). Likewise, Arvas suggests that heternormativity began to become more dominant in Ottoman Turkish literature and transformed the male beloved in classical Ottoman poetry into the pervert in the nineteenth century (2014: 145). In general terms, the *zeitgeist* of contemporary scholarship is that from the end of the nineteenth century onwards the marginalisation of same-sex intimacy due to the nationalist discourse and modernisation of literary genres indicated "a linear narrative history and fictions of morality" (Kuru 2010: 1-2).

I contend that discussions about Ottoman same-sex love and intimacy, and its disappearance take a turn depending on how one wants to position oneself in relation to the Ottoman past or to detach oneself from the prototype of national identity. This approach seems hypocritical, because it is about avoiding possible risks in struggling with transcending historical boundaries in the course of one's own identity construction and implicitly one's own sexuality. However, the change in the signification of sexual practices and the construction of sexuality as a significant part of identity,

should not intimidate us from going beyond the causality of gender segregation, modernisation and the emergence of nationalism. While accusing the nationalist discourse of forming linear narratives in terms of same-sex sexual history, scholarship also forms a linearity and draws a distinction between before and after Ottoman modernisation and the emergence of nationalism as Butler and Halperin criticise. Here, I suggest reconsidering the change in the understanding of same-sex intimacy and the construction of sexual identity in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries as the transitional period. In this period, there was a hybridity in sexual norms and roles that have been deconstructed and reconstructed in various ways and through a range of discourses. These discourses have been based on existing power structures up until today.

The discussions on same-sex love and intimacy in general and the discussions around Ahmed Cevdet Paşa's quotation in particular, continually revolve around the transformation of same-sex practices among men. Undoubtedly, there were also same-sex practices among women in the Ottoman Empire. However, it never became explicit in the male-dominated Ottoman Turkish literature and remained as "the *terra incognita* of Ottoman studies" [emphasis in the original] (Arvas 2014: 151). Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı report that they were not able to "locate a single instance in the Ottoman legal literature of a woman being accused of illegal or immoral sexual relations with another woman". The most informative sources on same-sex practices among women are the travel accounts written by Europeans (2005: 172-173). There are only few Ottoman Turkish sources that mention same-sex practices among women. For instance, in his book *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?* (How Was Istanbul Having Fun?), Refik Ahmed (Sevengil) (1903-1970) mentions that:

> This psychological sickness, which clinical medicine calls "love between the same gender," was common in the past among women, too. There were such wealthy women who made love to each other in the harems. They had several young and beautiful girls and women in their service in order to satisfy their sexual desires. They made these women take care of their private and secret affairs. (1927: 96)[66]

Drawing on this quotation, Arvas makes an inference that Refik Ahmed also differentiates Ottoman Muslim women from women in the Turkish Republic. Yet, Arvas also indicates that this sort of generic reading does not necessarily indicate that same-sex practices among women or "lesbianism" were considered as a psychological sickness or that sexual identity stemmed from gender segregation in Ottoman society (2014: 152). Hence, it only remains as another linearity that was formed regarding the change in sexual practices.

Deli Birader Gazali's literary composition *Dâfi'ü'l-gumûm ve Râfi'ü'l-humûm* (The Expeller of Sorrows and Remover of Worries) includes same-sex practices among women. Andrews and Kalpaklı state that in Gazali's work there is some recognition given to same-sex practices among women (2005: 171). They "tie dildos on their waists and grease them with almond oil and then start the job, 'dildoing' the cunt" (Kuru 2000: 235). Andrews and Kalpaklı's conclusion is that the story of dildo women functions to restore confidence to male audiences demonstrating that same-sex practices among women are not as satisfactory as a man and a penis. Sexual intercourse among women without a penis or replacements for penis

[66] Tıbbın müteşâbih'l-cins aşklar diye isim verip teşhis ettiği bu ruhî maluliyet eski kadınlar arasında da icra-yı hüküm etmekte idi. Nice zengin hanım efendiler vardı ki haremlerde birbirleriyle muaşaka ederler ve tatmin-i hevesât için suret-i mahsusada genç yakışıklı kızlar, kadınlar bulundururlar, hususi ve mahrem hizmetlerini onlara gördürürlerdi. I benefited from Sılay's translation. See Kemal Silay. *Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court: Medieval Inheritance and the Need for Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994: 92-93.

were not considered important (2005: 171-172). The fantasy that all women desire to be penetrated is emphasised, and there is even a story about a woman who "once sent her slave-girl to a spinning-wheel maker to order a dildo" (Kuru 2000: 235). Although Arvas agrees with Andrews and Kalpaklı and argues that same-sex love and intimacy among women was based on a male point of view for male audiences, he, on the other hand, indicates that – by the example of dildo women – Gazali does not reduce penetration to a male activity; the dildo woman is the clearest-cut example of penetrative sex among women (2014: 152).

In the ancient world especially, sex was considered as a penetrative act performed by adult free men on those who were socially inferior such as women, boys, and slaves/servants (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005: 13). Eva C. Keuls formulates sexual practices within the frame of power relations in ancient Athens using the term "phallocracy" meaning "a cultural system symbolized by the image of the male productive organ in a permanent erection, the phallus" (1985: 1-2). Halperin indicates that sexual practices before the modern understanding of sexuality is based on the age-old classifications in terms of hierarchy and gender such as penetration versus being penetrated, superordinate versus subordinate status, masculinity versus femininity, activity versus passivity. In this respect, the pre-modern understanding of male same-sex practices privileges gender over sexuality, while the modern understanding of homosexuality privileges sexuality over gender (2000: 96, 91). Halperin notes that the notion of homosexuality, however, reduced all the nuances of same-sex desire, penetration and/or domination to a single unified phenomenon. It refers to both partners without distinguishing the sides of same-sex practices and without establishing a hierarchal relation between the partners at least on a semantic level. However, it does not necessarily mean that previous hierarchies do not exist

in homosexuality (2000: 110, 112).

Sexuality is always embedded within a power structure and implies domination. In the late Ottoman Empire, the realms of political, cultural and literary productions were dominated by a small group of Ottoman elite men for whom defining masculinity was not easy (Kuru 2010: 1). I contend that in this elite group of men exerting domination by using their pens, the pens might easily be regarded as phallic symbols in the writings. Regarding this literary vis-à-vis sexual domination, in this chapter I read Mehmed Rauf's (1875-1931) *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, which narrates same-sex practices among women by refusing its transformation into being an internal part of identity, namely lesbianism. Through my reading, I aim to depict the changes in meanings of sexual practices and construction of sexual identities at the turn of the century – a historically as well as sexually transitional period. I start with the (hi)story of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* (The Story of a Lily) and the polemics around the narrative. Next, I explain the theoretical framework I apply throughout my reading. Finally, I scrutinise Mehmed Rauf's approach to the polemical theme of lesbianism in his novel by comparing it with the discussions on same-sex practices and homosexuality I have presented so far.

(Hi)Story of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*

Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi is one of the most famous erotic and pioneering narratives of late Ottoman Turkish literature. It has two known editions: *Matbaa-i Bahriye* (the Navy Institute Press) published the seventy-two-page edition in 1910 in Istanbul, and the forty-four-page edition was published by *Hilal Matbaası* (the Crescent Press) without a publication date or place of publication (Birinci 2001: 285).[67] Despite the fact that both editions were published anonymously, literary circles of the period freely speculated that

[67] In my analysis, I will refer to the seventy-two-page edition.

Mehmed Rauf was the author. Mehmed Rauf was one of the most outstanding novelists of Ottoman Turkish literature; he was renowned for the first psychological novel *Eylül* (September), which was published in 1901. His literary skill is evident in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, which has a plain style and uses colourful language. Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu counts this novel as the first example of Ottoman Turkish adultery literature and argues that if "pornographic" parts are removed, it can be a good read (1967: 54). After *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, Mehmed Rauf's laureateship profoundly fell into disrepute (Tarım 1992: 43). It is often claimed that he wrote this "half-pornographic" novel just to make money and to deal with his economic difficulties (Karaosmanoğlu 1969: 22). İrvin Cemil Schick indicates that *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* is "narrated by a self-confessed rake, and Mehmed Rauf's contemporaries had no doubt that it was autobiographical" (2011: 214). The novel had a large audience when it was published. It sold out very quickly and earned a lot of money for the author and publisher. It was hand-copied and rented out to readers for prices ranging from ten to twenty even to fifty *kuruş* overnight. Its audience interestingly consisted of both men and women (Çapanoğlu 1967: 54). A woman reader from İzmir, Besime Hanım, even proposed to Mehmed Rauf after reading the novel (Birinci 2001: 287).

Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi was banned and recalled from the market on the 21st May 1910.[68] It is one of the few books that were prohibited during the period after the proclamation of the Second Constitution. Burcu Karahan points out that the reason for the prohibition might have been its profane language rather than its erotic plot. On the 28th May 1910, Mehmed Rauf sent a letter to the newspaper *Sâdâ-yı Millet* (Voice of the Nation) and denied that he was the author of the novel (2009: 175, 165). Nevertheless, he was taken

[68] For the decision of its recall in Latin script see Birinci, Ali. "Müstehcenlik Tartışmaları Tarihinde 'Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi'." *Tarih Yolunda: Yakın Mazînin Siyasî ve Fikrî Ahvalî*. İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2001: 286.

to *Divan-ı Harb-ı Örfi* (the military court), as he was in the army at the time. In the court, Mehmed Rauf stated that he had compiled and translated it (Karakışla 2001: 20). Nevertheless, he did not indicate the source text for *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* (Karahan-Richardson 2011: 153). He was discharged from the army and sentenced to prison for eight months. The owner of *Hilal Matbaası*, Asım Bey and the distributor Ziya Bey were fined as well (Karakışla 2001: 20-21). After being discharged from the army, Mehmed Rauf continued writing erotic novels for money, none of which attained the success of his acclaimed canonical work *Eylül.*

Considering nineteenth-century translation practices in Ottoman Turkish literature, Burcu Karahan remarks that what Mehmed Rauf meant by "translation" is the imitation and adaptation of a foreign text (2009: 165). In fact, *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* is an adaptation of a French erotic novel *Le Roman de Violette*. It was also published anonymously and without a publication date in Belgium like many other nineteenth-century French erotic texts. Identifying the author of this French novel proved even more difficult than assigning authorship to its Ottoman Turkish adaptation. It had been assigned to several authors: Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), Alexandre Dumas père (1802-1870), and Marquise de Mannoury d'Ectot (1815-1899). Burcu Karahan-Richardson argues that *Le Roman de Violette* is a decadent lesbian story written from a female perspective. The extensive "female sensitivity", which distinguishes itself from usual erotica motifs concerning the selection of words, the changing positions in power relations etc., strengthened the possibility that *Le Roman de Violette* was written by a female author. Marquise de Mannoury d'Ectot was broadly accepted as the author of *Le*

Roman de Violette published in 1883 (2011: 156).[69] By comparing *Le Roman de Violette* to *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, Karahan examines the ways in which Mehmed Rauf Ottomanised the French novel and how the narrative became estranged from its original author and genre (2009: 164). Although these two narratives are quite similar in terms of basic structure, as Karahan argues, Mehmed Rauf transformed *Le Roman de Violette* into a pornographic narrative told from a male perspective (2009: 174).

Reading *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* from within *Le Roman de Violette*

In her article "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida", Barbara Johnson analyses three texts – Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Purloined Letter*, Jacques Lacan's reading of Poe's short story, and Jacques Derrida's reading of Lacan's reading of Poe's short story – in order to explore different modes of reading. She argues that any reading of the aforementioned texts would transform some of their elements while repeating the others in a sequence that is not fixed. This unfixed sequence creates "certain regular effects" whose functioning and structure constitute the basis of her reading of these texts. Johnson indicates that each of the texts both presents itself and the others, and also demonstrates "the fallacies" that are intrinsic to any kind of "presentation" of a text. These fallacies form essential elements in modes of reading (2014: 57-58). Hence, Johnson does not aim to validate the intersection of Lacan's and Derrida's readings of Poe's short story; instead, she draws attention to "how they miss each other" in terms of understanding, and the ways in which this missing makes room for interpretation (2014: 67). Accordingly, she turns Poe, Lacan, and Derrida into an allegory of modes of reading a text. In this respect, the text does not exist through its meaning, but

[69] Marquise de Mannoury d'Ectot wrote two other erotic novels; *Mémoires secrets d'un tailleur pour dames* (1880) and *Les Cousines de la colonelle* (1881), which are stories of the immorality of noble women (Karahan 2009:168).

through its reading. Reading becomes a way of establishing a relationship with the text, which is framed by the reader. Thus, thanks to its reader, the text turns out to be *performative*, rather than being *constative* [my emphasis] (Johnson 2014: 93).

Drawing on Johnson's reading, Mehmed Rauf's reading and framing of *Le Roman de Violette* is significant in the formation of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*. Here, his position as the reader of *Le Roman de Violette* allows us to scrutinise the ways in which Mehmed Rauf's reading transformed certain elements in the narration of *Le Roman de Violette* while repeating others in the sequence. In this chapter, my reading forms the basis for demonstrating how *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* presents itself and *Le Roman de Violette* including the "fallacies" of its representation – as Johnson suggests. Apart from Mehmed Rauf's framing of *Le Roman de Violette*, through his reading I move Johnson's discussion forward and demonstrate the adaptation process of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* as a cultural appropriation.

Although Julie Sanders regards adaptation and appropriation as intersecting and interrelating activities, she argues for maintaining certain distinctions between adaptation and appropriation based on the fidelity to source text (2009: 26). Pascal Niklas and Oliver Linder fundamentally suggest that adaptation and appropriation are not two divergent processes, but rather that appropriation was simply a part of adaptation (2012: 5-6). Linda Hutcheon refers to the term adaptation both as a product and as a process (2006: 7). Adaptation as a product is a transposition of a particular work or works adapted from one medium or genre to another, or a change of frame, and – implicitly – context. Moreover, adaptation as a double process invariably contains both (re)interpretation and (re)creation that "has been called both appropriation and salvaging" and that these are contingent on the perspective (Hutcheon 2006: 20, 7-8). In the process of adaptation, many

different factors such as ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic ones come into play (Hutcheon 2006: 108). Correspondingly, some change is inevitable and it could come from the adapter, the audience, the contexts of reception and creation (Hutcheon 2006: 142). This transculturation or indigenisation could change the meaning and impact of narratives thoroughly from the adapted text to the transcultural adaptation including racial and gender politics (Hutcheon 2006: xvi, 147). Thus, appropriation as a part of adaptation functions as a tool that manifests cultural differences.

Along similar lines, Mehmed Rauf is very selective when it comes to the adaptation of *Le Roman de Violette* as a cultural and literary appropriation. As Hutcheon puts, adaptation "is both an interpretive and a creative act; it is storytelling as both rereading and rerelating" (2006: 111). As well, *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* has an extra layer that demonstrates the ways in which Mehmed Rauf interprets *Le Roman de Violette* as its reader, and then adapts and appropriates it to *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* as its author. Therefore, this chapter proceeds on my reading of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, which is based on Mehmed Rauf's reading of *Le Roman de Violette*. In this way, I scrutinise the understanding of lesbian sexuality and its abnegation in the process of adaptation and appropriation of *Le Roman de Violette* in terms of Ottoman heteronormativity.

Biased Adaptation: Sacrificing Lesbianism on the Altar of Heteronormativity

The preface to *Le Roman de Violette* presents itself as a fiction. Marquise de Mannoury d'Ectot distances herself from her text (Karahan 2009: 172). The fictional author who is also the character-bound narrator, Christian, begins to speak:

> I have spent thousands of years in this earthly world, it would appear, and the spiritualistic component of my own being must have been successively transmitted in the continuity of human creatures, before it became my privilege to be one of the denizens of the planet of Mars, my present dwelling. (2012, Preface)[70]

Instead of a more spiritual distinction between the "earthly world" and afterlife, Christian displaces afterlife to another planet, namely Mars. This displacement undermines the conventional spiritual expectations of the aftermath to the "earthly world". Besides, the choice of the fictional author's name, Christian, subversively refers to Christianity, which, according to David M. Carr, "often has dealt with this tension by denying earthly desire" (2003: 86). Although the expression "continuity of human creatures" brings procreation and sexuality – ostensibly an earthly desire – to mind, Christian juxtaposes sexuality and spirituality and states that the spiritualistic part of his being provided the lineage. Furthermore, Carr underlines the link between sexuality and spirituality by arguing that they are not incompatible, but "intricately interwoven" (2003: 10). Even so, Christian's sexuality transcends the religious convention in the narrative and does not remain limited to procreation, as Christian doctrine requires. For this reason, the character-bound narrator Christian acknowledges the sins he committed during his "terrestrial incarnations". He associates these sins with his "most gratified feelings" for women in general and Violette in particular:

[70] I use the English translation of *Le Roman de Violette*. See Alexander Dumas, *The Romance of Violette*, Kindle Ed., The Library of Alexandria, 2012.

> She who now receives my slumbering sensations, numbed, alas, by the ethereal poetry of the ambient atmosphere in which I breathe when on earth, went by euphonious name of Violette. She gave me all the joys of that paradise promised to the faithful by Mahomet, and when she died my grief was unspeakable. (2012, Preface)

Violette, who used to be a virgin before meeting with Christian, substitutes heavenly pleasures and the promises of afterlife on earth. The reference to "Mahomet", the prophet Muhammad, shows that this substitution by means of sexual intercourse alters the idea that the afterlife is superior to life on earth. Hence, spirituality and earthly sexuality are considered equal.

In the fictionalised preface, Christian also specifies the target audience. He makes it explicit that *Le Roman de Violette* is not appropriate for "young ladies". He addresses the audience as follows:

> […] squeamish reader, and you, bashful lady, who are fearful of calling a spade a spade, you have had due warning; therefore tarry you a while, or else go no further, for these pages were not designed for you.
>
> Let only those follow me, who understand love, and practise thy sweet science, O voluptas! (2012, Preface)

On the other hand, the preface to *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* is mostly based on the socio-political realities of the period when it was written. Mehmed Rauf addresses the audience only as the author of the narrative, and he does not identify himself with the narrator. He criticises *hommes de lettres* who write mostly about the cabinet, the parliament and the CUP in newspapers, thereby depriving the audience of literary works. Differently

from Christian, who elucidates his reason for writing as recalling his most delightful memories of his "earthly life", Mehmed Rauf explains his intention in writing the novel by stating that he wants to write a story that will give pleasure to audiences who have become tired of reading political texts. Yet, his story would turn into being political after all, since it is very relevant to sexual politics in the twentieth-century Ottoman Empire. Aware of the possible critiques his work might receive, he starts a discussion about morality and manners. In this respect, he demonstrates a positivistic attitude that explains the woman-man relation through the filter of sexual urge (Gündüz 2013: 402). Besides, Mehmed Rauf indicates that morality and manners were invented to dominate people. In spite of this, he suggests that morality should reflect one of the indisputable needs of human nature, namely sexuality.

In *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, there is also a distinction between the earthly world and the afterlife:

> As the expression of our grandmothers, "Tomorrow in afterlife" if we receive a question as "What did you do on earth?" by God, what could we give as an answer? Of course many of us cannot say more than "I worked, ate, drank and slept!"; then there is no doubt that this community will tell these men "What a pity, such a shame, you have lived vainly!". Whoever could say "I have loved and have been loved" he is worthy of esteem; because only that man thoroughly understood and lived his life by appreciating his descend to earth! (5)[71]

[71] Büyükannelerimizin tabirince "Yarın ahirette" Cenab-ı Hak tarafından bize "Dünyada ne yaptınız?" diye bir sual vârid olsa ne cevap verebiliriz? Tabii birçoklarımız "Çalıştım, yedim, içtim ve uyudum!" sözlerinden başka bir şey söyleyemez; o zaman halkın bu adamlara "Vah vah, yazık etmişsin, beyhude yaşamışsın!" diyeceğine şüphe olmasın. Kim ki "Sevdim ve

Mehmed Rauf favours love over other earthly actions.[72] Nevertheless, the form of love he favours is not clear here. Considering the erotic motifs in the narrative, I suggest that he refers to sexual love though he also combines it with spirituality. The questions of loving and being loved also function to determine the target audience. Mehmed Rauf seems to agree with the fictional author Christian and makes it explicit that *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* is written for men who know how to love and be loved. The novel is not for young girls, or mothers, nor the ones who are morally as paranoid and fanatic as women. This statement suggests that moral sensitivity is attributed to womanhood. Furthermore, he also refers to Napoleon's famous saying about money and suggests that the world does not rotate around money, but rather focuses on a hole that is the reason for our existence in universe. The hole he refers to and rhapsodises over is the female genitalia. Mehmed Rauf likens female genitalia to "a unique, elegant flower", and he describes it as "women's most heart-robbing and pleasant device of lust" [*kadınların en dilsûz ve nûşin alet-i şehvetleri olan bu emsalsiz, latif çiçektir*] (6). He claims that in the East and in the West, from India to China and even to wild African clans, female genitalia is the only reason why life and the universe exist:

> If that hole did not exist, neither you nor me would exist in this world today, if it did not exist, nothing would exist in the world; even the

sevildim!" diyebilirse işte o şayan-ı tebriktir; çünkü ancak o adam hayatı hakkıyla anlamış, niçin dünyaya geldiğini takdir ederek yalnız o yaşamıştır!

[72] Similar lines appear in the very first pages of *Le Roman de Violette*: "These men in their passage through life, eat, drink and sleep; they indeed beget children, but they will never be able to say: "I have loved!" And surely is there anything worth living for, unless it be love?" (2012, Chapter One)

> world would not exist; nothing, nothing would exist; neither working, nor development, nor civilisation, and not even life… (7)[73]

On the one hand, the reference to Napoleon's saying about money emphasises the supremacy of spirituality over against materialism. On the other hand, Mehmed Rauf tries to prove that female genitalia are essential to materialistic progress. He also despises other authors who are not brave enough to write about this important and current theme of female genitalia. Mehmed Rauf praises the power of female genitalia by arguing that everyone is powerless and weak against them. However, contrary to what its author claims in the preface, *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* turns out – in fact – to be a praise of masculine potency (Karahan 2009: 172).

Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi starts with an inclusive sentence that intends to forge a link with the putative Ottoman men who are the target audience according to the preface: "I do not know if everyone is like me" [*Bilmem herkes de benim gibi midir*] (8). The male character-bound narrator immediately begins a 'manly' talk about women and describes how he becomes distracted in front of a beautiful woman (Karahan-Richardson 2011: 162-163):

> […] when I see a woman I like at first sight, I can visualise her body naked by using a little imagination; and in front of this beautiful scenery, I start watching the most eye-pleasing and provocative parts of this body for hours with great pleasure and lust. Especially, [certain body] parts envisage with their utmost glory and sovereignty, roundness of breasts like silver, seducing folds of hips, and, oh I

[73] O delik olmasaydı, bugün ne sen, ne de ben bu dünyada mevcut olmayacaktık, o olmasaydı, dünyada hiçbir şey olmayacaktı; hatta dünya olmayacaktı; hiç, hiçbir şey, ne çalışmak, ne terakki, ne medeniyet, hatta ne de hayat olmayacaktı…

> cannot write without shivering, and [that] beautiful womanhood flower. Is there anything else than this flower, even its dream gives cheerfulness to eyes by its innocent shape and I can never look at it long enough? Most particularly, if it is ornamented by shiny, colourful and arousing hair like flower petals… (8)[74]

As in the preface, Mehmed Rauf compares vaginas and pubic hair to flowers and petals respectively. Similar comparisons are repeated throughout the narrative. After his lustful daydreams about beautiful women, he begins to focus on a woman he sees on the Haydarpaşa ferry. According to Karahan-Richardson, this part of the narrative clearly demonstrates the difficulty that comes when one is translating and writing themes concerning love in an Ottoman context that are not equivalent to European kinds of love (2011: 163). Mehmed Rauf occupies the narrator with the issue of gender segregation in public spaces. He makes the narrator pose a rhetorical question: "Where do we encounter women at most in our lives? Either on ferries, or at the bridge, or in trains, don't we?" [*Bizim hayatımızda kadınlara en çok nerede rast gelinir? Ya vapurlarda, ya Köprü'de, ya şimendiferlerde değil mi?*] (9). Ze'evi points out the implications of technological innovations such as the steam engine and the train as well as new structures such as the Galata Bridge in the nineteenth-century shadow theatre plays (2006: 133). My assertion is that "the bridge" that Mehmed Rauf mentions is also the Galata Bridge. Although it is mostly used as a satirical symbol for Istanbul's

[74] […] hoşuma giden bir kadın görür görmez, ufak bir cehd ve tasavvurla, onun vücudunu çıplak olarak gözümün önüne getirebilirim; ve bu manzara-i letâfet huzurunda, bu vücudun en nazar-nevâz, en arzu-engiz kısımlarını kemal-i zevk ve şehvetle saatlerce seyr ü temaşaya dalarım. Bilhassa nazarımda olanca haşmet ve saltanatıyla tecessüm eden noktalar, göğsünün tedevvür-i sîmîni, kalçalarının şekl-i dil-firîbi, ve, ah titremeden yazamıyorum, ve şükûfe-i nisvâniyetidir. Bu şükûfenin hayalen bile olsun karşısından, nazarı tezyin eden şekl-i masumu kadar seyrine doyulmaz başka bir şey var mıdır? Bahusus, üstünü bir taç-ı muhteşem ve garrâ gibi, rengîn ve emel-nevâz tüyler tezyin ederse…

urban transformation both in cartoons and in shadow theatre plays (Brummett 2000a: 271), here it represents one of those rare public spaces where the encounter with the opposite sex is possible.

The narrator intensifies the gender segregation by using the pronouns "we" and "they" for men and women respectively:

> I generally look at mansions that come my way I think of the beautiful and stunning bodies of women who spend their lives behind these windows and how much I feel sorry about our lives we spend away from them and they spend away from us... (10)[75]

He writes a letter to the woman on the ferry through which he touches on another implication of gender segregation in Ottoman society: "there is no possibility to fall in love without letters in our lives" [*bizim hayatımızda mektupsuz aşk olmak imkanı yoktur*] (11). The narrator compares Ottoman society with European societies in terms of socialising with the opposite sex. He states that differently from Europe, in Ottoman society, a letter functions as a way of formally introducing two members of the opposite sex to each other. Additionally, the narrator notes that in Europe even after being introduced, these two people do not talk about love for weeks, even for months. However, in Ottoman society, he argues, if a woman answers a letter written by a man, it is not different from saying "I am yours, do whatever you want to do to me!" [*Ben seninim, ne istersen yap!*] (11). He does not find sincere those who talk about topics other than lust or love with the opposite sex. The narrator feels thankful that Ottoman people do not subject themselves to this torment. According to him, the only women that men

[75] Ben ekseriya gördüğüm köşklere bakarken bu pencerelerin arkasında sarf-ı hayat eden güzel ve müstesna kadın vücutlarını düşünür ve onların bizden ve bizim kendilerinden uzak geçirdiğimiz hayatımıza ne kadar teellüm ederim...

encounter are either their relatives or others whom one is allowed to love and lust over the instant that men encounter them – for these are women who do not keep themselves from men. Although he criticises Ottoman homosociality due to gender segregation in public spaces, he appreciates its easiness, which throws two people from the opposite sex together straightforwardly.

He sends three letters to the woman on the ferry. However, he does not get a reply until the third one. In the third letter, the narrator writes that he would be very happy and hopeful if she were to come to a rendezvous with him. She comes to the rendezvous point and gives him a letter:

> Sir,
> I regret to upset you with this letter; although I appreciate your commitment and affection towards me, I hereby declare that there is no possibility of there being any kind of relationship between us; because I am so disgusted by men, I cannot accept even the ones who are exceptional like you. I am certain that along with [this letter] that presents my sincerity I will earn your forgiveness.
> Farewell and respect. (15)[76]

He is devastated after reading the letter. While questioning the reason why she might dislike men, he has an epiphany and realises that this woman, who has a delightful and beautiful body, is also one of "those". At this juncture, "those" turns out to refer to lesbians. I contend that the enunciation of her

[76] Beyefendi,
Sizi mektubumla meyus ettiğime çok esef ederim; hakkımda gösterdiğiniz merbutiyet ve muhabbete çok minnettar olmakla beraber, aramızda hiçbir rabıtanın ihtimali olmadığını beyan ederim; çünkü erkeklerden o kadar müteneffirim ki sizin gibi müstesnalarını bile kabul edemem. Affımı şu gösterdiğim hulûs ile kazanacağıma eminim.
Veda ve hürmet

sexual orientation immediately after the discussion on gender segregation is not a coincidence. As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, heterosexuality began to become a dominant sexual orientation in the nineteenth century. Thereafter, same-sex love and intimacy previous to the nineteenth century have been explained as the result of the absence of women in public sphere. In his narrative, Mehmed Rauf essentialises opposite-sex intimacies like Ahmed Cevdet Paşa.

Up to this point, the narrative does not bear resemblance to its French original. Mehmed Rauf problematises certain socio-cultural issues in Ottoman society and prepares the ground for the rest of the narrative that depicts the story from a male perspective. In doing so, he segregates men from women, the Ottoman Empire from Europe, and heterosexuals from homosexuals. Each of these segregations helps the narrator to identify himself with regard to the expected and desired image of Ottoman men. The narrator takes a stand on heterosexuality, and more specifically masculinity by setting homosexuality and femininity apart.

After learning that the woman on the ferry is a lesbian, in order to console himself he decides to visit one of his friends. When he arrives, a young girl – one of the relatives of his friend – opens the door. This young girl was orphaned after the deaths of her parents one after the other, and she was obliged to seek refuge in his friend's house. The narrator describes her body based on their previous encounter that was ten days before his current visit:

> […] this girl has a very beautiful and seductive face over her thin body, this charm cannot be even found in an untouched white lily that magnificently waves over its stem. Besides, this girl, whose innocence is self-evident, has promising and willing glances that

> struck me with lust and passion in my visit, which was a week ago; furthermore, the part of her blouse, which coincides with her chest, has spectacular and stimulating folds and draws a beautiful and flowery picture that while walking, these two pearl breasts as if swathed by two big chrysanthemums, move seductively […] (17)[77]

Apart from comparing her body to nature, the narrator relates the way he feels in front of her body also to a natural event. Her body makes him feel as if his presence had been struck by lightning and thunderstorms. Ultimately, her sexual attraction becomes a consolation for the narrator who has been rejected that very day. He wants to take revenge on the woman on the ferry by approaching this young girl, Zanbak. The narrator thinks that she would immediately accept his sexual invitation, since her tempting and promising glances were the expressions of her struggle with the need of love in her soul and the passion in her body. Yet, the narrator hesitates over seducing a fifteen-year-old girl. Zanbak's eroticised virginity ends the narrator's internal feud with a decision to have sex with her. He holds her hands and pulls her to himself and wants to touch his lips to her cheeks. In the meantime, he accidentally touches her breast, which so

> […] resiliently shoved my hand that I was surprised. My whole body was shaken by this only touch; on earth there are indeed women, who

[77] [...] bu kızın ince bir vücud üzerinde o kadar latif ve pür-mana-yı şuhî bir çehresi var idi ki, sakının üstünde ebyaziyyet-i bakiranesi ile kemal-i ihtişamla sallanan bir zambakta bu letafet belki bulunamaz. Sonra, bu masum olduğundan şüphe edilemeyecek olan kızın nazarları o kadar pür-vaad ve pür-hâhiş idi ki, bir hafta evvelki ziyaretimde, hâbide ruhumu derin bir sadme-i şehvet ve iştiyak ile sarsmıştı; sonra arkasında bluzun göğsü, memelerin hizasına gelen ciheti o kadar câlib-i nazar ve iştihâ bir tedevvür, o kadar latif bir teressüm izhâr ediyordu, yürürken, büyük iki krizantem şekliyle göğsünü ihâta etmiş olan iki inci meme o kadar müstesna sallanıyordu [...]

> have received from nature the fascinating gift of exciting sensual desires at the slightest touch. (19-20)[78]

After a short foreplay, which was "like as if she understood the reason of coming into the world," [*dünyaya geldiğinin sebebini anlamış gibiydi*] (20). The narrator and Zanbak tryst for the night. This is the part where *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* intersects with *Le Roman de Violette*, a novel that has a more straightforward beginning. After briefly mentioning his mistress whom he was not happy with, the character-bound narrator Christian begins to recount his encounter with Violette who used to work in the same apartment building where he lives. She escapes from the husband of her employer Monsieur Beruchet's sexual harassment and seeks refuge in Christian's house. Christian takes her to his bedroom and looks at her body attentively. Although he is charmed by the same kind of accidental touch, he initially allows Violette to explain how she is scared of Monsieur Beruchet.

When Zanbak and the narrator meet in the dead of night, Zanbak tells her life story which had been spent in reduced circumstances and orphanhood. Differently from Violette, Zanbak was not harassed sexually; the wives of the house exposed her to physical violence. She makes it clear that her only expectation is to rescue herself from this house, and she pins her faith on the narrator. Hanne Blank notes that "the virgin as an erotic object" has emerged in the modern period starting from the sixteenth century onwards. Classicised virgins were represented as sexually appealing and beyond reach – such as Athena whose rank and classical otherworldliness protect her virginity. On the contrary, lower-class virgins like the Servant Girl, who was as sexually appealing as Athena but did not have a similar

[78] […] o kadar salâbet ve elastikiyetle elimi itti ki, hayret ettim. Yalnız bu temasla bütün vücudum sarsılmıştı; dünyada öyle kadınlar vardır ki, tabiattan kendilerine temas edilir edilmez tahrik-i şehvet etmek sihir ve kuvvetini ahz etmişlerdir.

privilege, was worldly and her virginity was accessible. Although lower-class virgins frequently resisted aspiring seducers, their poverty and illiteracy made them defenceless against sexual predators (2008: 199-201).

In order to spend many nights instead of one with her, the narrator asks her to stay in his house. In return, Zanbak hugs his neck, and they kiss. The narrator caresses her teeth and tongue with the tip his tongue. Zanbak closes her eyes by unconsciously throwing her head back, with a shaky and deep voice:

- Oh, how sweet!... […] But only your kisses are sweet this much! I wonder if everyone kisses like this?
- The ones who love each other kiss like this… […]
- Ah, is that all? […] That is strange… It seemed like I used to feel different desires. As if this kiss – no matter how good it is – is only the beginning of love... […] It is not possible to describe… A complacency I have felt in my whole body, and a felicity sometimes I have sensed in my dreams… […]
- Then it means I am the first man who ever kissed you.
- Yes, my father used to kiss me but it was different.
- Then you are a virgin...
- What does virgin mean? (23-24)[79]

[79]- Oh, ne tatlı!… […] Lakin yalnız sizin buseleriniz bu kadar tatlı! Herkes de böyle mi öper acaba?
- Birbirini sevenler böyle öpüşürler…[…]
- Ay, bu kadarcık mı? […] Bu tuhaf… Bana başka arzular hissediyorum gibi gelir idi. Sanki bu buse ne kadar iyi olursa olsun aşkın başlangıcı gibi bir şey… […] Tarifi mümkün değil ki… Bütün vücudumda bir rehavet, bazen rüyalarımda hissettiğim bir saadet… […]
- Demek size öpen ilk erkek benim.
- Evet, babam da öperdi ama o başka türlü idi.
- Demek bakiresiniz…
- Bakire ne demek?

This conversation is a direct translation from *Le Roman de Violette*. When it comes to Zanbak's ignorance of the meaning of being a virgin, the narrator

> took a pity on this innocence who fully gave up and turned herself over to me, more precisely I respected her; it felt like it would be a murder to steal this treasure of nature, which she unknowingly obtained, like a thief from her. (24)[80]

In *Le Roman de Violette*, the association of defloration with a "crime" – not specifically with a "murder" – presumably symbolises a medieval crime called "raptus" which might be translated as rape, and it literally means "the theft of a woman" (Blank 2008: 155).

Neither Christian nor Mehmed Rauf's narrator sleeps with these young virgin girls the very same night, and both of them explain why they did not, as follows:

> Undoubtedly my audience understood why I postponed taking advantage of this happiness starting from that night; however if a woman who does not know men and refinement of these affairs very well, accidentally reads these lines and wonders, I take to give the necessary information as my duty.
>
> Beyond any doubt, it was not apathy that prevented me from taking pleasure, yet this poor girl was only a fifteen-year-old innocent child, [and] she was an innocent to the extent that possessing her without making her aware of it would be deemed as a real murder; and then, please get it known that I am a man who wants to taste all

[80] Kendisini bana bu kadar kâmilen terk ve teslim eden bu masumiyete acıdım, daha doğrusu hürmet ettim; bana öyle geldi ki, malik olduğuna vakıf olmadığı bu hazine-i tabiatı bir hırsız gibi kendisinden almak bir cinayet olacaktı.

> fineness, the most gentle pleasures and the elegant lust of these pleasures one by one; and innocence is such a flower that, it should be kept in its pot as long as possible and even if it is picked it has to be picked leaf by leaf; a rosebud needs a week to bloom. (25-26)[81]

Likening virginity to blooming is an old custom, it is not unique to Marquise de Mannoury d'Ectot or Mehmed Rauf. Virginity is defined in *Hali Meiđhad* (Holy Maidenhood, written 1190–1230) as

> the blossom which, if it is once completely cut off, will never grow again (but though it may wither sometimes through indecent thoughts, it can grow green again nevertheless). (Salih 2003: 23)[82]

When Zanbak moves to the narrator's house the next day, he recommends that she take a bath. After the bath, when he sees her within a bathrobe that exposes one of her breasts, he caresses it. Later, he extends his hand between her legs and becomes very excited in the moment during which he feels a pile of hair that is fine and flossy. I contend that the description of pubic hair functions to legitimise Zanbak's sexual maturity and readiness to sexual intercourse. Already, by means of this slight touch, Zanbak's body

[81] Şüphesiz kârilerim niçin bu saadetten bu geceden itibaren istifadede teehhürü lazım gördüğümü anlamışlardır; fakat kazara bir hanım şu satırları okuyup da bunu merak ederse, erkekleri ve bu mesâilin gavâmızını çok iyi bilmediğinden ona bu mesele hakkında kafi derecede izahat vermeyi bir vazife bilirim.

Şüphesiz, bu zevkten beni men eden şey arzusuzluk değildi, lakin bu kızcağız henüz on beş yaşında bir çocuk, kendini verdiğini bilmeksizin ona temellük etmek bir hakiki cinayet addedilecek kadar masum bir kız idi; ve sonra, lütfen bilinsin ki, ben aşkın bütün inceliklerini, en nazik zevklerini, ve zevkin en ince şehvetlerini ayrı ayrı tatmak isteyen bir adamım; ve masumiyet öyle bir çiçektir ki, sakında mümkün olduğu kadar fazla bırakmak ve koparılırsa bile yaprak yaprak koparmak lazımdır; bir gonca bazen inkişâf için bir hafta vakit ister.

[82] See Bella Millet, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds. *Hali Meiđhad (Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990: 2-44.

becomes tense and startled. Her reaction proves to the narrator the extent to which her body comes into the world entirely for love and lust. Zanbak's sensitivity seduces him; he smells her vagina through a deep and long kiss. He places his mouth on her vagina and his "greedy lips" come into contact with a "feverish virginity".

Zanbak enjoys the narrator's exposure to her virginity and associates the pleasure she receives with death: "Oh my God… I died I am devastated…" [*Ah yarabbim… Öldüm, harap oldum…*] (33). At the same time, she senses that what they have done is something "wicked". Herein, the widely debated question of losing one's virginity takes place through a dialogue about womanhood – being a *tabiatın kadını* (woman of nature) and a *heyet-i içtimaiyenin kadını* (woman of society) – that starts between the narrator and Zanbak:

> When earth had been formed and women descended to earth beyond any doubt God accorded the same rights to women as he did to men. […] Man initially led off with family, he found a partner [for himself], woman had children; a few families gathered at somewhere, they constituted a clan, five-six clans gained a footing, they became socialised; in order to conduct and ensure an order of this society many laws were deemed necessary; here it is women's captivities and disasters had started since then. Because if [those] women were strong then, today the entire world still would be obliged to live according to their pleasure, that is to say laws that they enacted; however, since men are strong, due to the law which requires domination belongs to the strong one, women endured captivity… The law imposed on young ladies is the law of virginity, as to women is faithfulness. In other words, men of those times obligated young

> ladies to be virgins and women to be faithful in order to use them as they wish. While indoctrinating these laws to women as a result of their selfishness, men preserved their right to satisfy their desires; but in doing so, they did not think that they would exclude women from what had been determined for them. Here it is, women who forgot their soundness and tried to make men happy could not find anything other than shame as a quite painful lesson. (34-35)[83]

Zambak finds this very unjust, and the narrator continues:

> Yes, of course… Indeed it is a very big injustice, for this reason, some women raged and rebelled against this captivity and this injustice; they said that; "What does the society give me in return to this bondage life? Marrying a man whom I certainly cannot love, doesn't it? A man who gets hold of me at the age of eighteen, incarcerates me for his benefit, and makes me unhappy for my entire life… In that case, I prefer to live for my own pleasure, against social pressures, and do whatever I would like to do freely. Then, I will not be the woman of social pressures, but of nature." Here it is my dear, what we

[83] Dünya kurulduğu ve kadın dünyaya geldiği zaman şüphesiz Hâlik kadınlara da erkeklere bahşettiği hukuku kâmilen vermişti. [...] Erkek evvela aile ile işe başladı, karı buldu, kadının çocukları oldu; birkaç aile bir yere toplandılar, bir kabile teşkil ettiler, beş altı kabile bir yere geldi, bir heyet-i ictimâiye yaptılar; bu heyet-i ictimâiye muntazaman idare olunmak için birtakım kanunlara lüzum görüldü; işte kadınların esaret ve felaketleri o zamandan itibaren başladı. Çünkü o zaman kadınlar kuvvetli olsaydılar, bugün bütün dünya hala onların keyfini, yani onların koydukları kanunları takibe mecbur olacaklardı; halbuki, erkekler kuvvetli olduklarından, el-hükmü limen galebe kaidesine riayete mecbur kalan kadınlar da esarete katlandılar… Genç kızlara cebr edilen kanun bekaret, kadınlara cebr edilen kanun ise sadakat oldu. Yani o zamanın erkekleri kadınları istedikleri gibi kullanmak için genç kızları bakir[e] ve kadınları sadık kalmaya mecbur tutular. Erkekler, kadınlara bu kanunları vazʿ ve telkin ederken hodkâmlıklarının neticesi olarak, kendi ihtiraslarını istedikleri gibi teskin etmek hakını muhafaza etmişlerdi, fakat düşünmemişlerdi ki böyle yaparken, yani kendi ihtiraslarini kemal-i serbesti ile teskin ederlerken, kadınları da kendilerine tayin edilmiş vazifeden harice çıkaracaklar. İşte kendi selametlerini unutarak erkekleri mesut etmeye kalkan kadınlar gayet acı bir ders olmak üzere, ayıp ve hacâletten başka bir şey bulmadılar.

> just have done is wicked according to [judgements of] the society, but it is quite good and legitimate according to [law of] nature; because it is a satisfaction of our desires. Did you understand now? (35-36)[84]

This dialogue, which is shorter in *Le Roman de Violette*, functions to demonstrate the way in which a patriarchal society limits and forces women to behave according to certain rules and social pressures. The ones who follow these rules are called women of society, and the others are called women of nature. Similar to Zanbak's body and her innocence as well as the narrator's sexual arousal that have previously communed with nature, virginity and its loss are also discussed in relation to nature and justified by sexual instincts. Both Christian and Mehmed Rauf's narrator explain the social rules in society in a similar manner and ask Violette and Zanbak to decide what kind of women they want to become – a woman of nature or a woman of society. Both decide to be a woman of nature.

Zanbak declares that she wants to read and learn more, and again asks the narrator the meaning of being a virgin. The narrator defines virginity as "not ever being loved by a man":

> - There are different kinds of love, my angel… This morning I have loved you, although it was very sweet […] it cannot deflower your virginity. […] Virginity is a material and spiritual situation that is unique to young ladies like you who did not have any lover.

[84] Evet, elbette… Bu hakikaten büyük bir haksızlıktır, bunun için bazı kadınlar bu esarete, bu haksızlığa hiddetlendiler, isyan ettiler; dediler ki; "heyet-i ictimâiye bana cebr ettiği esarete mukabil ne veriyor? Şüphesiz sevemeyeceğim bir adamla izdivaç değil mi? Bir adam ki beni on sekiz yaşımda zapt edecek, kendi menfaatine hapsedecek, ve beni bütün hayatımca bedbaht edecek… O halde, ben kendi keyfime, heyet-i ictimâiyenin haricinde yaşamayı, hür olup istediğimi yapmayı tercih ederim. O halde, ben heyet-i ictimâiyenin değil, tabiatın kadını olacağım." İşte iki gözüm, bizim de şimdi yaptığımız şey heyet-i ictimâiyeye göre fena, fakat tabiata gayet iyi ve meşrudur; çünkü arzularımızın teskinidir. Şimdi anladın mı?

- Then what does "to be [one's] lover" mean?
- That [means] to take an action with a man, which helps the procreation of people. […] to be the lover of a woman means to come to the last letter in the alphabet of love. However, before that there are twenty-eight letters that should be learnt, the first letter is kissing.
- Oh, which letter was what you have done this morning? (39-40)[85]

Then, the narrator confesses that what he has done was very close to the last letter of the alphabet, as he went mad and skipped lots of letters because of his eagerness. But, he also explains that he wants to continue the alphabet of love as long as possible.

Blank suggests that virginity does not materially exist; it is invented and developed by humans, and it is socially designated (2008: 3, 5). Virginity is mainly female, and "virgins are, and always have been, almost uniformly female". Even the word "virgin" derives from the word *virgo* in Latin and stands for a girl or a never-married woman (2008: 10). In the narrative, because virginity is defined as "not being ever loved by a man" by the narrator, the loss of virginity corresponds to being loved by a man. Along these lines, the narrator explicitly and immediately refers to the insertion of a penis into a vagina, which "helps the procreation of people". As Blank writes, virginity is defined over its termination, and the loss of virginity is

[85] - Sevmek var, sevmek var meleğim…Bu sabah seni sevdim, bu her ne kadar çok tatlı idiyse de […] bekaretini izâle edemezdi. […] Bekaret, senin gibi hiçbir aşıka malik olmayan genç kızlara mahsus bir hal-i cismânî ve manevîdir.
- O halde "aşığı olmak" ne demek oluyor?
- Bu da bir erkekle, insanların çoğalmasına yardım eden bir harekette bulunmak demektir. […] bir kadının aşığı olmak saadet elifbâsında, son harfe gelmek demektir; halbuki, ondan evvel yirmi sekiz harf daha öğrenmek lazımdır ki, buse bunların ilk harfidir.
- Ay, bana bu sabah yaptığın hangi harftir?

more often than not marked by the insertion of a penis into a vagina. Yet, she poses the question of why this insertion has been regarded as the clear-cut act for the loss of virginity, especially other body parts, such as fingers, lips, breasts, tongues, anuses, etc. might be entailed in sexual activities without the need for a man and a woman. The insertion of a penis into a vagina is the only sexual activity that is not "essentially gender-neutral" and can impregnate a woman. Accordingly, Blank comes to a conclusion: virginity in relation to defloration and pregnancy is heterosexual at least in a traditional sense (2008: 9-10).

After its definition, the narrator touches on Zanbak's "virginity". Here there is an ambiguity in terminology. What the narrator actually refers to is the hymen, the existence of which was not even validated until the sixteenth-century in Europe (Blank 2008: 6). Hymen does not have an important function; like virginity, its importance is a given. As Blank asserts, where there is a vagina, there is also a hymen and "we are aware of hymens, because we are aware of something we call virginity" (Blank 2008: 33, 24). The narrator explains to Zanbak that hymen distinguishes girls from women; after its defloration, virginhood ends and womanhood begins. This distinction demonstrates the way in which the penis is given "the role of a mighty gatekeeper" that transforms a girl into a woman by means of its penetration (Ergun 2013: 277). Such a normative understanding of virginity also exists at a semantic level: the equivalent of hymen in Turkish is *kızlık zarı* (girlhood membrane), which contains the word *kız* (girl) that is frequently used as a substitute for a more medical term *bakire* meaning "female virgin" (Parla 2001: 79). This semantically normative use also shows how women's sexual prowess and sexuality are recognised only by means of virginity/hymen (Ergun 2013: 279).

By reading Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Jacques Derrida

highlights the liminality and the in-betweenness of the meaning of the hymen that signifies both "membrane" and archaically "marriage". As it is, "there is hymen (virginity) where there is no hymen (copulation), and there is no longer hymen (virginity) when there is hymen (marriage)". Thus, the meaning of the hymen is undecidable, "[i]t is 'both one and the other', and 'neither one nor the other'" (Descombes 1980: 151-152). Derrida speaks of the "undecidability" of the hymen, which dissents from "the either/or logic" – binary oppositions as follows (Johnson 2004: xviii):

> [T]he *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc. […] [emphasis in the original] (Derrida 1981: 43)

According to Derrida, the importance of the word hymen is not in the lexical richness, in the semantic infiniteness of the word hymen or in the mutually opposite layers of its signification, but in its composition or decomposition, which stems from its "syntactical *praxis*" [emphasis in the original] (2004: 229). The hymen stands between the inside and the outside of a woman, and its undecidable meaning results in another unclear relationship – that existing between desire and fulfilment:

> It is neither desire nor pleasure but in between the two. Neither future nor present, but between the two. It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting, in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder. If either one *did* take place, there would be no hymen. But neither would there simply be a hymen in (case events go) *no* place. With all the undecidability of its

> meaning, the hymen only takes place when it doesn't take place, when nothing *really* happens, when there is an all-consuming consummation without violence, or a violence without blows, or a blow without marks, a mark without a mark (a margin), etc., when the veil is, *without being*, torn, for example when one is made to die or come laughing. [emphasis in the original] (Derrida 2004: 223)

When it comes to the hymen, there is no longer any difference between desire and fulfilment (Derrida 2004: 219). Here, orgasm is achieved between the anticipated desire and its ultimate fulfilment due to the suspended spatiality and temporality of the hymen. In this respect, Derrida implicitly mentions the relationship between orgasm and death as part of his discussion about the hymen by applying to Mallarmé's work *Mimique* (1897). It refers to Paul Margueritte's (1860-1918) *Pierrot Murderer of His Wife* (1881), in which Pierrot murders his wife Columbine by tickling her to death; after her "spasmodic death", she rises from the dead and also tickles her husband to death. In the end, Columbine breaks out in laughter, which might be counted as "the moment of simultaneous pleasure and death" (Aydemir 2007: 196). Rodolphe Gasché indicates that the event narrated by the mime of *Mimique* could be considered as a hymen – the marriage of Pierrot and Columbine whose deaths due to orgasmic spasms symbolise the consummation of their marriage (1983: 164). As Derrida writes:

> […] the crime and the orgasm (what Bataille calls dying laughing and laughing [at] dying) take place such that in the final analysis what happens is nothing, no violence, no stigmata, no traces; the perfect crime in that it can be confused only with the heights of pleasure [*jouissance*] obtainable from a certain speculation. […] Here, then, is

> the apparent production of the spasm or, let us already hazard the word, of the hymen. (2004: 212-213)

Consequently, the difference between the hymen and the spasm is abolished and both the pleasurable and the murderous become undecidable (Aydemir 2007: 198). Also in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, "the moment of simultaneous pleasure and death" occurs through the narrator's first contact with Zanbak's hymen. After repeating his intention to keep Zanbak a virgin as long as possible, he reaches "the secret of womanhood," which astonishes Zanbak. When the narrator touches "the soft surface of the flower mound" with his finger, she begins to react, utters inarticulate exclamations, and sighs. When she recovers she says:

> - I am dying… […]
> - Are you dying? […] On the contrary… Actually now you are beginning to live... (43)[86]

Suddenly Zanbak gives a cry of astonishment, and seizes with both hands the unknown object – the penis – that causes her surprise, as if the veil is torn asunder. As the narrator's penis is inserted into Zanbak's vagina, she starts writhing and shaking. She says that if the narrator is afraid of hurting her, he should not be afraid. Suddenly, she shouts out with a victory cry, and later groans: "for God's sake stronger, tighter… Kill me […] I swear I am dying… Ah, ah… You take my life…" [*Allah aşkına daha kuvvetli, daha sıkı… Beni öldür […] valla billa, ölüyorum… Ay, ay… Canımı alıyorsun…*] (45).

[86] - Ben ölüyorum… […]
- Ölüyor musun? […] Bilakis… Asıl şimdi yaşamaya başlıyorsun…

The orgasm is commonly named as "the little death" (Bataille 1986: 239). During both sexual intercourse and dying, it is difficult to express strong pleasure or severe pain at a linguistic level; expression is mostly done by "onomatopoeic conglomerations of letters meant to evoke the sighs, gasps, groans, screams, and rattles concomitant to the described actions" (Gorer 1965: 174). However, the similarity between sex and death is not limited to the utterance of sounds. Georges Bataille argues, "the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation" (1986: 16). His argument applies to death as well. Philippe Ariès informs us that – in the eighteenth century – similar to sexual intercourse, death evokes the idea of transgression, which detracts people from their daily lives by having them embark on an irrational, violent, and beautiful world (1974: 57). Furthermore, Geoffrey Gorer indicates that sexual intercourse and birth were unmentionable during the Victorian period; however, when that society became sexually released from Victorian restrictions in the twentieth century, the notion of death then became less "mentionable" especially in Anglo-Saxon societies. Death replaced sex and turned into a taboo in the twentieth century (1965: 171-172). Regarding the transgressions of sex and death, Bataille draws a parallelism by giving an example from the Bible: "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not perform the carnal act except in wedlock" (1986: 42). I contend that the idea of transgression found in both death and sex appears in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*: when Zanbak asks the narrator to kill her, what she actually refers to is sexual intercourse "out-of-wedlock," which breaks the old and new taboos – sex and death. Therefore, Zanbak's transformation from a girl into a woman by piercing of the hymen leads to a transgression – the symbolic death of the virgin Zanbak.

Next morning, although the narrator wants to have sex with Zanbak again, he feels obliged to forbear, as a fresh wound crumples her. Generally,

the loss of virginity revolves around blood and pain, which are frequently counted as the signs of a penetrated hymen. For thousands of years in Europe, it has been presumed that first sexual intimacy leads to a wound in a woman's body. Indeed, defloration is a hurtful act, if not violent. Soothing baths and styptic waters to stop bleeding and reduce inflammation used to be recommended (Blank 2008: 90). Also, when Zanbak wakes up, the narrator recommends that she have a bath. In *The Taboo of Virginity*, Sigmund Freud indicates that the pain of defloration is not only physical, but there is also a deeper pain stemming from an unavoidable "psychic wound" (Blank 2008: 109). Because the loss of virginity has appeared as a transformation throughout history, from Avicenna to Freud, the wound derived from first sexual intimacy that occurs by the insertion of a penis into a vagina counted as the turning point of the life of any woman. The loss of virginity – regardless of one's gender – is assumed to be a ritual transformation "that transforms a boy into a man, a girl into a woman, a child into an adult" (Blank 2008: 90, 97). Generally speaking, the virgin little girl becomes a "sexually awakened" woman after her first sexual experience. In other words, sex turns the ignorant into the knowledgeable and the unwilling into the eager (Blank 2008: 199).

The more Zanbak gains experience in sex, the more her knowledge of different sexualities advances in the narrative. Regarding his experience two days ago, the narrator explains to her that there are some women who hate men, but have admiration for women. He also mentions the Greek lyric poet Sappho. Yet, compared to *Le Roman de Violette*, Mehmed Rauf touches only briefly on Sappho. I contend that as he is in favour of heterosexuality, he chooses not to mention Sappho and female same-sex desire in detail. Mannoury d'Ectot allocates several pages to the subject in a more historical and detailed manner. Besides, Violette advances her knowledge about female

same-sex desire by reading Théophile Gautier's famous novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). Both Violette and Zanbak ask the same question:

> - Ah, what can women do themselves?
> - They can do what I did to you yesterday with my finger, [and] the day before yesterday with my tongue and they receive pleasure from it… As you certainly must have heard, we call these kinds of women elegants or tribades. (49-50)[87]

Here, it is significant to indicate that Mehmed Rauf's narrator does not enunciate the word "lesbian", but he prefers to use "*zürefa*" and "*sevici*", words that refer to female same-sex love and intimacy.

Following this conversation, both Violette and Zanbak remember women who have been interested in them. Violette remembers Countess Odette de Mainfroy's, one of the old clients of her employer, whereas Zambak remembers Naciye, one of the acquaintances of her aunt. Nevertheless, the ways Violette and Zanbak react to the question of lesbianism are different from each other. When Christian asks if she would be afraid of making love with a woman, Violette does not see a reason to be afraid, and she asks if Christian has a plan in his mind. He does not deny that he would "feel amused to see how a woman sets about it, to make love to another woman." Christian proposes Violette to get in contact with Countess Odette de Mainfroy. Violette asks if he would not be jealous of seeing her with a woman. Christian replies:

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[87] - Ay, kadınlar kendi kendilerine ne yapabilirler?
- Sana dün parmağımla, evvelsi gün ağzımla yaptığım şeyi birbirlerine karşı pekala yapabilir ve telezzüz ederler… Bizde de bu nevi kadınlara zürefa, yahut sevici dediklerini elbette işitmişsindir…

> Of a woman, why should I be jealous of a woman? She will only excite your amorous desires, and I shall get a much better reception when I come to satisfy them (2012, Chapter Four).

Christian does not take lesbian relations seriously, as it has been mentioned above; a 'real sexual' relation is often defined with the insertion of a penis into a vagina. In response to Christian's reply, Violette asks: "But if it were a man?" He gives a biased answer: "That's another matter. If you deceived me with a man, I should kill you!" Bataille suggests that if the lover is not able to possess the beloved, he might think of killing her rather than losing her (1986: 20). Christian has a similar inclination in the narrative.

Zambak reacts quite differently than Violette when the narrator remarks that the acquaintance of her aunt might find Zanbak sexually attractive. She says: "Oh God forbid!" Later, it turns out that the woman who likes Zanbak is the woman on the ferry, Naciye. The narrator makes a plan "to teach her a lesson" [*ona bir ders-i ibret vermek*] (51) and asks Zanbak to write a letter to her. When Naciye receives Zanbak's letter, she promises to visit her on the same day. Before Naciye arrives, the narrator hides himself inside a wardrobe in order to watch them together. As Christian, Mehmed Rauf's narrator underestimates sexual intimacy between women. After undressing and having a bath together, Naciye kisses Zanbak's vagina:

> This caressing is a victory of [a] woman who enters into rivalry with men; however, she has to perform this task skilfully, swiftly, and in a way without making her partner feel any regret. (65)[88]

[88] Bu nevâziş, erkeğe rekabet eden kadının bir muzzaferidir; yalnız, maharet ve süratle, ve usul ile, halk olunmuş olduğu bu vazifeyi nezdinde ifa etmek istediği kadına hiçbir esef vermeyecek surette ifade edebilmesi lazımdır.

Upon the request of Naciye, Zanbak applies what she just has learnt from her. After a while, the narrator creeps into bed and applies his mouth to Naciye's vagina. Naciye does not believe that it is Zanbak, and she confesses, "it is not possible that it is you who gives me this much pleasure…" [*lakin mümkün değildir ki bana bu kadar zevk veren sen olasın…*] (70). She tries to straighten herself up to see who it is, but the narrator prevents her by pressing her breasts with his hands. His moustache, which he has been keeping at bay in the beginning, now begins to tickle Naciye's vagina. She shouts and becomes breathless, devastated and exhausted. Right after, the narrator inserts his penis into Naciye's vagina. Although she tries to resist the narrator, later she likes this intimacy and agrees to the narrator's sexual power. Blank indicates that lesbian women are frequently considered as the ones who "never had the right man", or never came across "the magic of the 'right' male wand" (2008: 195). Mehmed Rauf also implies a similar consideration through the forceful sex scene with Naciye. The sexual support given to a heterosexual woman Zanbak – during her decision-making to become the *tabiatın kadını* – is not given to a lesbian woman Naciye who rejects the social and sexual limitations of patriarchal society. Instead, she encounters the anger of the narrator who shows his bellicosity and forces her to acknowledge male domination and heterosexuality. This forceful scene is in praise of masculine power (Karahan 2009: 176). He remarks that no matter how satisfactory the sexual intimacy between two women, if there is not a contact of a penis with a vagina – more specifically if there is not an insertion of a penis into a vagina – the pleasure is incomplete. In the narrative, Zanbak remains in a position where she functions as a medium for the narrator's desire for Naciye (Karahan-Richardson 2011: 165). Thanks to Zanbak, the narrator reaches his aim at being with Naciye a week later after having been rejected by her. Naciye's growing passion for Zanbak helps him to keep her

on a tight leash.

Although a similar plan is made in *Le Roman de Violette*, Christian neither pursues the goal of taking revenge on a woman because she is a lesbian nor tries to heteronormalise Countess Odette de Mainfroy. Unlike *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, *Le Roman de Violette* does not end here. After the forceful sex scene, it evolves in a different direction. Christian, Violette and Countess Odette de Mainfroy make an agreement that Violette would always be Christian's and could be with Odette only when Christian allows it in his presence. Besides, Violette does not allow Christian to "make a complete love" to Countess Odette; he could only use his eyes, his hands or his tongue, but not "the other thing". Hence, as it is indicated in one of the articles of their agreement, Christian cannot play the part of a man with Countess Odette.

In the second half of the narrative, for Violette's acting training, Christian and Odette find an actress Florence who is "one of the most active tribades in Paris". In order to avoid a possible sexual relationship between Violette and Florence, an affair between Odette and Florence starts before Florence is introduced to Violette. This lesbian affair between Florence and Odette begins to dominate the plot. Florence is depicted as a masculine virgin that regards sexual intercourse as a relation of domination, and she is against the idea of being possessed by someone. Although the relationship between Florence and Odette might be regarded as resistance to the male domination from the viewpoint of Florence, like Naciye, Odette still acknowledges the male superiority in sexual intercourse in response to Florence's question:

- Do you think, then that a man in that respect is our superior?

> - Indeed I do. We but light the fire. We do not put it out. […] Luckily we have some inventions which supply the place of what nature refused us. Have you not heard of dildoes? (2012, Chapter Nine)

Odette shows her dildos, one of which was "the production of the great Benvenuto Cellini" (1500-1571) and used to be owned by Diane de Poitiers (1499-1566). Florence deflowers her own virginity through this dildo, named after Diane. Karahan-Richardson notes that this defloration scene happens because of Florence's apprehension of domination, which she rejects through lesbianism (2011: 161).

The second part of *Le Roman de Violette* is not included in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*. According to Karahan-Richardson, by excluding this part, Mehmed Rauf develops a physically and sexually strong character-bound male narrator. Although Naciye initially rejects him, he stands firm and forcibly transforms her into a heterosexual woman in the end of the narrative (2011: 172-173). Karahan-Richardson suggests reading and contextualising *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* as a continuation of the early Ottoman Turkish novels in terms of adaptation techniques and character formation (2011: 149, 153). She argues that Mehmed Rauf's narrator does not manifest himself as a "new" character, and weaknesses in the idealisation of the narrator and the depreciation of women evoke the early Ottoman Turkish novels (2011: 168-169). Furthermore, she underlines the "opposition" between female characters Zanbak and Naciye drawing on the early Ottoman Turkish novels: "ideal women and *femme fatales*" who are representative of love, submissiveness, social norms, tradition, and degeneration, sexual pleasures, moral hazard for Ottoman men, respectively. Karahan-Richardson refers to Mehpeyker in *İntibah* (Awakening) – written by Namık Kemal and published in 1876 – as the precursor of the latter group of female characters

who is punished by death once she discovers her sexuality or freedom like her fictional fellows. Yet, Naciye's punishment in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* is not death, but rape, which can be seen as a 'spiritual' death. Karahan-Richardson indicates that Mehmed Rauf does not differentiate himself from his literary precursors with regards to character formation in *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* (2011: 171, 173).

Although Burcu Karahan-Richardson reads *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* as the continuation of the early Ottoman Turkish novels due to its depiction of a male-dominant society by not allowing Naciye to experience her passion as she wishes, I find associating Naciye with *femme fatales* protagonists in the early Ottoman Turkish novels, to a certain extent, problematic. When it comes to her passion for Zanbak, Karahan-Richardson's association of Naciye with precursor *femme fatales* in relation to the discovery of female sexuality, which is mostly based on extramarital and heteronormative sexual intercourses, is beside the point. In *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, experiencing extramarital sexual intercourse, and being punished for it, are not problematised in the same way as in the early Ottoman Turkish novels. Contrary to most of the early examples, Mehmed Rauf does not criticise Naciye's extramarital experience and makes her appreciate and acknowledge the satisfaction of a penis. Furthermore, it is difficult to argue that Naciye is really transformed to a heterosexual woman, as the narrator states that he pulls Naciye's strings by means of her growing passion for Zanbak. It is my contention that Mehmed Rauf is not explicitly opposed to same-sex desire among women, but is against its construction as part of identity that might harm the masculine superiority in Ottoman society. As mentioned above, same-sex desire had not been reacted to 'immorally' in pre-modern Ottoman Turkish literature, and after the emergence of heteronormativity – due to modernisation and the alteration of society since the second half of the

nineteenth century – it was explicitly silenced if not altogether banned. In this regard, homosexuality was invented as a new category, and European "immorality" was held responsible for it (Arvas 2014: 158). Naciye's 'homosexuality' or 'lesbianism' is seen to come from modernisation. Yet, Naciye's passion for Zanbak is not the result of Ottoman modernisation or modernity. Put differently, having same-sex desire among women does not bring modernity, but homosexuality does. What Mehmed Rauf takes a stand against is not same-sex desire among women per se, but its transformation into being an internal part of identity. He allows Naciye to experience her desire as long as she does not identify herself as a lesbian. Bearing these arguments in mind, I contend that Mehmed Rauf departs from his literary precursors because of the very same reason that Karahan-Richardson alleges that he does not.

Conclusion

Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi is the most popular erotic narrative of late Ottoman Turkish literature. Apart from the fact that it was written by a renowned author of the Ottoman Turkish literary canon, its sexually provocative style and the fact that it treated the subject of lesbianism, which had been overlooked in pre-modern Ottoman Turkish literature, make it distinctive among other erotic narratives from the same period. In this chapter, I have juxtaposed *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* against its French original. By means of this juxtaposition, I have discussed how lesbian sexuality was at one time understood and then later rejected in the process of the adaptation of *Le Roman de Violette* to *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*. My contention is that Mehmed Rauf's framing of the French original is hostile to lesbianism and looks for a way to appropriate *Le Roman de Violette* so that the topic would be acceptable to Ottoman society at the turn of the century. Mehmed Rauf puts

masculinity and heterosexuality first and uses lesbianism to demonstrate the superiority of the penis and heterosexuality. Yet he does not intervene in the sexual practices among women as long as they do not compete with and subvert masculine sexual power. His appropriation of themes such as virginity, womanhood, sexual intercourse, and lesbianism are depicted in such a way as to favour Ottoman heterosexuality, which had become the norm in the formation of sexualities, and marginalised non-normative sexualities. As I have suggested in the beginning of this chapter, the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries constituted a sexually transitional period during which modern discourses on gender and sexuality began to permeate the late Ottoman society. This permeation changed the meanings of sexual practices and resulted in the construction of various sexual identities. In this context, *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* demonstrates the oscillation between sexual practices and sexual identities both by narrating same-sex practices among women and by refusing to define these practices with regards to the construction of sexual identities.