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## OF SURREALISM IN TURKEY

**Dr. Ayfer Bakkalcıoğlu<sup>a</sup>**

"En Turquie, Oktay Rifat, Cevdet et Veli ont fait connaître le surréalisme par des traductions. Selon une information de René Renne, qu'il m'a été impossible de vérifier, il existerait un groupe surréaliste turc qui édite une revue : Varlık."

Vingt ans de Surréalisme. Jean-Louis Bédouin,

Edt. Denoël, 1961, p. 115.

Is there or has there been a surrealist movement in Turkey? This is the question and the answer is no--there never was, and at least for the foreseeable future, there cannot be a surrealist movement in Turkey. To be able to justify our double negation we must study the problem rather closely and from a psycho-social point of view rather than a literary or artistic one.

André Breton insisted with constant iteration that Surrealism was not an artistic or literary movement but rather a "new interpretation of life"; and according to Aragon, "an attempt at arriving to a new declaration of rights of man."<sup>1</sup>

"The tools of surrealism are poetry and painting, but these must be understood for what they are : the purpose is extra artistic-- they are meant to make man see."<sup>2</sup> For a further definition we can refer to William Carlos Williams : "By retaining a firmness of extraordinary word juxtapositions while dealing wholly with a world with which the usual mind is unfamiliar a counterfoil to the vague and excessively stupid juxtaposition commonly known as 'reality' is created. The effect is to revive the senses and force them to re-see, re-hear, re-taste, re-smell, and generally revalue all that it was believed had been seen, heard, smelled, and generally valued."<sup>3</sup>

1 Cyril Connolly, "Farewell to Surrealism", p. 30.

2 Paul C. Roy, "The Surrealist Movement in England", (Cornell University Press : 1971), p. 65.

3 Introduction to Charles Henri Ford, *The Garden of Disorder and Other Poems* (London : Europa Press, 1938), p. 9.

<sup>a</sup>Dr. Ayfer Bakkalcıoğlu is an Assistant Professor of social literature and French language at Boğaziçi University. He is the author of "Gobineau et les Ethnologues Américains" and is presently working on a study of Gerard de Nerval's "Les Nuits de Ramazan".

As we can see, surrealism is more of a social phenomenon than literary movement. The mere fact that its birth place is France at a given moment in history hides certain *données* which are accepted, merely, as facts of life in Paris, but may not be so at other points of the earth. First of all the lack of socio-political implications of this movement is only an appearance due to the fact that economics are not part of its basic principles. Contrary to other revolutionary movements which advance economic inequality as their basic premise and end up by being a tool for transfer of wealth, surrealism attempts to change the values established by the bourgeoisie over the centuries without concern for economic matters, hoping that by lifting the taboos, or by showing how ridiculous the 'do's' and 'don'ts' are, the structure of the society will also change and the trap-door between *échelons* will be done away with.

For a society to be eligible for surrealism the following are needed :

1. A well established social structure without too much fluidity and too much stiffness;
2. a strong merchant and industrial class, in other words, bourgeoisie;
3. a literary and artistic tradition and high literacy rate.

We can add much more to the above conditions, such as religious tolerance, sense of humour, etc.

We can readily see that at a given moment in history not many countries can boast a surrealist movement as we cannot hope to see a universal form of government. Further than that let us concentrate on Turkey.

When Oktay Rifat, Orhan Veli, Ahmet Hamdi and Ahmet Muhip were involved, very seriously, in a movement to modernize the Turkish poetry there came a moment when they had to start looking for a literary or philosophical school which might formulate what they were attempting to do. It is then that Orhan Veli published his now famous foreword to a collection of poems under the title "Garip" (Bizarre), 1941 edition. This foreword was, rather bizarrely, deleted from further editions.

The impression we get from Veli's foreword is that, he and his friends were unable to find a suitable movement and surrealism seemed to be the best compromise. It is interesting to read from Orhan Veli, what Miss Balakian was to write six years later in her *Literary Origins of Surrealism* concerning the "symbolists." It may be that both may have been inspired by René Crevel or Tristan Tzara.<sup>4</sup>

Veli, who rejects the symbolists, explains his attraction to the surrealists in a footnote, without admitting any sense of belonging. "Probably due to the fact that we have mentioned surrealism with sympathy a few times, certain people who have not read our poems or are ignorant of what is surrealism, have defined us as such in their writings. In reality we have no ties with surrealism outside of a few affinities mentioned here neither with any other established school."

<sup>4</sup> "La poésie qui nous délivre des symboles plante la liberté elle-même et son ascension laisse très loin derrière, très bas sous elle, les sons, les couleurs qui l'expriment. Mais quel technicien comprendra jamais?"

Veli and his friends, inspite of random rumblings of "bourgeoisie" were well aware that Turkey of their time lacked one of the essential elements to compose the elixir of surrealism. There was no bourgeoisie; the closest thing was the professional and bureaucratic classes, which did not have established tastes or norms worthy of attack. As for a mystique of inner life and dreams, the first has been in the eyes of the beholder, the cliché lover fond of saying "oriental mystique." The second is more a matter of interpretation (punintended). Turks, both Muslim and pre-Muslim, have always been very fond of the interpretation of dreams and tolerant of mediums, wizards, etc. Therefore, "le pays des rêves" is more of a cristal ball to show one what to expect in the near or far future rather than a Pandora's box opened only by the "maudit" or the "avant garde".

As for the social structure, we must remember that in Turkey it has always been extremely fluid. The viziers of today have been the headless corpses of tomorrow, while the laborers and slaves of yesterday have been the viziers of today. The closest group to a bourgeoisie were the craftsmen, who were neutralized by the fact of belonging to guilds and later the Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities and the Levantines. But, though the minorities had all the attributes of a bourgeois, even the colour and form of their garb was selected by the state, which, by creating a morose uniformity neutralized any budding literary criticism. Even then, who could have criticised families who fell into hard times after two at the most three generations of wealth? The Victorian age? Industrial age? never heard of it. Balzac would have been confined to the sons of Pashas (Paşazadeler) in Istanbul and except for Enver Paşa perhaps, none, I am sure, looked at Istanbul from one of the seven hills and said, "A nous deux maintenant!"

The second world war, the 1940's has seen the laying of the corner stone of bourgeoisie in Turkey. The village wheeler dealers started coming to Istanbul who was basking in the sun, outwardly unhappy to have been scorned by Atatürk, (who, nevertheless, came back to die), populated by professional men, descendents of old Istanbul families, catered to by minority shopkeepers. The new arrivals had nothing to lose and much to gain, and they gained--they converted everything into money much to the astonishment of the native inhabitants who always displayed a wellbred scorn for trade and resulting wealth.

The nouveau riche of the war years and the postwar years have now been replaced by others, only a score remains from the originals. They are amateurs compared to the centuries old bourgeoisies of the west--they are behind in their thinking, clumsy in their politics and besides there is the tradition of fluidity and the money market is very, very small.

Literature? no continuity--court and popular and some religious. Court (Divan) is too restrictive to permit any levity except a "bon mot" here and there. Religious literature is philosophical and there one can find some specks of something which can be taken for surrealist thought occasionally. Remains the popular--some very good, especially the unwritten ones, the songs (*türküler*), very irreverent, very deep and sincere.

You have made a bridge thinner than hair for your creatures to cross, O, God!  
If you are so tough, why don't you cross it, O, God...

-Kaygusuz Abdal

The children's songs of Anatolia are worthy of collected poems of famous modern poets:

One grape	Bir üzüm
Two grapes	İki üzüm
Three grapes	Üç üzüm
Four grapes	Dört üzüm
Five grapes	Beş üzüm
Six grapes	Altı üzüm
Seven grapes	Yedi üzüm
Eight grapes	Sekiz üzüm
My dear.	A gözüm.

pure Prêvert....

As "pour épater les bourgeois" there is KARAGÖZ (Turkish shadow play, whose origins are lost in time).

"...la femme de ce Seigneur (Hüseyin Pasha) voulant avoir part au divertissement des marionnettes, fit tendre un tapis devant la porte de son appartement qui repondaît à la salle où nous etions, de crainte que nous ne la vissions, et elle ne partit jamais de là que le jeu ne fit fini, quifit à une heure après minuit, ayant duré plus de trois heures, car ils les font durer tant qu'ils veulent, et je m'étonnais qu'elle n'eut pas honte de voir les saletez que faisait leur Caragheuz (Karagöz)."

Monsieur de Thevenot  
Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant etc.  
Rouen et Paris, 1665.

A century and a half later nothing has changed; listen to this revolutionary bourgeois :

"...ce spectacle se nomme kara-gueuze, espèces d'ombres chinoises qui font les delices de la capitale et que les particuliers aisès se procurent de tems entems chez eux. La scène qui divertissait le plus les spectateurs, etait celle d'un âne, prenant ses ébats avec un Juif. Nous avons été surpris, la première fois que nous avons assisté à kara-gueuze, de voir les Turcs, naturellement graves et silencieux, se livrer à une joie vive et à un rire immodéré à l'aspect de ces obscénités. Quelle inconséquence, avons nous dit, dans cette nation qui sévit contre le libertinage (etc., etc.), et qui permet en public une pereille indécence!"

Olivier, Guillaume Antoine  
Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman, l'Egypte  
te la Perse - Tom I  
Paris an 9 (1801)

We must not forget that Sieur du Loir in his "Voyages contenus en plusieurs lettres écrites du Levent, etc., Paris, 1654" finds Karagöz "more subtle than ours". while the great forerunner of the surrealist movement, de Nerval, in his "Voyage en Orient" in 1843 observes :

"Parmi ces jouets, on distingue de tous côtés la bizarre marionette appelée Caragueuz, que les Français connaissent déjà de réputation. Il est incroyable que cette indécente figure soit mise sans scrupule dans les mains de la jeunesse. C'est pourtant le cadeau le plus fréquent qu'un père ou une mère fassent à leurs enfants. L'Orient a d'autres idées que nous sur l'éducation et sur la morale. On cherche là à développer les sens, comme nous cherchions à les éteindre..."

To Karagöz we can add the Theater in the Round or **Orta Oyunu**, which is live Karagöz with its **Kavuklu**.

Painting, sculpture, cinema is another story. Cinema is international and MAN RAY Bunuel, Cocteau can be seen as well in Istanbul as in Paris or New York. As for painting, there is no doubt, the Moslem culture of Turkey has killed the art at its inception and to our mind it would be dishonest to try to pass Bektashi calligraphies as surrealist art.

However, we can say that Turkey has never been and will not be, in the foreseeable future, part of the surrealist community of nations. Besides we would question very strongly and very earnestly most of the so-called surrealist movements mentioned in M. Bedouin's book. The reason is that, surrealism is supposed to be a non conformism, a breaking of the bounds; why then look for similarities among nations when even the idea of nations was alien to surrealists?

For a non conformist surrealism, we can state that Turkey has it and has always had it as a built-in social characteristic. Otherwise how could this social entity have survived so long?

## ÖZET

Türkiye'de bir "Surrealist" hareket vakti ile yer almış mıdır veya halen mevcut mudur? Bunun esaslarını surrealizmin sosyal yapısında aramak, öncelikle bu yapının Türk cemiyetinde mevcut olup olmadığını tesbit etmek lazımdır; oysa ki Türkiye'de yerleşmiş bir burjuvazi yeni yeni doğmakta ve buna rağmen cemiyet el'an daimi bir akımcılık "flüidite" göstermektedir. Eğer sürrealizmin sanat olanaklarını aramak icabederse bunu bulabileceğimiz tek yer halk edebiyatıdır. Gerek şiirler, gerek tiyatro, gerekse türküler ve karagözde çok eski bir sürrealizmin, otorite ve kalıplaşma ile alayın izlerini bulabiliriz. Fransız ekolünün anladığı, esaslandığı bir sürrealizm Türkiye'de mevcut olmasa bile, cemiyetin yapısında bir sürrealizm bulunduğu şüphe götürmez bir hakikattir.