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ABSTRACT

In this study, biographic documentaries of three contemporary women virtuoso are analysed in respect to narratives, subjectivity and representation of gendered identities. The purpose is to discuss these biographic films as feminist texts. The first film in analysis is, *I am the Violin* (Paul Cohen, 2004), portrays legendary violinist Ida Haendel with a focus on her struggle as an aged prodigy virtuoso. Second film *Bloody Daughter* (Stephanie Argerich, 2012) portrays the unusual familial and geographical ties of eccentric pianist Martha Argerich, at different times and occasions. The last film *İdil Biret: Portrait of Child Prodigy* (Eytan İpeker, 2015) gets closer to the personal history of a child prodigy.

In order to represent the “blur” reality of a “unrepresentable” female prodigy, the inner world and outer world have to be reflected truly and embedded in coherence by the filmmaker. To viewers of a biographic film, watching a “messy portrait” can initiate a conversation with the “other” who is thought as a conception of women as “complementary” in feminist thought. The depth of this conversation depends mainly on the narrative style of the filmmaker. Therefore, filmmaker’s documentary style requires a questioning ability on the “messy” gender identification experience and “existential anxiety” of her/his subject. Besides, an intimate reflection of an “embodied female subjectivity” depends on the intersubjectivity experienced among the narrator, the subject and the viewer. Due to its unconventional, messy and ambiguous representation of a female prodigy with “an embodied subjectivity” from a female/daughter position with an auto-biographical style, *Bloody Daughter* stands out as a feminist text among the selected examples.

Key words: biographical documentary, life narrative, female subjectivity, telling women’s lives, myth of prodigy

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, çağdaş kadın dehalardan üç tanesinin biyografik belgeselleri, anlatı, öznellik ve cinsiyet temsilleri açısından incelenmektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, bu üç filmi, feminist metinler olarak tartışmaya açmaktır. İlk film, *I am the Violin - Keman Benim* (Paul Cohen, 2004) efsanevi keman virtözü Ida Haendel'i, ileri yaşında verdiği performans mücadelesini yansıtarak portrelemektedir. İkinci film *Bloody Daughter - Bela Kız Çocuğu* (Stephanie Argerich, 2012) ise, alışılmamış ailevi ve coğrafi bağlarıyla, piyano virtüözü Martha Argerich'i ele almaktadır. Son film, *İdil Biret: Harika Bir Çocuğun Portresi* (Eytan İpeker, 2015) ise "harika" bir çocuk olan piyanist İdil Biret'in kişisel tarihini konu edinmiştir.

"Temsil edilemez" görülen kadın dehaların, "bulanık" hikayelerini temsil etme amacıyla yola çıkan yönetmenlerin, öznelerinin hem iç, hem dış dünyalarını gerçekçi ve somutlaşmış bir biçimde yansıtımları beklenmektedir. "Düzensiz/dağınık" bir biyografik belgesel, izleyicilere, feminist düşüncede "tamamlayıcı" olarak görülen "öteki" ile iletişim imkanı kurar. Bu etkileşimin derinliği yönetmenin anlatısına dayanır. Yönetmen, "düzensiz" ve "dağınık" bir anlatı biçimi benimsediği ölçüde öznesinin cinsiyet kimliği tecrübesini ve "var olma endişesini" aktarabilir. Bunun yanı sıra, anlatıcı, özne ve izleyici arasında gelişen "bedenlileşmiş öznelerarasılık", samimi bir portreye yansır. Anne-kız ilişkisinden yola çıkarak oto-biyografik öğeler de barındıran, *Bloody Daughter - Bela Kız Çocuğu*, sıradışı ve muğlak kadın deha temsili ile, feminist bir metin olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: biyografik belgesel, dişil öznellik, deha miti

INTRODUCTION

WHY DO WE NEED BIOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN?

“If truth be told, one is not born, but becomes, a genius; and the feminine condition has, until now, rendered this becoming impossible.”

(Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 2011, p.152)

In many cultures, a woman becomes a woman not only by her own solitary existence, but instead by her performances of building relations and dependance/influence on others. Similarly, becoming both a prodigy and a woman is a conflicting experience. This study aims to examine both experiences in conjunction with documentary film.

Feminist film theorists of the 70s and 80s widely discussed the exposure of the female spectator and proposed filmmakers’ of the time alternative ways of filming female experience to create a “counter-cinema”. Most of the theorists focused their analysis on the examples of avant-garde/experimental cinema with a concrete political purpose to spread feminism while rejecting classical narratives of fictional cinema and documentary “realism”. They were expecting to create a critical audience via breaking the codes of a classical narrative flow (Erens, 1990, p.217-218). However, upon to the rejection of “realism,” a vital branch of documentary film work was left inadequately studied (Warren, p.12). There were also few theorists, like Julia Lesage, who drew attention to the importance of biography and auto-biography as a tool of sensing women’s ‘embeddedness’ in a certain object world. She added that the biographical documentary serves as a critique of and remedy to previous cinematic depictions of women’s lives and women’s space (Lesage, 1978, p.518). She even interpreted biographic documentary on women, as “a tool of liberation” since these films encourage a politicised “conversation” among women; along with the self-conscious act of

telling one's story as a woman, in a politicized, yet in a personal way (ibid., p. 520).

As spectators of a biographic documentary, to watch a life dissimilar to ours can initiate a conversation with the "other". "Other" is a conception of women as "complementary" in feminist thought. Women in other words are defined not so much as for men but as in relation to men. Man is the norm and woman is defined negatively in relation to that norm. Simon de Beauvoir summed up the hierarchical relationship between men and women in these terms: "He is the subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other" (de Beauvoir, 1975, p.16). The depth of the conversation with the "other" stemming out of a biographic documentary depends mainly on the narrative style of the documentary, which explores dimensions of womanhood and the instabilities of gender impositions. The incorporated gendered subjectivities of the narrator and the subject play a key role in filming "truthful" portraits. On the viewer's side, an interactive narrative style of a biographical documentary can help to create plural meanings and open-ended questions since the female viewer is inclined to combine her past experiences and attitudes with those of biographical subject's experiences. Women have a "different" form of subjectivity that is more "relational to subjects" compared to that of men's privileged relations to "objects".

The "relational" approach of film-making and spectatorship is in line with the understanding of the female subjectivity as "embodied". This phenomenological approach has originated mainly by the views of the existentialist and or radical feminist thinkers like Luce Irigaray and Christine Battersby, who focus on human experience over biological, sociocultural and psychoanalytic formations (Ince, 2017, p.11-21). As Kate Ince has pointed out, phenomenology of female subjectivity was seldom used as a tool in film studies. Psychoanalytic, semiotic and deconstructive tools have been the main tools of analysis in film studies until recently (Ibid., p.41-44). Without neglecting the contribution of these tools, the perspective of this study is closer to a

phenomenological angle since it focuses on “relationality”. This concept derives from the understanding that a woman builds her self-identity on a “different” type of “subjectivity” independent from that of men. In other words, this subjectivity is not “complementary” but “situated”. Situatedness comes mainly from Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of embodiment as the perceptual experience of the body that experience being always an intersubjectivity (Kruks, 1990, p.17). Merleau-Ponty maintained that phenomenology is “an attempt to make us see the bond between subject and world, between subject and others, rather than to explain it” (1964, p.48-59). According to him, “Films are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other” (ibid., p.58). This view matches the purpose of a biographic documentary to portray a woman’s life composed of her unified mind and bodily experiences and of her relations with the world and others.

As Kate Ince points out, Luce Irigaray as a radical feminist thinker, underlined the goal of the women to pursue an identity not in terms of “equality” but with a different sex-specific identity, based both on women’s bodily differences from men and on the cultural context (2017, p. 41-44). According to Irigaray, the feminine subject immediately constructs herself through a relation to the other. Women privilege relations with others whereas men privilege the relation to objects. This “relational identity” has to be changed in order to create an individual from a woman (ibid., p.15-18). At the same time, I argue, this privilege of femininity of forming a relation to an other, has the potential to open a conversation at filmic communication as well. Contrarily, the ‘other’ that the female spectator engages in a relation, has to be an example of a woman who has modified her relations with subjects — as Irigaray suggested — and privileged a relation to objects. Therefore, biography offers an opportunity for display of the “situated” subjectivities and “lived” experiences of women, who privileged their relations to “objects” rather than to “subjects”. These stories need to be told to women who “spontaneously” prefer relations to subjects.

In this study, the films that are selected for analysis are mainly portraits of three prodigy women who displayed a life-time commitment to their musical performance. Devoting oneself to music — rather than to gender roles defined by patriarchy — can be seen as a shift form of a feminine relation to objects. According to Irigaray's understanding, these women are not exchangeable among men because they are not disappearing as they have put a distance between themselves and others. They exist by their own, not dependent on others, appear to have a relational bond only with "music".

Biography is a hybrid form due to its complex links to auto-biography. For a biographer, it is not easy to get out of the very subjective comments expressed by the biographical subject and reach an interpretive narrative (Depkat, 2006, p. 39-41). Biography is co-intrepreted by the biographer, the biographical subject and the viewer. Since they have own lived lives and preconceptions, the complex relations among them creates the multi-layers for feeling each other. An ideal biographic narrative has an aim of deciphering both the inner and outer world of a person. Since there is no firm line between inner and outer experience - Marleau Ponty even considers them unified — it is filmmaker's capability to reflect both of them in harmony. In other words, in order to represent reality, the inner world and outer world have to be reflected truly and embedded in coherence by the filmmaker. As Denzin states "understanding someone is an intersubjective, emotional process" (Denzin, 1989). In order to that, the biographers want to discover the "figure under the carpet," the hidden myth of life. This approach requires a very fine line between empathy and scholarly objectivity, with the overall aim being able to enable a "truly human figure" (Depkat, 2006, p.45-46).

This study's objective is to magnify "figuring a truly human" narrative, within a frame of understanding women's lives. There is a purpose in selecting documentaries on women, because the viewer does not often come across with this kind of platform for empathy in most of biographic documentaries of men. We often watch/read biographies mainly built on the tradition of "great men's"

narratives. As Virginia Woolf stated: “History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men” (2014). The common quality of a men’s life story telling is a pattern of a target and destination that signifies only public life without mentioning about the personal. However, we need more personal messiness about women’s life to challenge the institutionalised masculinity (Long, 1999, p.18). In a classical narrative, there are causes and effects and a desire to create resolutions and coherence. This desire to control time and events prohibits the generation of new dialogues among the parties of biography, being the narrator, the subject and the receiver.

When we look at recent times fueled with individualist thoughts of being, to show a true interest at somebody-else’s life experience is not very common since own-selves deserve the highest attention. In fact being involved in another person’s life-story, is also a part of own-self-inquiry process. Moreover, to encounter with an intimate text builds a connection with the social world that creates a platform for empathy. To find something from own experience at another one’s, is still a possibility.

If we regard empathy as a kind of perception emerging while or after watching a film, we should refer to phenomenology that sees a film in itself “an expression of experience by experience” (Merleau Ponty, 1964). Galya Frank defines empathy as the opposite of narcissism because it demands the ignorance of the self to take place of the other. It allows a person to experience of something of another’s life as if it were one’s own (1985, p.190). In this sense, empathy corresponds to an intersubjectivity that phenomenological view claims on. We may conclude that capacity for empathy is present at filmic communication — at biographic documentary as well — since it provides viewers the experience through similar modes of being-in-the world (Sobchack, 1992, p.5).

The intersubjective communication takes place between the biographic subject and the filmmaker during the filming process. The viewer participates as the third party of this network of cinematic communication, since intersubjective

communication involves or occurs between separate conscious minds. Different minds and bodies may share the experience of each other in terms of feelings and perceptions. This capacity, to start a dialogue in/with another, exists in each social being to an extent. A person may become herself in his ability to create an empathy for an “other” or to find the expression of herself in an other. In this study, the filmmaker’s capacity and the intent to go beyond her subjectivity, or the ability to create empathy, is seen essential to understand her biographical subject’s unified world. Similarly, the filmmaker’s connection with their subject’s gendered identification is assumed to have a vital impact on the perception of the female viewer.

In line with this point, the focus will be on the reflexive aspect of connecting with the gender identity, achieved at some degree at all films selected for analysis. In order to have an equal exploratory ground, three biographic documentary films on three contemporary female prodigy musicians are selected for analysis. All three prodigy women have similar pasts and experiences. It is important that they are alive and they can reflect their self-concept directly to the camera. As a result, all films have used biographic tools with autobiographic accounts in the largest sense, to tell about their subjects’ authentic character while exploring the “prodigy” myth. All filmmakers have their own approaches and documentary voices while looking for a meaning to this extraordinary facticity of being a “female” and a “prodigy”. In other words, seeing and hearing an other woman’s story can fuel a deeper connection for the female spectator to actively engage with an other’s experience. The biographic documentaries in discussion mainly focus on the struggle among the forces of gendered constructs of being “a woman”. Similarly, prodigy myth is created by social-cultural norms in relation to nationalistic and patriarchal ideals. Ideological formation is reflected in each film, combined with public and private accounts, juxtaposed with the modern cultural myth of discovery of the “young talent”. The myth has become a tool of universal promotion of a country’s national identity.

Chronologically the first film subject to my analysis is: *I am the Violin* (Paul Cohen, 2004). Cohen portrays famous violinist Ida Haendel with a focus on her struggle as an aged solo violinist against a fading popularity. The influences of her experience as a child prodigy and wounded sexual identification process under the influence of her father, have also been reflected in the narrative. Dailiness of Ida is a hook that keeps the attention and her resistance against ageing is closely reflected. The collaborative relation of the filmmaker and the subject seems to be well-established in terms of mirroring the biographical subject's gendered identity. Further discussion will be held whether the filmmaker has understood her correctly, in other words, was able to open himself to her reality. True empathy requires one's self to be vulnerable to bond with another. As a male filmmaker, Cohen's ability to lessen the control and maintaining neutrality, seems to be achieved with almost nihilism. However, Cohen, at the same time, does not always reflect a resonating tone with his subject's self-perceptions since he portrays her as a "pretender". There does not seem an intention to build an equal relationship, but more an effort to stay disassociated, depicting the "objective" voice of the filmmaker.

In *Bloody Daughter* (Stephanie Argerich, 2012), my second film of analysis, the bond between the filmmaker and the subject is naturally very close, since the daughter films the mother. In addition to this engaging fact, truthful impact is created by the filmmaker's willingness to be in self-introspection. Stephanie Argerich saw this filmmaking process as an opportunity to understand more about her mother and herself in relation to the rest of the family members. Similar to domestic ethnography, that is described as a mode of autobiographical practice, including self-interrogation with ethnography's concern a documentation of the lives of others in particular, family members serve as mirror or foil for the self. Due to kinship ties, subject and object are bound up in one another. "The result is self-portraiture, refracted through a familial other" (Jong, W. D., & Austin, T., 2008, p.44). Stephanie Argerich, is not in a controlling nor in an

observatory mode, but acts more like a subject of the film, as a humble woman trying to give a meaning to life and family dynamics. She patiently reflects the pauses, conflicts and depressive moments of her “goddess” mother as the filming continues. There is a fluid narrative style parallel to reality, that is non-linear, lacking meaning most of the time. She portrays her mum, the legendary Martha Argerich, as a free and complex soul with wisdom. She manages to feel with her subject as an evidence for true empathy, able to focus on their relationality “without needing specific objects to mediate their relationship which is always-already mediated by her capacity to conceive herself in her mother” (Ince, 2017,p. 43).

The last film in analysis; *İdil Biret: The Portrait of a Child Prodigy* (Eytan İpeker, 2015) magnifies the childhood of another twentieth century child prodigy. İdil Biret’s designated mission by Turkish State, is part of the narrative whereas the filmmaker balanced the public history by personal, showing the distinctive “cat like” character of the protagonist, opening an area for complexity and emotion. The viewer feels the distance between the filmmaker and his subject throughout the narrative that resonates with the mysterious state of the pianist. This approach intersects both with the myth of gender — where a woman is defined with her mystery/non-representability — that corresponds to the genius myth who is a super — human often defined as mystique. However as we read the film more closely, this is mainly due to self defense reflex of a child to protect her intimacy against the outer and inner expectations, repeating itself each day of her life. The conservation at her accounts regarding her youth, reminds us the interruption she faced during her formation of sexual identity.

This study has started with the purpose of analysing the “emotional knowledge” or the “empathy” created by biographic documentary. Empathy, as a kind of emotional knowledge, is created mainly by narrative style by the filmmaker. It is the filmmaker’s style of documentary, engaging the viewer to get

in an intersubjective dialogue with the subject and the text. In the following chapter, components of style of respective films will be discussed.

CHAPTER 1

DOCUMENTARY STYLE

1.1. EMOTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

This chapter analyzes components of documentary style and their influence on filmmakers' intersubjectivity. As mentioned previously, an inquiry on a biographic documentary is capable of creating cognitive and emotional knowledge for gender identity. This kind of analysis is found rewarding by John Corner; he states that documentaries can employ different kinds of knowledge other than cognitive knowledge, including emotional knowledge, which is worth studying. According to him, by the exchange between documentary representation and subjectivity, a thicker and a richer documentary aesthetics has appeared (Jong & Austin (Ed.), 2008, p.25-26).

According, Bill Nichols, although they both rely on similar cinematic techniques, documentary style functions quite differently than fictional film style. He mentions about the documentary voice, which stems from filmmaker's direct involvement with the film's subject or with the events at the actual historical world. "Voice is a measure of how a filmmaker responds to and speaks about the world he or she shares with us" (Part 3, 2010). In a fiction film, filmmaker creates a world from her imaginary, whereas in a documentary, the filmmaker responds to a person or to a historical event through a personal interaction.

Nichols divides components of the "documentary voice" depending on the choices of filmmaker. He stresses on selection and organization of sound and image. These include choices made about editing, framing, recording sound at the time of shooting, whether to include a voice over or not, commentary, music and sound. To use other's footage or to use own shots is another key decision to be made. And finally, the selection of the mode of the documentary determines the

representation to be expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive, or performative (ibid.).

The narration tools are mostly about form and technique, that will be discussed at third chapter. For the timebeing, focus will be on Nichols's last point about the personal interaction between the filmmaker and the subject. The quality of the encounter between the filmmaker and her/his subjects makes the style unique and reflects the feminist perspective (if any). Feminist perspective might not always be emphasized or apparent, if the filmmaker does not intend to do so. The films in this analysis have a perspective on this issue, whereas the viewer can feel it tacitly. Nichols summarizes the tacit nature of the perspective as follows: Each voice is unique. This uniqueness stems from the concrete utilization of forms and modes, techniques and styles, and from the specific pattern of encounter that takes place between the filmmaker and the subject. The voice of a documentary serves as evidence of both a perspective and an encounter. A "voice of perspective" speaks through the filmmaker's specific decisions about the selection and arrangement of sounds and images. This voice advances an argument or makes proposals about the world by implication. The argument operates on a tacit level. We have to infer what the filmmaker's point of view. The effect is less "See it this way" than "See for yourself" (ibid.).

1.2. THE ENCOUNTER

Toni de Bromhead, contributes to the creation of a documentary style and mentions the capability of the filmmaker to take her/his subject to uncomfortable places that she could not go by her own. She mentions that filmmakers do not just collect images, they have to go beyond her subjects' testimonials and wills but to put the material in a different form that is intended by the subject, to go beyond the comfort zones. The subject may disagree with the filmmaker but it is an interpretive process and all sides have to be aware of it (2008, p.156).

With the help of this argument, the films will be discussed whether they have been able to take their subjects to a journey or to an introspection on gender issues, even if it turns out uncomfortable at times. Regarding three films on female prodigies in analysis, in *Bloody Daughter*, the filmmaker Stephanie Argerich attempts to reveal such uncomfortable moments of a female prodigy more than the other two filmmakers, Paul Cohen (*I am the Violin*) and Eytan Ipeker (*Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy*.) Stephanie Argerich, is naturally interactive with her subject as being her daughter and as a female filmmaker, sharing the same gender. Intersubjectivity also takes place by another factor by her following auto-biographic substance. In other words, she lives this encounter and goes beyond her comfort zones at the same time with her subject. She includes herself in the picture as another subject of the common experience. She frames her mother's persona not only at her accounts but also puts an eye on their shared messy familial ties. This approach is quite far away from an observational mode, rather it fits to a participatory mode. Nichols defines being participatory as an interaction of filmmaker with her subject. In this mode the filmmaker does not silently observes her subject's story but joins in (2010, p.179). Stephanie Argerich combines her life experience with that of her mother's, in portraying her complex persona and telling about her life experience. "This interaction is present within the film; the film makes explicit that meaning is created by the collaboration or confrontation between filmmaker and contributor. At its simplest, this can mean the voice of the filmmaker(s) is heard within the film" (Ibid.). Her relation with her mother functions as the central plot to underline her point of view towards gender roles. The film's opening scene, Stephanie's birth-giving process and her mother's moments waiting for her, combines her story with Martha's story, thereby introduces her documentary style, namely her "voice of perspective". Just by the opening, the viewer feels that this is not only a film about Martha, but also a film about womanhood. After the filmmaker visits pregnancy and giving-birth themes, unique to femininity, in the first scenes, the film progresses with

complexities of formation of the child-mother bond. Just in the first act, Martha's discomfort gesture with Stephanie's newly born son, is tacitly included to support the filmmaker's perspective that film is not only for portraying a virtuoso's persona, but also depicting her preferences and ambiguities on gender identities. As Martha declares: "I find girls more interesting."

In *I am the Violin*, Paul Cohen reflects a companion relationship with his subject: Ida. The viewer feels his closeness in following her acts and introspecting her reality in comparison with her testimony. He is more than a mediator rather than being intersubjective with his subject's gender reality. He explores her current contradiction about her age versus her desire to perform on stage. However, the viewer does not get any impression that Cohen is also in self-exploration about himself or share a common issue with Ida. It is notable that he has produced this film as a TV series for Holland. Therefore, it probably includes commercial purposes along with personal purposes. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to see Ida's willingness to open her heart to Cohen about her gender identity. Her incredible stamina against all odds is still adorable and the filmmaker suggests a distinct perspective to "craft the truth" of her reality.

In *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy*, gender dimension does not apparently determine the style as in *Bloody Daughter* but it is visited as a supporting theme to create evidence about Idil's high competence. Against all prejudices, viewer gets the impression that Idil accomplished to perform as perfect as her male counterparts. Although, this fact might be necessary to point out, more complexities about her gender identification than could have been explored. Her resistance against being a "good girl" during her childhood and teen-ages could have been reflected as an issue of gender impositions. Again, her sponsorship by the government was not only to create a cultural reform, but also to create an outstanding figure out of girls, asking equality in the community. These are not probably mentioned at *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* because

“asexuality” is taken as a ground for a child prodigy which I will explore in the next chapter on prodigy myth and female experience.

Ipeker chose to rely more on public memory than private accounts while portraying legendary side of Idil Biret. Her miraculous appearance in the musical arena since she was five, is supported with several evidences of her life experience. Her extraordinary talent and incredible stamina have been highlighted frequently throughout the film, suiting the conventions of an advocative biographic documentary. Her teachers’ astonishments, her determined personality and disciplined acts are juxtaposed with several accounts and images. Viewer can trace more of an observatory contact between the filmmaker and the subject. But still, there are moments viewer can feel different modes, especially when performativity is reflected by the opening scene. We hear filmmaker’s voice (“You can start!”) only once in the film. The performative mise-en-scene is purposefully exposed to the viewer which signals that the following text is a “representation”. The viewer starts with this reality and in some way trusts on filmmaker’s authority over the subject. Opening is meaningful in terms of camera angle that is all-above angle which supports Idil’s goddess image without framing her face directly but composing her reflection on the piano. Camera focuses on her skillful hand movements while recording her magical tunes.

1.3. VOICE-OVER

Making the self an instrument to tell a story, is a common feature of a memoir film, where the voice represents the consciousness of the filmmaker. At *Bloody Daughter*, Stephanie Argerich activates her consciousness about her mother and makes her own experience an instrument to tell about their intersubjective story. Her voice and her presence even determine the rhythm and character of the images (Hampe, 1996, p.57).

Stephanie Argerich uses first person voice which makes the whole story more intimate than others'. According to Hampe, first-person voice's greatest intimacy comes from its ability to refine memoir's point of view. This leads to displaying perceptions of the world and its greatest intimacy (the display of perception) paradoxically reveals its essential impersonality. "It wishes to see the world, not itself. The narrator is more eye than I" (Warren (Ed.), 1996, p.63).

Ipeker's success in creating images and sounds along with skillful editing techniques, enabled him to eliminate usage of a voiceover. Unlike, *Bloody Daughter*, a voiceover in *İdil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* could turn the narration didactic and promotional. The filmmaker achieved to distribute authority by interviews. Interviewer selection depended more on public accounts than private ones. Her husband, is the only figure outside of her music career but seems to have been selected to assure her genius as well. Though conducting a more conventional stylistic voice than *Bloody Daughter*, the "personal" is well interpreted in conjunction with public memory by Ipeker.

1.4. REFLEXIVITY

Although *Bloody Daughter* can be classified as in participatory mode, it has some reflexive elements, too. The filmmaker does not hesitate to remind of a filming, by letting her subject to look directly at the camera and even allow her to challenge the existence of the camera. Martha twice interrogates her filmmaker daughter to reveal her purpose in making this movie. Martha asks "Why are you filming?" She is allowed to express her discomfort about the camera as she says, "It is not possible to share when you are filming!" This kind of reflexivity helps the viewer to "assume that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole" (Rosenthal (Ed.), 1988, p.65). More importantly, to be reflexive does not include only self-awareness, but also it requires to be aware of including oneself into the picture only when necessary. This sort of reflexivity

emerges purposefully and intentionally but not because of narcissism or by coincidence (ibid.).

1.4.1. Self-representation

By revealing herself and reflecting her perspective on others, Stephanie Argerich, as a filmmaker, also draws attention in terms of self-representation. She displays her “embedded” subjectivity to the camera. The second scene in the film, shooting herself naked in the bathtub with a high angle, closing her eyes after looking at the ceiling, is an act of self-revelation. As Mulvey underlines: “The female gaze is associated with an act of self-revelation and self-knowledge, an act of constitutive of the subject” (1995, p.12). Her style includes the female gaze which questioning “the power of dominant discourse” which is based on gender (ibid., p.19). As a female eye on the camera, she engages her subject with empathy and looks for meaning in their mutual gender experience. She explores her own sensitive relationship with her pianist father, while exploring his relationship with her mother. She displays his ambiguous character and anxious behaviour. The viewer infers that he is not only alienated from fatherhood, but also mainly from every daily duty, except practicing the piano. This resulted him having limited intimacy with his surroundings, or to put in Irigaray’s view’s on male subjectivity, lacking relationships with others.

1.4.2. Representation of the Mother

Stephanie Argerich’s perception and representation of her mother is valuable in terms of the representation of motherhood in film history. According to Ann Kaplan, during the rise of first wave feminism, feminists have focused on the Mother largely from the daughter perspective. Their main concern for reaction

to their mothers aimed a separation from “oppressive closeness” (Kaplan, 1990, p. 126). Contrarily, at Stephanie’s experience, her mother has not imposed boundaries and led her daughters to make their independent choices, since they were very young. Notably, Stephanie is not only in daughter’s position, but also in a mother position with two sons. This dual role helps her to form her opinions with several dimensions about her mother. Her representation of Martha, supports Kaplan’s ideal mother representation, a complex personality in her own right. This mother has multiple roles to fill with conflicting needs and desires and is “absent from patriarchy” (Erens (ed.), 1990, p.127).

In *Bloody Daughter*, the mother is represented as a complex character with different roles; daughter of a woman, who denied intimacy, mother of three girls with unique feelings for each, a bohemian female virtuoso, a working woman traveling the world, a globally acknowledged celebrity with fans, a single elderly woman who is missing a romantic partnership and a cheerful friend of many artists. Further, Stephanie Argerich, carefully manages to draw a character with multiple dimensions. In other words, she defines the position of the mother as participant, active and capable agent (ibid p.135). She focuses on old recordings of her interviews on TV, to display her perception of motherhood, that she had to leave her daughters behind to make rehearsals and to give concerts. Stephanie also depended on her step-sisters’ accounts about their mother. Therefore, the viewer is invited to see Martha from different angles. The accounts portray a mother who is decisive and acts as a subject on her own right. Martha has given all of her decisions independently since childhood. This representation of motherhood is quite contrary to classic notions of motherhood, which is mostly portrayed and limited to the dependance on her children, husband and parents. Martha, in contrast, finds motherhood easier without a husband.

In *Bloody Daughter*, there is a journey to old memories of her past with no chronology. Especially about the tragic memory filled with abandonment and kidnapping of her first daughter, appearance of Lydia, can be regarded as the

climax of the story line. Lydia's unlucky childhood is explored with detail and aspect. Martha does not deny that she could not create affection to her eldest child. Her pregnancy was not planned and she was at a very young age, when she gave birth to Lydia. She reveals that she could only feel sisterhood to her. Lydia spent her first years at an orphanage, where her only visitor was Martha's mother. When the grandma brought her to Martha's home, she was accused of kidnapping the child and Lydia was banned to sleep over at Martha's house until she has become an adult. Recently, they have come together, but more like close colleagues rather than a mother and a daughter. Lydia's admiration to her musical talent and her resemblance to Martha's persona are reflected, but her decision to stay separate or "to be herself" is also mentioned.

In the voice-over, Stephanie focuses on her mother's playful character, who was not afraid of creating anxiety to Stephanie during their travels in her childhood. Her mother's instability led her define herself as a child, who had to "mother" her mother. Though, she now gives credit to her mother as she developed changing views about her. While doing that, Stephanie refreshes her memories and filming of the past with newer ones without following a chronological order. She rather follows a non-linear timeline and character based juxtaposition, where all events and characterization link to Martha's life and personality. Martha's past is narrated both by her accounts and her visits to the places, documenting of her past. Harmonized with Martha's subjectivity, her memories on past and present experiences, her appetite to food and to love, remain to be the same whereas her stage anxiety, her melancholia and difficulty to express herself with words, continue to exist.

Motherhood is also represented at two other films in this study. In Idil Biret's biography, mother is portrayed an essential figure at forming Idil's perceived subjectivity. Her mother appears in the film with her ideas about her daughter's performance and suitable behaviors. Viewer can infer that her opinions led Idil to become a modest and dedicated person. Her effect on her gender

identity is tacitly narrated as Idil still talks under the influence of her perspective. Surprisingly, there is no account about Idil's choice of not becoming a mother, but the viewer can infer that she preferred to remain independent at her relationships.

Cohen, on the other hand, does not explore Ida's relationship with her mother since her father had been much influential on her gender identity and career. However, the film implies Ida's dedication to her dog, Decca, as a compensation, to fill the gap of not becoming a mother.

1.4.3 Intimacy

Stephanie asks disturbing questions both her mother and her father about their relationship. The viewer can feel Stephanie's desperate will that her parents would again come together and this documentary can be a tool to revive some hidden feelings. In many ways, she has such a purposeful introspective style. She tries to heal some burdens of the past via filming. Camera had become a tool to mirror some complexities of her mother and to explore the feelings of the people that she has close impact. It is quite a private film not neglecting the public side, rather creating emotions on viewers more than cognition. Her sincere subjectivity and reflexive elements of documenting create emotions that build intimacy. On the other hand, reflexivity and intimacy may not always correspond. As mentioned at *Crafting Truth*, the evidence can also be diluted by being reflexive. In other words; reflexivity does not guarantee intimacy. Spence and Navarro indicates while some reflexive elements help to examine the process of representation, some may come out by narcissism, that can jeopardize the value in reflexivity can create (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p. 54). In *Bloody Daughter*, the viewer does not gain any narcissistic impression, but feels the engagement. Notably, reflexivity has been used by Stephanie Argerich only when necessary.

In *I am the Violin*, reflexivity seldom occurs. The viewer twice hears the questions of the filmmaker out of the frame. Therefore, the filmmaker has eliminated unnecessary cuts and contributed to the dramatic effect of the dialogues by revealing his voice. Interestingly, the viewer hears Cohen's voice at only critical moments of confession. He positions himself as a provocateur. For example, during Ida's comparison of her face with her sister's face, he asks "Would you like to have her face instead of yours?" Her answer is undoubtedly; "Yes." Or at an other moment, when Ida is once again confessing about her charm being inferior to her sister and complaining about being seen as an instrument not a woman. If she had more charm, she implies, "I would conquer the world!". Cohen asks provocatively "But didn't you conquer the world?" She immediately replies, "No!" then she pauses for a couple of seconds, then she calmly repeats: "No."

During the opening performance, Ipeker gives the command of start, with his voice out of the frame, to Idil to play. However this has no reflexive purpose but might have been included in the scene to strengthen his position as authority in the process of representation.

1.5. AUTHORITY

The usage of voiceover narration leads to an authority discussion too. One may claim that being the daughter, Stephanie's authority over the evidence should be suspected; her testimony is biased for sure, therefore untrustworthy. However she balances this view by acting her life as well. Her very early recordings of her childhood strengthen her truthfulness. She had been observing her family members since she had first got a hand-held camera. She identified herself with the camera lens, a common companion of her, since childhood, a fact accepted by her filming subjects. Therefore, filming has become a way of a dialogue among

her and her family members since she was a child. Although her voiceover narration belongs to presence, it does not harm its credibility regarding the past due to her sincerity. Her testimony becomes the primary source for the viewer and does not harm her credibility, because she reveals fragmented perceptions of different stages of her life. This is a film with strong autobiographical component, in which subjectivity poses no danger to authenticity but serves instead, Micheal Renov nicely puts it, subjectivity acts as “the filter through which the real enters discourse” (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p. 71).

Since it is a narration on private matters more than the public matters filled with intertwined stories of Stephanie and Martha, the viewer would not engage as much as with an outsider’s voice-over. This singularity in voice-over might have been regarded as single-minded but it contributed to the authenticity of the film rather than directing to a single opinion. Stephanie’s voice is understanding rather than being judgmental, her soft tone reminds a young girl’s diary; full of confusions about her family and surroundings, combined with a mature woman’s willingness to understand the dynamics of her past and empathize the feelings of her parents. The viewer is aware that this is a point of view which is still open to discussion, not dictating the ultimate truth but expressing a sincere opinion belonging to an insider.

The other two filmmakers, Cohen and Ipeker, though they dissociate themselves from their subject’s lives, we as viewers feel closer when they make their presence explicit. While framing their subject’s memories, they do not force spectators to form a single conclusion in a forceful manner. They do not block to form a counter argument either. They prefer displaying their perspective as being witnesses. They depend more on their protagonist’s subjectivity, sometimes with an ambiguous manner, so that it leaves some space for the viewers to create their own meanings.

1.6. ROLE of INTERVIEW

Another aspect of Stephanie's style is the usage of interviews. She has used the interviews in the most fruitful way to enhance the effect of narrative and emotional knowledge. Interviews are tools to open an authentic dialogue between the filmmakers and their subjects (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.74). She explored the clues for her mother's subjectivity by choosing the daily settings for interviews. Most of the confessions and testimonies appear on a couch or on a bed at home or in a hotel room, that signify most comfortable settings to make confessions. Martha by nature is a spontaneous person who can deeply travel into her thoughts and her emotions. Her artistic ability to match her feelings with different composers' music, helps Stephanie to catch authentic bodily movements. Martha's facial gestures and pauses tell many things more than her words and Stephanie shares the authority with her, especially at close-ups. The roles are clearly distinct in terms of the filmmaker and her subject, but Stephanie covers this distinction by acting-out her life, as well.

1.7. RESPONSIBILITY

Opening private matters to judgement and making them public puts a responsibility on a filmmaker's shoulders. Documenting a life requires not only truthfulness but also responsibility. Filmmakers are liable to balance their actions in order to keep away their subjects and audiences from harm (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.85). As a daughter of a public figure, Stephanie takes care of the ethics of documentary while pushing the limits of privacy. Regarding the subjects, she does not know closely, or whom she did not ask opinions, she makes brief remarks. She seems to have permission to share their family secrets. All the subjects seem comfortable with revealing the uncomfortable issues since they trust the filmmaker. The aesthetics she used is not disturbing but engaging. For

example, she displays a photo of their naked feet on the beach with her mum, while telling about Martha's nickname as "Big Foot." Moreover, Martha is often depicted with naked feet while interviewing or even playing the piano so filmmaker's aesthetic choice has become "a calculated act-and an ethical act" (Ibid., p.96). Martha's independent character is implied even by this small detail. While defining her mother, Stephanie sometimes "impose a meaning on her" (Ibid, p.100). She acknowledges that she is a "goddess" but does not refrain from revealing her imperfect sides as well.

The other two filmmakers also took responsibilities to protect their subjects while revealing their complexities and privacy. Cohen seems more relaxed in revealing the uncomfortable, probably because his biographical subject is in need of self-expression. Ida has a big issue with her fading fame and she wants to persuade the audience about her capability to perform like she could do in the old days.

Ipeker, on the other hand, takes more of a historian position, where he reflects his responsibility to the Turkish Republic's modernisation efforts in conjunction with creation of Idil Biret's world-wide image. He carefully explores every detail in order to create evidence for her determinant and perfectionist character. As a filmmaker from the same geography, he might probably felt the responsibility of presenting the "truth" of a national history. However, the filmmaker gently pushed the limits of his subject, in terms of confessions, about the burden of her talent which does not appear as adorable as expected. Idil's desire for "ordinariness" and alienation from "prodigy" label have been used as clever conflicts to create contradiction with myth. Strikingly, Idil trivialises her talent: "I still do not understand why people are making so big stuff about it?" This type of remarks allow stronger engagement of the text by the audience.

1.8. RHETORIC

Stephanie Argerich, uses her own voiceover and her mum's gestures as the main source of rhetoric. She persuades the audience to engage with her perceptions and feelings about her family through combination of rational and emotional shots since our thoughts and feelings are strongly unified, documentaries cannot ignore the persuasive power of emotions (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p. 123). In *Bloody Daughter*, rationale and emotions are not treated as separate entities but combined cleverly to support each other to create affection. The viewer engages with feelings, in other words, learn "how to feel like" Martha.

Ipeker chooses the interview as his primary rhetoric. He persuades the audience about Idil's extra-ordinariness by the help of people's accounts representing milestones of her life. Idil's childhood voice on radio interviews are purposely selected as a powerful tool to depict her hidden homesickness, outstanding intelligence and perfect linguistic capabilities compared to her age.

Cohen, on the other hand, did not rely on many interviews to remind Ida's virtuosity but worked on her face to touch her emotions with extreme close-ups. Also, in contrast to her colorful house and stage costumes, the uncolored still photographs are taken by the filmmaker to help viewers to feel her reality. Her own genuine testimony is another tool for persuasion, including the counter arguments about her age and performance. So the viewer is invited to hear counter opinions via biographic subject's remarks. This is a notable stylistic choice of the filmmaker that created a subjectivity representing both sides of the dilemma. This style opposes a classical narrative where subjects represent just one side of the dilemma.

1.9. IRONY

Stephanie's feelings about her father are shaped by his weakness to show his approval of her presence in his life. "*Bloody Daughter*" is a great metaphor as being the title of the film, whereas it has an opposite meaning for her father. He denies that *Bloody* has a negative connotation and claims that it actually means "to love someone". Stephanie is still suspicious of his sincerity, since she is the only child who has not been legally registered as his child for the last thirty-four years. It is notable that he has registered all other his children whom are male but Stephanie could only took her mother's surname since father is written as "unknown" at her birth certificate. Stephanie uses this conflict, at the title of the film which too emphasizes the patriarchal duality at their relationship. Irony does not play another role in *Bloody Daughter*.

Irony can be regarded as definitive style in *I am the Violin*. Paul Cohen uses irony "to invite us to infer meaning different from the literal meaning" (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.130). He depicts Ida's efforts to sustain her career while showing the ironic nature of her age, loneliness and her self-mockery on gender issues. He does not use any voice-over narration to imply this meaning but uses Ida's own subjectivity as a contradiction with her "reality". Reality, he refers, is Ida's own perceptions about her-self, mixed with comments of opposite views. So he lets his subject, in a way to co-author his narration, with her self-denial, creating pitiful emotions about her struggle.

The viewer does not infer any irony at Ipeker's narrative voice. He prefers to have a journalistic voice to conduct his subject's reality, while resonating with his character's distant attitude. His style contributes to the mystery of the character.

1.10. STORY TELLING

All three films tell a prodigy's life story with using conventions of documentary i.e. accounts, evidence and interviews. All can be regarded as

dramatic stories in a way being “rich in character” and dramatization of actuality (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.135). Since “Documentary’s essence lies in the dramatization of actual material” (Rosenthal, 1995, p.21). Especially *Bloody Daughter* is full of characters composed of family members and also “rich in action” in terms of past events i.e. Martha’s cancer operation, Stephanie’s giving birth and Lydia’s abduction which contains “pathos, humor and even suspense” (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.135) . She also suggests some resolution to these specific events. Such as, Martha continues to smoke, Lydia is accepted to have a friendship relation with Martha and Stephanie’s boys are growing happily, while she continues filming. Stephanie looks for a meaning out of messy sides of life and presents some sort of coherence out of this messiness. Coherence is not the main aim but the narration is not as messy as a poetic documentary. She is quite successful to discover the “dramatic side” of Martha’s life.

The other two films employ less dramatic and messy events, whereas causality is somewhat presented for the past’s conflicts, especially at *İdil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy*. Such as Idil’s will to have a doll’s house is justified with the images of knick-knacks from her vacation house. Her rage to master caused her to silence her piano by filling it with newspapers. Eytan İpeker stayed more neutral and did not choose to “carve” the dramatic structures as much as the other two filmmakers, that can be regarded as a creative choice (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.139). This choice is also a result of his encounter with his subject’s authentic persona, who favors distance at her relationships and does not give credit to victimization in her life. Her biggest drama appears to be at her childhood by the time she was labeled as “prodigy”. İpeker wisely discovered this burden and resonated with her hidden suffering. His usage of time is mostly linear signifying an Aristotelian causality. As a result, genius epic is not distorted and not confronted. This led to create more cognitive public knowledge than an emotional one. However, he did not neglect to explore her character with private and daily reflections with the help of framing still-life objects. Remarkably, he

explored her cultivated interests and moods in conjunction with her surroundings. The images of the dark apartments she lived in, the depressing architecture of Paris, toy-size objects she collects, the Buddhist literature she reads and the dark paintings she selected...

Cohen, on the other hand, used rules of Hollywood at *I am the Violin* more precisely than the rest of the filmmakers, by introducing the protagonist with a distinctive suffering. Namely, Ida's suffering with getting aged and being ignored. The identification of protagonist's objective has been also made clear that is continuing to perform and keeping her status. Meanwhile, the film displayed the difficulties that stand between her and her objectives as well (Spence and Navarro, 2011, p.139). Her effort to fix her untuned violin, a Stradivarius, has become the climax of her struggle. By dividing the whole story into six episodes, Cohen manages to keep the viewer to wonder, if she will be able to stay on stage or give-up playing.

Being a prodigy was the first dramatic event at all three subject's life experience and they were seen as a "race horse" for the rest of their youth. Cohen is the one, who has not made this reality as the biggest tension of his film. Maybe because, in contrast to other two subjects, Ida claims that she had been someone who was gifted by birth and always remained happy to be seen as an instrument. As she claims in the closing scene, "I am the Violin!"

Until now, stylistic elements of documentary are explored with the aim of finding their effect on creating "emotional knowledge". The empathy for an "other" mainly roots from the "voice of the filmmaker" depending on her/his response to the encounter. The modes, the type of interaction and the stylistic voices' of the filmmakers and their subjects are explored. Discussion was made in order to understand, if the viewer can "feel with the gender reality," while watching these three films.

In the next chapter, narrative elements will be discussed on the basis of prodigy myth versus female experience in order to get a deeper view about the

socio-historic reality that the filmmakers had to interpret. Finally, the cinematic elements of narration will be explored at creating a voice for women.

CHAPTER 2

PRODIGY MYTH VS. FEMALE EXPERIENCE

In order to have an equal exploratory ground, biographic documentary films on three contemporary women musicians who have similar pasts and careers are selected for analysis. All three films have used biographic tools in the largest sense, to tell about their subjects' authenticity, while deconstructing and reconstructing the perfectionist "prodigy" myth at the same time. All of the three filmmakers have their own approaches and documentary voices, while looking for meaning of this extraordinary facticity, being a "prodigy". In this chapter, I will analyze the "musical prodigy" myth as a cultural agency to create the narrative and reveal the meaning in the film.

First, I have to note that working on films on female musical prodigy myth is not a common phenomenon to film scholarship, due to prodigiousness being a rare feature of few individuals. The phenomena do not have many interpretations by documentary filmmakers either. Biographic films are sometimes made for promotional purposes focusing on the high competency of their subjects. Although, several bio-pics are based on the life story of the conflict of artistic extraordinariness vs. life tragedy, biography has not yet become a subject for artistic documentary. However, the prodigiousness phenomena have been rather under attention of musicologists and music educators who have searched and discussed the criteria for the label. Their academic discussion mainly evolves around the eligibility and measurement of musical talent. Shortly, the "Nature or Nurture?" debate.

2.1. PRODIGY MYTH and HISTORY OF ‘GENIUS’

I find it better to start with concept of “myth” before connecting it with prodigy and gender. In 1957, Roland Barthes has made significant contribution to the understanding of mythologies. He defined myth as a type of speech, chosen by which cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of the things. He drew attention to the strength of imagery as imposing meaning on one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it (1993, p.110). At this point, one can easily retrieve from memory, a picture of a small child sitting on a piano seat, putting her little fingers on something relatively too big for her. This image signifies a child prodigy, who has extraordinary talent. As it happened at İdil Biret’s story, where a history was mainly built around this image, without really “analyzing or diluting it”. Barthes mentioned the function of myth to empty reality. “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them simply. Myth purifies them. Myth makes them innocent” (p.143). He then elaborates the myth of childhood as an advanced bourgeois myth: that was invented by culture, reaching consumer culture (ibid.). As he has correctly estimated, today, child innocence continues to be an object of display, talent shows are still promoted and the “innate talent” is still consumed by mass audiences without any suspicion. Barthes mentioned the role of media in ripening the myth, as he declared: “A myth ripens because it spreads” (ibid). During 1940s, in İdil Biret’s childhood, radio, newspapers and magazines were the main media to spread her “extraordinariness”, whereas TV shows and internet broadcasting are the main media channels of our times to spread the myth of prodigious children.

After reviewing the concept of myth with Barthes’s ideas, we may get closer to the definition of ‘prodigy’ and examine its historical structure. A musical “Child prodigy” or “Wunderkind” is a label, commonly used by Western Culture since eighteenth century onwards. Both words ‘Prodigy’ and ‘Wunderkind’ describe exactly the same type of a person in musical life, such as a child

musician displaying extra-ordinary musical skills in front of an audience. Though they are unrelated to one another in their etymological origin. The word ‘prodigy’ derives from Latin word *prōdigium*, bearing the meaning of potents monster or something unnatural. ‘Wunderkind’ on the other hand, was mainly associated with baby Jesus, in German speaking regions during the 17th century and 18th century, with more positive connotations of ‘wondrous’ or ‘miraculous’ (Amthor, 2012, p. 15).

We can also add creative ‘genius’ into the picture since the word ‘genius’ is mostly associated with ‘prodigy’. Genius is derived from the Greek word for birth, so it is again associated with youth.

When we come back to the films in analysis, we can read the complexities of a ‘child prodigy’ phenomena at *İdil Biret: Portrait of Child Prodigy* (Eytan İpeker, 2015). Eytan İpeker, documents the “wondrous” experience of a larger audience, composed members of two nations, particularly statesmen and musical bourgeoisie, all were magnified by the extra-ordinary performance of a small child. The myth is supported by several accounts both visually and orally, by the people around her revealing their astonishment as they witness her performance. Therefore, the film repeats a common definition of a child musical prodigy, with the help of interviews and historical recordings.

While repeating the myth of a natural gift, İdil Biret’s personal confessions at *İdil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* mirror the opposite side as well. İdil Biret personally demystifies the experience, implies that becoming of a public figure at such a young age had no meaning for her. Piano, as a big instrument, was quite scary for her, that she did not even want to touch it at the beginning. Since the ultimate need was play and imagination for a child at that age, she was not emotionally involved with the extremity of the situation. This is underlined several times during the narration, creating a tension between the label of ‘being gifted’ versus the mood of an ‘ordinary’ child.

To draw a broader point of view, we need to analyze the rise of the “musical prodigy” concept within a socio-historical frame work. Prodigy phenomenon started by “the development of individualistic concepts in humans, which emerged in the Western world between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (Kopiez, 2011, p.226). According to Yvonne Amthor, who has studied the musical prodigy in European Concert Life between 1791 and 1860. She points out to the change in the perception of the child in the family unit and her place in society starting by the eighteenth century. Families started to get interested in child raising, their skills and achievements by then. From that time, nuclear family appeared with more privacy and affection for children. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, romantics like Rousseau viewed children as innocent, vulnerable and slow to mature. They idealized the child as a creature blessed by God, that a child could become a lifetime inspiration (Amthor, p.19). Moreover, Amthor found a second major factor influencing the development of and popularity of the phenomenon of musical prodigies: This was the rise of the bourgeois middle classes and the subsequent transformation of musical life in Europe. With the increase in music taste by bourgeois audiences in Continental Europe, prodigies could secure direct patronage from a local patron (usually a member of an influential aristocratic family) (ibid.).

This development resembles to that of İdil Biret’s case, that was patronized by members of the parliament during the modernization process of newly established Republic of Turkey. She was presented to the members of the period’s bourgeois class as a “child prodigy” when she was only four. Her talent was found so astonishing that she could have become a role model for the young generation and their families. A law called as “Prodigy Child Law” was passed by the parliament to sponsor her education abroad. This event created a strong bond among public with this little child.

2.1.1. Experience of a “Female Prodigy”

Another aspect of this phenomenon, is the publicity, since the musical prodigies were made public display from the beginning. Consequently, they were made eligible to take on this label, and furthermore should have been regarded a public, not a private, phenomenon. At this point, it is necessary to think about gender. There were not many but still a few girls reported as prodigy during the times that girls would have been considered to have a role only at private sphere. Girls were often encouraged to play the piano only at home. It was seen as a tool to attract more qualified candidates for marriage. With the help of this argument, it is not surprising that Maria Anna Mozart who was traveling with her brother Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, until she had become eighteen, was expelled from performing in front of an audience by her father. Maria Anna Mozart was the family's first prodigy. She probably lost her chance to become globally famous like her brother, by gender entanglement (Rusch, 2011). Music was not perceived as a career path for women for centuries. So how could have female prodigies emerged in front of public?

Virtuosity history is male dominated therefore it is not easy to find a single answer from research. We may combine findings of Reinhard Kopiez with few others', who studied the phenomenon with a historiometric method. Kopiez indicates that, “Data analysis revealed an increase in wunderkind reports, which reached a peak between 1821 and 1825—the historical beginning of the virtuosic era. Female prodigies performed on the piano or as singers (‘feminine’ instruments), while male prodigies played the flute, clarinet, and violin, the ‘masculine’ instruments” (Kopiez, 2011).

Eva Fenn, who studied women and censorship in music, made another contribution to the understanding of prodigy. Upon her view, playing in front of public was an opportunity to grasp a musical education at an early age especially for girls who were banned from some of the “masculine” instruments. Since some

of the instruments were found inappropriate for women to play, there were very few girls who could reach a musical education. These were mainly the children of musicians. Therefore, female child prodigies could only take their musical education from their fathers (2005).

Freia Hoffman argued that children were seen as asexual beings, and therefore female prodigy could play instruments which women would not normally have performed on (1998, pp.325-335). I think, her view on the perceived asexuality of a child prodigy worth attention. I believe, although they were born a century later, asexual perception of a child was sustained and might have influenced gender identification of the subjects at this study, as well. Being able to be in front of a public due this perception is important while forming the later phases of a sexual identity in the life of a prodigy. It possibly created a burden on the construct of their femininity. As in our films in analysis, the spectator meets portraits of a female prodigies, who could not freely enjoy their childhood and experience enough from the times to discover their sexuality. They were seen simply as musical machines not like ordinary humans with sexual development. Both Idil and Ida are still mourning for these years. Ida emphasizes that she had never been a child. She expresses that, she acts more childish now. Especially in Idil's and Ida's cases which were clearly interrupted by being in display since very young ages (around 3-5 years old) the viewer feels the gap and depression regarding the missing time for play and isolation from early love affairs during teenage years, due to the conditions of being in front of a public.

Another fact to consider, is the relation between age and talent. As Eric Weiner states at his article, "The subtle craftsmanship of old age attracts less attention than the pyrotechnic iconoclasm of youth" (Weiner, 2011). The frustration of getting aged but still desiring performance, is a prominent theme both at films about Martha and Ida, which constitute a realistic tension between getting aged and having talent. Being a woman plays a significant role again in this misperception, since the age of a male musician seldom attracts attention —

even it is respected as a sign of mastery — whereas an old age may become a sign for losing the skills for a female performer. At this point, we should notice that, “Like gender, age functions as a system of social classification. Older women are viewed as less competent, intelligent, wise and less independent than older men” (Unger, 2001, p.184). So the struggle never ends for a woman even if she is a performative genius.

Up to this point, I tried to define and give a historical social background of being a female prodigy. Being talented from birth, young, innocent and asexual have shown significance as criteria for building the conceptions of the myth. Being asexual and staying young seem to be prominent misconceptions of the myth especially when it is experienced by females.

2.1.2. Talent, Innate or Acquired ?

Another discussion is whether such talent is innate or acquired. The films in my analysis put an eye on this aspect as well. Scholars at New England Conservatory, who studied the misconceptions of talent state that, ‘being talented’ may mean families that their child is special and will remain exceptional in her capability for music for the rest of her life. In addition, to be called “talented” may put a burden on a student’s shoulder during her musical education, because she will face high expectations of performance and a fast peak at her career (Scripp, Lawrence, Ulibarri & Flax, 2013, p.58). All of our artists in the films, seem to carry this burden successfully with bright performances and keeping their aptitude for music for the rest of their lives. In this respect, we can claim that all of the films support the existence of innate talent and thereby its life-time continuity at some degree. However, films also support another argument of the same scholars, who claim that dedication is crucial especially for the maturity years. They mention that talent becomes irrelevant in the maturity years since a dedication to a career matters far more than the signs of an early talent (ibid.). Similarly, the three

films in discussion respect the hard work and the dedication of the three women throughout their life journey. Their hard work stemming out from biological limits — their muscles are weaker than their male counterparts — is also emphasized. Idil Biret shares her memory that her tutor Nadia Boulanger implied that she could never become as good as a male virtuoso because of her softer female muscles. However, Idil was so determined to compete with her male counterparts, so that she started to lift weight to strengthen her muscles. Her physical endurance is emphasized not only by her muscles but also very long hours of work. In order to become the most recorded artist of classical music world, she practiced heavily for days without giving any breaks. She still practices several hours a day with a silent piano, not to disturb her neighbors. Ida on the other hand, is still very obsessive on right tunes and does not allow any failure to feed misjudgments about her age and her performance. While building astonishment with their innate talent since childhood, all the films highlight the element of true dedication to practice and to sacrifice from other joys of life. Thereby, they blend the components of innate or fixed talent, in other words, gifted, genius, god-given components with know-how, proficiency and strength (ibid.). Martha on the other hand, questions her way of living on tours and feels stage anxiety before each concert. She is depressed to start a day and reflects her existential misery to the camera, that I find quite honest to demonstrate the existence of hard days.

At all three films, the myths of a female prodigy, such as young age, asexuality, the innate nature of talent and dedication, are explored by the filmmakers, as a text. When we come to the subject's point of view, except Ida Haendel, the other two musicians share the conflict of extra-ordinary performance and innate talent and reveal experiences to de-mystify these misconceptions. Only Ida insists on that she is “the violin” from the day one, by the time she touched the instrument. However, the rest of the two women are more aware of the gap between the myth and the experience, and are able to put a distance to their “innate” talent. Martha confesses that she spent a year stopped playing — her

fingers were not functioning at all — because of the big pressure on her. Here again the viewers face the de-construction of the “unflappable persistence” (Weiner, 2011). Idil confesses that she dreamed of an escape to an island to be free from the strict discipline and heavy practice. Furthermore, she sadly indicates that her desire to become a medical doctor was prevented because she was told that she was born with ‘the talent’. She implies that she actualized her healing mission by another means, namely with music. Surprisingly, Martha also wanted to become a doctor instead of a pianist.

Ida did not consider any other profession since she believed that she existed only for playing the violin. Her belief might have been strengthened by the most basic need of a human being; which is to survive. During the Second World War, her talent made possible for her and her Jewish family to flee from Poland to Britain. In other words, their lives were saved by her talent. So it is not surprising that she has been associated with her talent. Life is what we perceive.

2.1.3. Role of Family

Direction to music and intense practice by family members are additional common features of a child prodigy. As previously stated, these children are usually encouraged, tutored — even forced — by one of the parents, who is also a musician or at least by a parent, who had strong aspirations to become a musician. In Ida’s case, her father’s role is evident. His aspiration to become a violinist was forbidden by Ida’s grandfather since he thought violinists were “lost” beings. As a result, Ida’s father decided to become a painter and swore to raise his children as violinist. Ida as his second daughter had more aptitude for music than her elder sister, so she was selected to make his dreams come true. In Ida’s life, this resulted in a life-long relationship to ‘please’ the father. Her father was a perfectionist like Idil’s mother, who was not easily satisfied with her daughter’s performances. Both parents made their daughters to feel insufficient but also built a stamina to endure

the critic. At all three cases, the parents changed their homelands and dedicated their lives to the evolution of their child's musical career. At *Bloody Daughter*, however, Martha's motivation to choose music is not explicit, since the filmmaker drew a more self-driven portrait, who denied any connections with the family. Martha used to lie about her parents and refused the sense of belonging to someone, since her childhood. She went to music competitions alone. Although she had a closer relationship with her father than her mother, her father's role in initiating her to music is not mentioned in the narrative. Equally, her mother is portrayed distant to mothering, and even refrained from hugging Martha to show her love. Martha's case demystifies the common belief that all prodigies are promoted and supported by their parents who make big sacrifices from their lives for the sake of their children's path. Thinking about this "pleasing a parent" fact within the context of a gender perspective, we clearly see the early oppression of patriarchy through the institution of the family have been demonstrated both at *I am the Violin* and *Idil Biret: A portrait of Child Prodigy*. Ida implies that she always felt belonging and fidelity to her family. She willingly resonated with her father's desire to become a violinist and was always motivated to please him with her performance. She justified his ban from other social relations by believing in that, "She did not need anyone else, other than her family." As viewers, we may read this statement as a self-mockery because Ida experienced "overlapping identifications". One of these roles of identification was being a 'daughter' where her perfectionist father left the main gender influence on her. He was actualizing his fantasy of being a violinist via his daughter's gift but in Ida's words: "He could not see that his violinist daughter was at the same time a woman". This did not lead to Ida's rebellion instead she felt more of a dependence on and admiration to her father. This bias costed her to stay fragile at her romantic relationships. Her only love was to an orchestra conductor who broke her heart with another love affair. Similar to her contradictory feelings to her father, she still adores him and thinks he was 'perfect'. Ida's another self-mockery...

In İdil's case, we do not have much idea from the narrative but we know that she comes from a family with secular aspirations; she was also directed by her perfectionist mum and harsh music teachers having a say at her choices. İdil Biret remembers her mum's words, stating that, she needs thousands of hours of practice in order to claim being a "real musician". As a child, she resisted them in her own ways and dreamed of running away to an island, which probably affected her gender identification process, too. She preferred distance at her relationships as a method of protection from impositions. İdil's husband states the hardness of their relationship as; "he lives with a genius whose mind is always full." This might have led to a marriage without kids due to the fact that having children would be impossible to put distance at their relations. Upon to Unger, who studies women and gender, "Parent and musician identities appear to less intersect" (Unger, p.93). This finding is in line with İdil's and Ida's cases, who do not have any children probably because of their dedication to their music careers.

2.1.4. Nation, Home, Language and Belonging

In İdil's case, the patriarchal figure 'to please' has extended beyond family thus to the 'state' where she was expected to fulfill not only her parents's dreams but also a nation's dream to get recognition from the modern world. According to Şerif Kahramankaptan, who has written a book on the period of early years of Republic of Turkey, examined the relation between period's president İsmet İnönü and the two little prodigies. The "prodigy child" law was passed for İdil and for another prodigy violinist Suna Kan, to sponsor them in having music education in abroad, by the parliament after severe debates. The myth was constructed by the media of the times as both were announced as the "idols" of the girls, who have selected to be Republican. Kahramankaptan congratulated the "enlightened" families due to their support (Popular History Magazine, 2003, p.79). So the "prodigiousness" was linked to being an 'enlightened republican' and was praised

as a bourgeois value. At last, Idil had been a symbol of modern, talented Turkish youth, with re-constructed values of the West (Keyman, 2013, p.75), who had the potential to achieve a global success for the pride of her nation. Idil Biret, on the other hand, has interpreted this ambition with a wider perspective, where she defined herself as “universal”. She did not pursue a nationalist propaganda but focused on building an excellent performance and universal fame.

At this point of analysis, the notion of identity gets into the picture, as the perception of self-concept. I should say that all of our prodigies have become an object of nationalism and were expected to represent their nationalities worldwide, like athletes of the Olympic Games. Nationalism is a masculine code of success, since women do not find meaning not only in the outer world but more complex within. As Ann Kaplan points out that a nation can be a concept, that men fulfill their needs for belonging and recognition whereas it does not function as much as a belonging for women (1997, p.45).

Belonging issue reminds another type of an “ideal” belonging which is “home”. E. Ann Kaplan adds women see their family as “home” more than men because of local relations, that’s why they do not perceive state as their home as much as men do (ibid.) However, in the Western nature of its depiction, whether it is understood as a positive or negative concept, ‘home’ with its familial and domestic attributes, few women are consequently out of this type of belonging (Taylor, 2010, p.45). Prodigy women are inevitably among in the excluded part of the few women. All three films tacitly explored this issue, being women who moved to a West European country at early ages of their lives and still spending their lives touring all around the world without having any conventional family. At their personal accounts, only Ida declares that she felt deep belonging to her nuclear family, whereas, family does not form a conventional meaning either at Idil’s or Martha’s experience. They seem to look for different types of belongings. For instance, Idil prefers a little doll house with sunshine, in contrast to the dark apartments of Paris, where she was heavily trained. Martha still questions the

meaning of home; living at a permanent residence and belonging to somewhere is still confusing for her. Their moments of their journeys at airports, trains and various concert halls of the world, claim a broader definition of a woman musician's home which involves abstract and temporal form other than an identity described by a certain place or belonging.

Along with this point, I would like to suggest another aspect, to enrich the question of 'home' and negotiated identity of these women with "language". Language attracts attention at their extra-ordinary capabilities of learning and expressing it. They are fully capable of learning and using signs, their musical performance heavily depends on the memorization of a sign system of reading music. Although they are not composers, they have the ability to interpret and integrate their own essence into this poetic language of music. At the same time, as a result of their multicultureness, they can speak at least three languages fluently and can easily suit themselves to different cultural interactions. As a social discourse, language becomes a tool to express and relate with themselves and the world. Their multi-cultural, and multi-lingual identity appears to have a support on a more hybrid and fluid self-concept which allows them to perform different identities at different occasions. Finally and most significantly, music appears as the most beloved language in their lives. They associate their self-concept by the means of language of music and found their own meanings by the help of its meanings.

2.1.5. Being Lonely and Desire

Another myth, that artistic genius has to be a "loner" is explored by the films in discussion. At many classic representations, artistic people have been portrayed as lonely and even "Weird, lacking social communication. The films explore this myth as well. All women are depicted as sort of "loners" but as a result of being independent and because of the necessities of commitment to long

hours of solo practice. They go along well with others, during the rehearsals and the concerts. Especially Idil, does not prefer to be in close relationships with the music industry and the critics. According to the account of her husband, Idil refrains from getting intimate relationships with the music industry, since they are not always composed of “good” people working in “harmony.” Martha and Ida seem more content to be closer to this cycle and like to interact with fans. Therefore, being lonely or escaping from the social world conceptions are somehow deconstructed by the narrative. Isolation is a personal choice for Idil. The loneliness feeds the myth of “mystical” as well which can be linked as to the inability to represent the inner world of a female artist. This takes us back to the classical narratives where women portraits are only replicas of what men see. As bearers, sacrificers or neurotics, De L’Auretis implied “women” is fundamentally unrepresentable as subject of desire, she can only be represented as representation.” (Smelik, quoted De L’Auretis, 2001, p.17).

The issue of representation of a female desire reminds the argument that in classical narratives adult women prefer to be silent about their sexual desires and does not reflect her observations of the self after childhood years. We face with this inclination to be silent about the period after childhood mainly at the film on Idil Biret, where she reflects her feelings during her childhood and does not give much clue about the rest of her life. She lets others speak about her and make them give their remarks about her youth as “wild” and “independent”. She does not become a figure of desire at her own subjectivity but at others’. Martha and Ida are more confident in telling about their youth and also the filmmakers show an aptitude to reveal their subjectivity about their sexual desires. Ida’s willingness to wear clothes remaining from her youth, provide the impression that she still feels like a young woman. She is still under influence of being on display and proud to be fitting in the same costumes of her youth as an evidence of her existing capability. Martha, on the other hand, keeps her simplicity and confesses that she still needs a love partnership to fulfill her life. These moments create a

text of embodied subjectivity from first-person, crucial for a woman's narrative. In my opinion, Martha has been the most independent character among all because she reflects her independence confidently. Being the oldest and most wounded by history, Ida had to bury her sexuality for a long time. Idil had it in her soul but behaved more controlled outside, to keep the distance with herself as well.

2.1.6. Intersection of Genius and Motherhood

The intersection of "genius" and "motherhood" is another subject to be discussed in this respect. The *Bloody Daughter* explores the common belief that genius and motherhood do not easily co-exist. The myth is built around the notion of a woman being an artist, she often fails at motherhood. The film goes over Martha's own point of view on motherhood and observes her style of mothering. Motherhood has become a central theme of the film, which is opened with a scene of Stephanie's (the filmmaker & Martha's youngest daughter) giving birth to her second son. Martha wishes the baby to be a girl but the opposite happens. Her mimic explains her preferences for girls. Stephanie also edits scenes from Martha's earlier accounts while raising her children. Martha raised them independently without putting any boundaries. Since Martha was often on tour or heavily practicing, many other musicians and friends took part in the communal way of raising her two daughters. Biological fathers did not take much role at raising their daughters. When asked, Martha exclaims that it is easier to be a mother without a "spouse". She is only pitiful for that she could not act responsible enough for her first daughter, Lydia, who was separated from her when she was very young.

She confesses that she could not feel the bond with her as much as she felt with her other two children. However, in the last decade, she tried to compensate her ignorance by keeping her by her side. Martha and her eldest daughter Lydia,

who is a violinist, have formed a colleague relationship after difficult times. Stephanie, her filmmaker daughter, as a young child, was free to explore everything at home, even free to not to attend school. Maybe this opportunity led her to explore freely and motivated her filming their daily lives since she was quite young. As Adrienne Rich emphasizes the power of a mother at “extending actual possibilities” for her daughter. That signifies that the mother also pushes the limits of her life. Such a mother refuses to be a victim in difficult times (1977, p. 250).

Consequently the text at *Bloody Daughter* becomes a feminist one, depicting a woman’s struggle to resist social norms of being a faithful, sacrificing mother. Martha feels the existential anxiety like every woman who insists on her own way. She did not expect anything either from the fathers of her daughters or from her parents. She stayed at her center, playing music, while creating her own way of mothering. She might be considered as an example of a feminist mother, who did not reduce her sense of self to motherhood. The text becomes a feminist text not only by her standing against patriarchal stereotypes but also by the depiction of the acts of Stephanie’s father’s attitude towards his daughter. He is a concert pianist as well. He seems cheerful filled with ambiguity of incompetence when they meet. He avoided Stephanie legally as her daughter and the procedure is still pending which still hurts her feelings. “The Bloody Daughter” has been pronounced by him, creating a metaphor for his love to Stephanie. Stephanie preferred to reveal him and his role at her mother’s life to complete the whole picture. On the other hand, although Stephanie has a partner, she carries only her mother’s surname, which again connotes a feminist attribute to the text.

Finally, all three women are peculiar, with their individual resistance stories against different stages of life. Idil opposed her imprisoned childhood, whereas Martha resisted ordinary codes of being a “nice mom and a spouse” of maturity, and Ida still opposing the stereotype of being an idle old woman.

CHAPTER 3

NARRATION

At this chapter, the narrative tools of biographic documentary enabling the filmmaker to draw authentic portraits of three virtuoso, are analysed. While looking for clues for a feminist biographical documentary aesthetics, some of the issues discussed in “feminist film” aesthetics are taken into consideration along with the “typical structures” of biographical documentary.

3.1. PERSON AND WORLD

John Corner’s article on “Biography within Documentary Frame” identifies key ‘Biographical Structures’ and ‘Elements of Biographical Discourse’. Corner explains the first aspect of the structure under the “person and world” title. He describes the primacy of the person and world as “the origins and development of character and attributes within environment provide one of the principal points of imaginative engagement” (2002, p.96). Construction of ‘person and world’ structure can be seen at *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* where the filmmaker produces cold and dark images of the city¹ — that romantically



contribute to the cinematic quality of the film — in connecting with the formation

¹ **Figure 3.1** Ipeker produced images to designate the place and world of Idil Biret.

of the depressive mood of the pianist and placing the character at a dark environment.

Idil Biret's origins, her first "places" that have shaped her prisoned childhood under strict education, are filmed to strengthen her testimony. In addition to the images of the city and her photos from her motherland, Turkey, testimonies of her great talent are juxtaposed with her childhood drawings.² These drawings combined with the audio of first person accounts reveal the play versus duty tension of her relations with her parents during the times. The filmmaker carefully combines her autobiographic accounts with these expressive drawings in order to document her early experiences and to build a bridge between the imaginative, reflexive and the real. At the same time, it is interesting that the filmmaker refrains from usage of recorded/filmed visual or audio of Idil Biret's parents, other than their presence as imaginary figures at her childhood drawings along with her short remarks about them.



This untypical narration for the parents brings two possible inferences for the viewer:

²**Figure 3.2** Idil Biret's childhood drawings build a bridge between the imaginative and the real.

1. To imagine her parent childhood relations symbolically with the help of the drawings without questioning but enjoying them as a small child's representation.
2. To leave a critical space for the lack of parents' "recorded" visibility. As the story progresses, the viewer implicitly infers that for the sake of her ambitious future, Idil was left to the hands of the music instructors rather than a warm togetherness with her parents. This crucial choice for a biographic narration creates a strong value for the "personal" while revealing "the hidden figure under the carpet." This approach corresponds Corner's comment on the contemporary biographical documentary's premise of "revelation" (ibid., p.99).

3.1.1. The Teleology of Fame

Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy (Eytan Ipeker, 2015) supports Custen's remark that, "Documentaries of famous people are obliged to show something that is called the teleology of fame" (Corner, 2002, p.98). *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* follows such an obligation, demonstrates subject's early talent and the phases of her evolving greatness with chronological editing. This approach comes from an impulse to combine public memory with a personal one, whereas the other two films in discussion do not have such an urge to create a memory for/of the "public".

I am the Violin (Paul Cohen, 2004) partially sticks this "fame" obligation as it focuses on the origins of Ida's extra-ordinary talent and development by visualising it with testimonies and archives. *Bloody Daughter* (Stephanie Argerich, 2012) on the other hand, does not feel the need to tell the story of phases of its subject's becoming of a legend, but more interested in depicting the "personal" matters of a "goddess" with her fragmented relations and her complex mind. In other words, among the three films, only *Bloody Daughter* attempts to

disrupt such a classical biographical narrative with an auto-ethnographic point of view.

3.1.2. Face and Body Work

While defining elements of biographical discourse, Corner highlights the importance of “face work” in order to place the “body” in the world. Gestures of the face tell a lot about an inner world of a character therefore widely used by biographers (ibid, p.99). Rich readability of a face is extensively used by the three filmmakers in analysis with own approaches. Stephanie Argerich chose to use close-ups especially at moments of testimony and at when Martha feels difficulty to cheer up in the mornings of the concerts.

Martha’s habit to use her facial gestures and courage to look directly³ at the camera creates proximity to the viewer by breaking the camera’s barrier. It breaks the voyeurist position of the viewer as well.



³ **Figure 3.3** Martha’s direct look breaks the camera’s barrier.



Figure 3.4 Face work, readable gestures



Figure 3.5 Unconventional moments

I am the Violin attracts the attention in the use of close-up and stills to underline the lived experience of Ida. Especially the still photos taken by the filmmaker, to enrich the pictorial qualities of the film, leaves the viewer a space for interpretation of the character and her unique story. These photos can be regarded as “documents of fiction” at a non-fiction. In Corner’s words, “The only way that a documentary can acquire value with some independence from its content is of course, by marking its own aesthetic status” (2003, p.95). The photos help to place the body in the world aesthetically and represent the filmmaker’s authorial viewpoint. The filmmaker’s artistic choice for black and white still photography signifies both an aesthetic component that, “It continues to function as a faithful record implying a view-point from which it was taken: and there is a

sense in which one continues to be at this viewpoint no matter what angle the photograph is inspected from” (Sparshoot, 1971, p.18).



Figure 3.6 Black and white stills reflect the world of the subject.

Stephanie Argerich’s choice to place her subject’s body at unconventional settings like lying on a sofa or in the bed differs from other two filmmaker’s respective choices. She usually includes Martha’s ‘bare feet’ into the frame to create meaning since her bare feet evokes her bohemian lifestyle as a sign for her freedom. In addition, she looks confident and happy with the “gaze”.



Figure 3.7 Martha’s bare feet evokes freedom.

Another atypical aesthetic contribution of Stephanie Argerich to the narration is, her self-reflexive scene, just at the opening. The way she introduces herself as the

narrator of the story is unconventional for a classic biography which combines her story with her biographical subject. She has chosen the bathtub filled with water as the reference of her subjectivity with her naked body. This choice signifies the purity and sincerity of her “naked” views about her mum and builds a trust for the viewer.



Figure 3.8 Stephanie’s self-reflexive scene in the bathtub.

3.2 VOICE

Another element of a biographical discourse is the voice. When period allows the availability of the subject and her voice together, creates the strongest placement of the “body” in the world. (Corner, 2002, p.99). All three films enjoy this opportunity and are able to reflect the subject’s opinion directly from their own perspectives. Since “the autobiographical device of subject’s voice is the most powerful. The combination here of subjectivised, voiced self (self as source) and an objectively rendered self in the world (self as referent) is a potent one.” (Corner, 2002, p.99). The viewer can feel this power mostly at *Bloody Daughter*; since the filmmaker have combined her and her mother’s voices with the images in harmony. Both aural and pictorial narration allow the travel of “the

female voice” from daughter to mother. This creates the rhythm of the narration and reflects both views separately organized in a blend. Stephanie expresses her views about her mother as a bridge between images and other testimonials.

3.3 MUSIC and SOUND

Music, on the other hand, constitutes one of the key elements of all three documentaries, since they all portrait virtuosos. All three women’s virtuosity of classical music is depicted both by the recordings from the concerts and private sessions. In that sense, *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* distinguishes itself by revealing another personal side of its subject, her ‘silent’ piano practice. The filmmaker has filmed and used the sound of silent piano’s keys as an authentic sound of the film, which strengthens the competence and complex inner world of Idil Biret. Her testimony regarding her silent working sessions — with an intention not to disturb the neighbours — is supported with the sound of the piano keys like a typewriter machine. This aspect “thickens” the aural aesthetics of the film and gives an abstraction to the subject. As expressed in her own words: “ I hear the music, not the sounds of a flute or piano. It’s abstract. I hear something else, that does not exist...”

3.4. CAMERAWORK

According to Corner, many television documentaries have discovered the impact of “looking through,” meaning “observations of observations”. “Looking through” means to frame parts of the world in such a way that they transform into ‘imaginary spaces’ without necessarily thereby losing an engagement with the ‘world’. This effect is created by the camera movements and temporal organisations of continuity and change introduced by editing (2003, p.97). Angle, height and level of the camera are crucial elements in the films discussed, since they differ from each other that may point out man eye vs. a female eye (although the sample size is very limited to conclude a view). Man eye is represented with camera movements of Eytan Ipeker and Paul Cohen, who played with camera angles, distances and levels few more times than Stephanie Argerich does. They have placed the camera at high angle and low angle to highlight the greatness or vulnerability of their subjects, whereas Stephanie Argerich often preferred to position the camera at eye level to remain in equal level relationships.

At *I am the Violin*, Cohen shot his subject from a significant distance placing the camera at a high angle with a long distance. From this scene, the viewer can infer that Ida is in a vulnerable position because she needs to prove that she is not under performing.

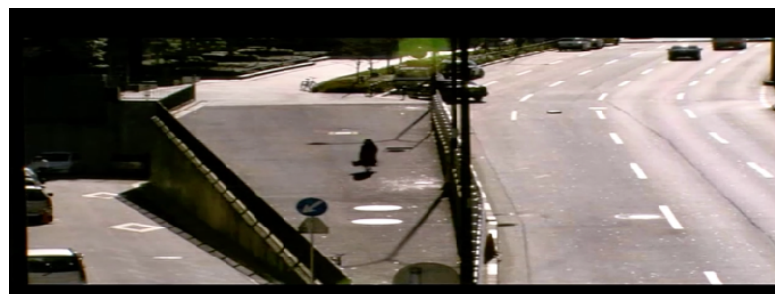


Figure 3.9 Cohen shot Ida from a significant distance to underline her vulnerability.



Figure 3.10 Eytan Ipeker preferred a high angle shot with an artificial lightening at the first scene to assure the camera's authority over the subject.



Figure 3.11 Stephanie Argerich preferred to place the camera at an eye level with daylight.

Actually, Stephanie Argerich's preference to record with a hand-held camera, that gives a journalistic effect and provides the ability to travel with the protagonist. Home made videos from the past with hand-held camera are also available because she has been filming her mother since her childhood. These shots create an intimate feeling more than intrusiveness. Excerpts from home made videos of the past, build an intimacy to the story like looking at a family album, though do not offer pictorial quality.

Cohen and Ipeker also used hand-held cameras in times of unaware shootings that served the de-mystification process of their subject's lives.



Figure 3.12 Uncomfortable moments filmed by a hand-held camera de-mystifies the ‘legend’ myth.



Figure 3.13 Hand-held camera recording the dailiness of a virtuoso

3.5 EDITING

Frederick Wiseman calls editing a ‘private debate’. And he talks how meaning is created as footage is edited into a story. In a documentary, however, it is only after editing that documentation finds its “script”. He adds, “A cut is a judgement, the only public trace of a private debate” (quoted by Spence & Navarro, 2011, p.162.) Cutaways help maintain the illusion of clear and continuous action. Although not essential at a documentary as it is at fiction, cutaway and cut-in shots are preferred by Ipeker, to create meaning. Cut-in shots are added as the rhythmic elements into the story. For instance, Ipeker chose to

shot of the cat figurines at Idil Biret's house in order to impose a meaning at her personality of resembling cats.



Figure 3.14 Cut-ins implies Idil's "cat like" character

"Life may sometimes seem like a meaningless string of random incidents going nowhere. Not so in documentary. Time may be fragmented and reorganized. And we have incidents that are organized to create a sense of forward momentum toward an implied destination" (Spence & Navarro, 2011, p.172). Ipeker also felt the need to organize the events and time to create such a progressive impact at *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy*. He combined the events in most chronological order by blending them with the interviews as evidences of her dedication. His organization of images created the impression that, Idil's childhood mission determined by her talent has been completed and her life experiences have served this purpose. There is little room for question marks or pauses even though some contrasts exist.

Cohen, on the other hand, chronologically organized the events to emphasize Ida's struggle to perform on stage, while selecting images and recordings on her personal story. But more importantly, he preferred to create dramatic "climaxes" for the viewer. This is a result of film's episodic feature, that was mainly produced for television audience to be on air at five short episodes. Each episode repeats some virtues and flaws of the subject so that a new viewer can connect with her story. In addition, a key event exists for each episode to create curiosity for the next one.

Not only the organization of the events, but Cohen's montage of the shots are quite well organized for dividing the film into the three dramatic acts that are represented with black-and white stills.



Figure 3.15 First act implies greatness: "I am the chosen one. I am the Violin!"

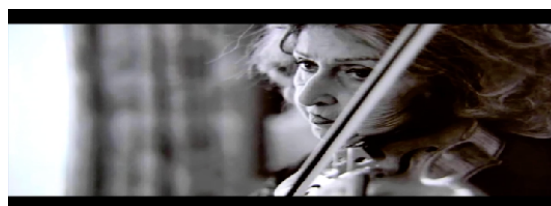


Figure 3.16 Second act implies the female experience: "I was the only one who saw Ida Haendel as female..."

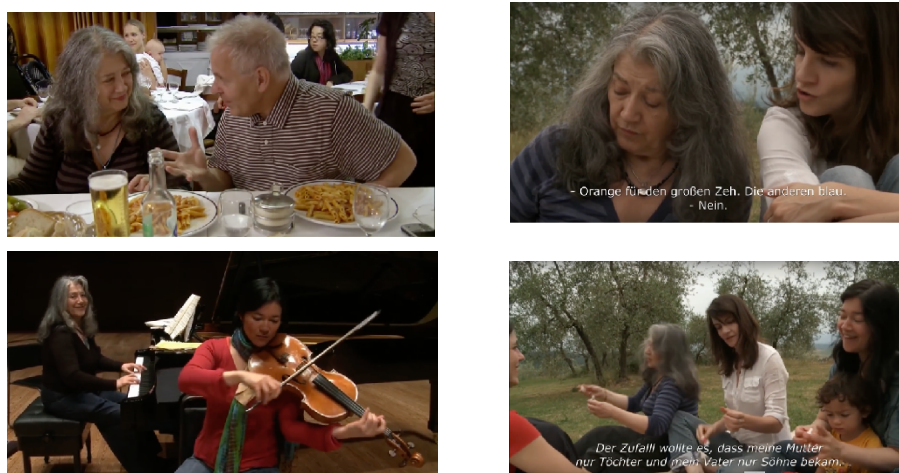


Figure 3.17 Final act resolves the tangle : “May be she’s now at a hotel room traveling the world by herself..she’s always got her violin between herself and being lonely.”

Close and rapidly edited frames cut to music and sound help Ipeker to create a certain level of stylization while magnifying the dedication of Idil Biret. Among three filmmakers he has been the most attentive and fast editor of various frames. He wisely created visual and aural excitement while conveying cognitive information from past. The documentary interviews and the radio recordings serve the “hidden script” written to portray a virtuoso’s distinctive personality and history.

While Ipeker’s and Cohen’s interviewees are alone in the frame Argerich preferred her interviewees present in frames with Martha and others in interaction with each other. This choice shows her “intersubjective” style.

Figure 3.18 Stephanie preferred her interviewees to be in interaction.



Until now, narrative elements are analyzed in order to find the filmmaker's approach to the fact of being a prodigy and a woman. While using main structure and elements of biographical discourse, each filmmaker was able to create their own style of images and editing to depict their subject's world.

CONCLUSION

As a spectator of the three films, it has been touching to meet the humane side of the “prodigy”. While stressing on this rare quality of these individuals, these films aimed to display the “ordinary” side with different layers. In this respect, a dramatic tension between myth and reality emerges successfully at all of the three films. Regarding this tension, John Corner points out a time of a biography with a de-mystifying purpose “that reclaims the subject from legend into the messier mode” (2002, p. 95-101). The subject’s distance to self and others, mistakes, hesitations, dissatisfactions, ambivalences and existential anxieties fascinate. This impression depicts a female viewer’s capacity to connect. Ruby Rich has pointed out the female viewer’s ability to interact with both text and context. According to her, the female viewer is not passive in receiving ideological messages but at the same time she is able to produce meanings out of it (Rich, 1978).

A woman, who makes independent choices on her own way of life, suffers the existential anxiety accompanied by that freedom caused by gender impositions. Putting emphasis on this anxious condition plays a crucial role to produce intimate and humanistic portrayals. A female spectator can be mostly affected by the incompatible qualities of the three women, who obsessively perform music, putting aside every other role, insisting on their way of living, playing the instrument with endless passion and dedication. They are also inspirational figures with their resistance to gender stereo-types. The structure of their resistance is peculiar to keep their inner and outer freedom. Social roles, they confront with, can be listed as follows; being a devoted mother, being an obedient daughter, being a competitive sister, being a supporting wife and being a passive old lady.

Interestingly, three films represent milestones of each woman in terms of a lifespan. Namely, *Idil Biret: The Portrait of a Child Prodigy* focuses more on the

story of discovery of her prodigy, therefore depicting Idil Biret's early experiences and memories. *Bloody Daughter*, on the other hand, focuses on the adult and middle age crisis of Martha Argerich, while putting an eye on her style of motherhood. *I am the Violin* portrays an eccentric old lady, Ida Haendel, with full of passion who struggles against a fading fame. Observing these three main periods of lives of prodigy women musicians, the childhood, maturity and elderliness, becomes an intertwined case of talented and hard working women's struggle to construct their fluid identity at different periods/conditions of their life-spans.

Moreover, all three women in those films draw a border between their inner and outer world mainly due to the endless and repetitive performance anxiety. In addition, self-revelation in public is not found appropriate for a woman under the rules of patriarchy. As a result of this culture, all have difficulty to retrieve their consciousness. However, there are times they express their "consciousness" introspectively such as their inner lives, thoughts, desires, fears and emotions (Ince, 2017, p.41).

In *Bloody Daughter*, Martha Argerich, has broken the barrier of retrieving "consciousness" with the help of her filmmaker's ability to connect with a self-purpose, whereas we see a much more distance between the narrator and the subject at other two films, with using different modes of documentary. Such as in *Idil Biret: The Portrait of a Child Prodigy*, Eytan İpeker, remained more in observatory mode, resonating the distant mode of his subject. However, he displays a significant effort to explore the subject's inner world throughout her identification process with her prodigy past and her search for an escape. Her independent character is evoked by her possessions and by her intimate confessions about her boredom during childhood, supported with evidences of the past.

At *I am the Violin*, Cohen also interacted and felt feelings for his subject but not approached her always with sympathy. He leaved a distance to give him a

freedom to criticise his subject, even to caricaturize her. He resonated her self-mockery but did not feel her “negotiated” gender, as expected. This leads to a weakness in the narrative and the viewer leaves the screen with feelings “for” Ida, not “with” Ida . In my opinion, this does not create a true empathy, since empathy requires a bond “with” somebody.

In this study, one should take in to consideration, as the name indicates; films about “classical” music and its performers are also expected to be “classical”. Therefore, I was not expecting to find out an experimental form of depicting a prodigy woman’s life, but was more interested in how different they were told with a feminist perspective. I have selected the films on women but not necessarily made by female filmmakers since I believe intersubjectivity can also flourish among men. Corner’s view on capability of creating “emotional knowledge” at documentary, developed my perception of documentary aesthetics and voice of a documentary, that I blended with Teresa de Lauretis’s perspective, by rethinking the spectator as “female,” despite biological sex.

As mentioned in the second chapter, Barthes’s views on mythologies of talent and child innocence enriched the reading of the films by providing the semiotic elements of studying a prodigy (1993, p.110-143). I tried to juxtapose his views with some inquiry on musical talent, that examines innate qualities and the influence of family on raising talents. History of socio-cultural developments in classical music and their effects on the place of “female” prodigies on stage, have been elaborated. It was surprising to see a female child prodigy perceived as “asexual”, a perception allowing her acceptance to perform in front of public in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, the prejudgements about female’s capabilities compared to their male counterparts have not changed much since then. The age is still seen as a weakness for a woman performer, whereas it is seen as an evidence of mastery for men. As I got involved in a deeper connection with Ida’s, Idil’s and Martha’s feelings, I was quite upset to see their regrets for the years that they could not live freely, to meet others’ high

expectations. They had to severely negotiate their desires and playfulness with disciplined work. Martha seemed to be most resistant among the three of them, with her rejection of belonging to a family, a man or a place since she was very young. Besides, her unconventional style of raising kids, without help of their biological fathers, makes her story unique. The other two prodigies did not prefer to become mothers. These two concepts, being an artist and a mother, seldom intersect. Martha's experience seem to be exclusive in this sense. Her way of mothering is truly elaborated by its flaws and contradictions in *Bloody Daughter*. Martha preferred to take risk to keep on building her self-concept without obeying the rules of patriarchy.

There shall be other questions to be asked about identity since these women moved to Western Europe when they were young and consequently they have become multi-lingual and multi-cultural individuals. Their extra-ordinary capabilities of learning and performing language attracts attention as a strong type of bonding, since their identity had been shaped mainly by the ability of mastering language of "music". As in Idil's experience, hearing music while she plays the mute piano, her relation to music has become a privileged form of a "relation" with her "embodied" self and the world. In these experiences, music determines these women's behaviour and perceptions and they determine how to express music. So the music is embedded in these women's mind and body, conscious and unconscious, determines their "home" and relationality in the world. This choice led to a resistance against patriarchal impositions, such as nation, home and family, and to other stereotypical roles of a woman determined by age, natal or marital status.

During this study, analysis of narration was the most difficult part for me to elaborate, because I faced almost typical images and aural sounds of a biographical documentary blended with "elements of a biographical discourse". The plots were almost "classical" in a linear sense of events with an opening and closing, combined with continuous editing. These elements would block the

“female messiness” in the narrative that I was looking for. However, as I got into deeper analysis, I was able to figure out the feminist aspect of the narration as I remembered the words of Chantal Akerman on her film *Jeanne Dielman*: “I do think it’s a feminist film because I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images” (from an interview with Akerman conducted by de Lauretis, 1987, p.132).

Daily gestures of a woman are probably still at the lowest hierarchy of the images of the life of virtuoso portrayed at a biographic documentary, who is always considered to be in perfect shape and attitude with an outstanding performance in public. Besides, the dailiness and facial gestures are the personal elements of her life experience which depict an “embodied” point of view. Specifically, the facial gestures of Martha having hesitation to get out of bed for a concert or bodily movements of Ida washing the plates of her kitchen all alone at her apartment, demystify the myth and allow to build an empathy for the female viewer. The truth and subjectivity in moments of dailiness encourage a new mode of biographic documentary filmmaking, that can be called a “messier” mode.

My emphasis on “intersubjectivity” as the main tool telling a woman’s life is supported by the traveling voice of Stephanie Argerich, in *Bloody Daughter*. As a narrative element, her first-person narration is used as a bridge between her own consciousness and her mother’s consciousness. Stephanie’s voice-over corresponds to Irigaray’s proposal of a horizontal relationship among mothers and daughters. Irigaray insisted on breaking the codes of hierarchal and submissive relationship among mothers and daughters. Only by this way, they could prevent the hate and destruction of each other’s individual identities. The filmmaker’s introspective style therefore allows both the subject and the filmmaker to express themselves freely in words and images. The viewer connects with a horizontal relation that is not irreducible into any other’s subjectivity but instead Stephanie’s

subjectivity is intertwined with others' subjectivity, mother, father, and two sisters. This is an example of an intersubjectivity, that Irigaray prescribes for sure.

We examine another form of a horizontal relationship at *Idil Biret: Portrait of a Child Prodigy* where "the relationship between the sexes is not predicted on the production of a child" (Poe, p.55). Idil Biret and her husband conduct a relationship that Irigaray describes, as focusing on the coexistence between two people so that the couple's horizontal relationship maintains the difference between the two. Only by this way, they are distinct, respected and nurtured (ibid, p.55).

Considering all the elements of female subjectivity and shape of the encounter, *Bloody Daughter* stands out as an "unconventional" biographical documentary among conventional classic narratives. This conclusion mainly derives from its auto-biographic virtue with an emphasis on female subjectivity that creates "emotional knowledge" for the female viewer. My argument on "intersubjectivity" seems to be valid as a filmmaker's voice — or can be defined as the style of her documentary — rising as a key dynamic at both of the documenting and viewing processes of women's lives. A film directed by a daughter of a prodigy, by far exceeded my expectations of "intersubjectivity," providing a good example of not suppression but some peaceful coexistence of two individuals under the forces of patriarchy.

Although, I find second wave feminist thinkers' views still inspiring, it is evident that they are not sufficient to create a hype for a new feminist movement or to fuel a wide critical audience. For the last two decades, by the help of digital revolution, "The spectator is third 'personage' in the act of documenting, assessing authenticity, and deconstructing meaning" (Winston, Vanstone & Chi, 2017, p. 173). Moreover, the contemporary documentary viewer is perceived to own an "agency" and also being able to get involved in "multiple modes of engagement." Looking at different ways of viewer's engagement from a phenomenological perspective becomes more important to understand the dynamics of multiple

modes of engagements. This change of view on female spectator, from passive to active, provides new opportunities for both the filmmakers and the viewers to get involved in intersubjective actions with empathy. There will be more ways to connect each other by biographic documentary as well.

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