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THE GENERATION RHYTHM IN THE LITERATURE OF REPUBLICAN TURKEY*

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I have been asked to talk about problems and approaches in contemporary Turkish literature in something like 20 minutes. In so short a time you cannot expect me to say more than a few generalities. I choose to interpret the term contemporary as meaning the last half century, a time segment which is convenient since it starts with an incisive historical turning point, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the territorially much smaller but ethnically more homogeneous Turkish Republic. Under literature I shall understand only the core of what is conventionally understood by this term, namely poetry, the novel, the short story, and playwriting. My purpose will be a rough periodization. I shall try to show that the periods which are definable on the basis of the general profile of their literary output exhibit a rhythmic pattern that can also be described as a physiological pattern in terms of generations.

Concepts that are extremely obvious are often very hard to define. One such concept is the concept of the generation. We talk about new generations and old generations about the generation gap, we live with it, we see it clearly with our eyes, but what is it? Since people are being born every year, every day, and every minute, is it possible and correct to bunch them together into larger units? Is it justified to dissect the continuous flow of humanity by drawing arbitrary lines? Is it perhaps wrong to apply the concept to anything not oriented toward the now-point of time? Is it perhaps only meaningful as a subjective term by which we on the one hand identify with a group of relatively acceptable coetans and on the other hand distinguish ourselves from the two adjacent groups, one senior, the other junior?

I shall not enter into a discussion of this much discussed theoretical point. I shall simply take an axiomatic standpoint: it appears to me possible and also useful to describe the development of literature in a country as a rhythmic process in which periodically one generation after the other takes the lead. At every given time we can distinguish between three generations, one that represents the remnants of the former leaders, one that is at the helm now, and one that is only just beginning to assert

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itself, or, in other words, a past, a present, and a future generation. On the basis of such tripartition we can say that mathematically each generation has to constitute a period of 20-25 years, the average physiological lifespan being 60-75 years, or 15-20 years, if we exclude the inactive or rather unproductive years of childhood and early adolescence. In an art exhibit which was mounted in Germany this winter, the works of some famous artists were shown arranged in three periods of creativity: his works before he was 27, the period of youthful élan, his works from 27 to 55, the period of full strength and maturity, and the period after he was 55, usually initiated by a number of years of hesitation and indecision; the last period is sometimes characterized by serene superiority and by a resurgence of ideas of his youth. Obviously, if we accept the subdivision of stylistic development into a sequence of generations, we also have to accept the subdivision of the artistically creative life of a writer into a sequence of periods of variable intensity and, therefore, also importance. Regardless of their significance to his individual development, possibly only in one of these periods of creativity he may fulfill a decisive role in the development of the art. Of course, we will not attempt to apply such periodization uniformly to everybody like a straightjacket; we are aware of the exceptions, the precocious early geniuses and the late-bloomers, but as I had said in the beginning, we will be forced to make some rather sweeping generalizations.

Let us now turn to the Turkish scene. The first period we will have to characterize is the early Republican period, roughly from 1920 to the middle thirties. It is dominated by the generation born in the 1880's, or more exactly, in the decade from 1884-1892 (Halide Edip Adıvar 1884-1964, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı 1884-1958, Ahmet Haşim 1885-1933, Aka Gündüz 1886-1958, Refik Halid Karay 1888-1965, Ercüment Ekrem Talu 1888-1956, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu 1889- Reşat Nuri Güntekin 1889-1956, Orhan Seyfi Orhon 1890-1974, Osman Cemal Kaygılı 1890-1945, Halid Fahri Ozansoy 1891- ; to this generation also belong Ömer Seyfeddin b. 1884, had he not already died in 1920, and the two late-bloomers, Mahmut Şevket Esendal 1883-1952 and Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar 1883-1963, whose significant literary creativity only started in the middle 30's and early 40's). To these can be added a few late-comers from the later 90's (Fahri Celal Götülga 1895-), Mahmut Yesarlı 1895-1945, Hasan Ali Yücel 1897-1961, Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel 1898-1974, Peyami Safa 1899-1961), but these clearly fall into the ebbing-off period between two powerful waves. On the other hand, some men from an older generation were still around and active, respected but not contributing much that was new (as e.g. Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar 1864-1944, Ahmed Rasim 1864-1932, Rıza Revfik Bölükbaşı 1868-1949, Mehmed Emin Yurdakul 1869-1944, Mehmed Akif Ersoy 1873-1936). I even remember personally during my first visit to Turkey in the summer of 1935, while going to Kadıköy on one of the city ferryboats, a Turkish friend discreetly pointed to an elderly gentleman who was sitting on the opposite bench and asked me: Do you know him? It was Abdülhak Hamid Tarhan (1852-1937), the poet of the later Tanzimat Period, whose works created a sensation in the 1870's! But these people definitely did not belong to the generation that dominated the early Republican period.

Let us now briefly characterize those that did. The majority of them was no more in their period of youthful élan. They had started in the turbulent years between 1908 and 1912 when letters had burst into an early bloom of activity after the end of the long and dark years of Abdulhamid's autocratic régime, they had established their identity and fame and their hopes and aspirations, and then had suffered through ten

years of war and misery and frustration, a physical and emotional nightmare from which they were only saved by Mustafa Kemal's nationalist regeneration of Turkey. For this they were grateful, and many of them enthusiastically sponsored the cause of the new régime, though some remained skeptical and a number actually left the country and spent the years in exile.

It follows from what I have said that we will not expect a period of totally new ideas and daring innovations. We will rather expect to see a period in which the ideas of the years before the war are more widely and more consistently carried out. And this is indeed what we find. The main concern is to reach a wide audience, to free literature from being the privilege of a small elite, to create a truly national literature and in this way also to contribute to the formation of a conscious nation out of a culturally aloof and indifferent populace. Therefore the persistent struggle for a simpler and clearer language, the formulation of national feelings in poetry, and the treatment of the burning problems of the day in broadly designed, serious and powerful novels. I am thinking here primarily of Yakub Kadri's, Halide Edib's, and Reşad Nuri's novels. In general it can be said that poetry and the novel were still the preferred genres although toward the end of the preceding period some authors (especially Ömer Seyfeddin and Refik Halid) had achieved superb success in the short story.

During the 1920's we hardly see any signs of the appearance of a new generation. The only such signs are some bold verses by Nacip Fazil Kısakürek (1905-) who published his first poems in 1924, only 19 years old. And yet, it was in poetry that the great change, the revolt of the new generation, came first: Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963), deeply inspired by Mayakovski and the Russian Revolution, began to publish his early futuristic poems in 1929, later, in the middle thirties achieving more serene forms in a language of striking simplicity and poetic beauty. He was thus by several years a forerunner of the new generation which, on a broad front, made itself felt only by the middle of the thirties. This is the generation born and raised in the troubled years between 1900 and the end of World War I or perhaps roughly 1920, a generation whose ties with the Ottoman cultural heritage were already much weaker than those of its predecessors, a deeply disturbed and suffering generation. The old optimism had wilted away, bitter disappointment had taken its place. Some of the best of this generation gave themselves up to alcohol and died early (the very successful poet Orhan Veli died in 1950 at the age of 36, another poet, the Verlainesque Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, was 45 when he died in 1956, the short story writer Sait Faik, who had a tremendous influence on the formation of modern Turkish prose style, died 48 years old in 1954, and several others; Sabahattin Ali, in his prose writings the most powerful social critic of his time, was murdered in 1948 at the age of 42). Verbosity was not the vice of this generation: in poetry they preferred utterances of almost fragmentary brevity; in fiction they excelled in the short story. Sabahattin Ali was probably the only one among them twice to be able to produce a novel. But Turkish letters owe to this period of the 'lost generation' a treasure of very individually shaped poetry and an almost unbelievable wealth of interesting short stories of great originality and variety, many of which have been successfully translated into other languages.

With the year 1955 we enter into the third and narrowly contemporary period. This is roughly the period of those born in the 1920's and 1930's, of the generation that never learned the Arabic script and is therefore completely and irreversibly cut off from the

old cultural heritage. In many ways this is a healthier and happier generation. I would like to call it the 'liberated generation': It is liberated from the burden of the past, from the insecurity of its own identity, from the unhealthy rift between the pulsating metropolis and a stagnating rural wasteland, the rift that like an enormous social failure had in the 30's and 40's kept many writers awake at night. Not that the social wounds have healed, but there are now open alleys to fight them and the depressing frustration has diminished. There are many fighters in this generation, tough men who know the shady sides of life from firsthand experience and are not just an appalled bunch of idealistic observers from the well-to-do suburbs. To name just a few: the brave village teachers Mahmut Makal (b. 1933) and Fakır Baykurt (b. 1929), the bard of the Kurdish southeast Yaşar Kemal (b. 1922), the discoverer of a proletarian İzmir Tarık Dursun K. (b. 1931), the flamboyant poet Atilla İlhan (b. 1925); some older late-starters like Kemal Tahir (b. 1910, first publication in 1955) who in his novels has created a grandiose picture of the period at the end of World War I; Aziz Nesin (b. 1915, published first in 1948), the master of the satirical short story; and finally a number of authors who started with the preceding generation, but matured and developed their final stature with the new generation, as in particular Orhan Kemal (1914-1970) who began with poetry, wrote very moving short stories in the 40's and early 50's, but then in 1954 initiated the new era with his Anatolian novel *On Fertile Soil*; a similar development have Kemal Bilbaşar (b. 1910, short stories since 1939, novels since 1961) and Mehmet Sayda (b. 1919), short stories since 1940, novels since 1958); Haldun Taner (b. 1916) who began as a short story writer in 1949, but made his main contribution as a playwright after the middle 50's; and finally Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca (b. 1914) who published his first volume of highly sensitive introspective poetry in 1934, but whose poetic voice gained powerful dimensions in the 60's. Each one of these is (or, was) a fighter in his own way, some only with the pen, some running for offices, some serving long prison sentences. Some continue writing poetry, others follow the fine tradition of the short story. But the main novum of the 'liberated generation' is their ability to produce in a grand style: they are most at ease in the broadly based, solidly built novel, and, when even the novel is not enough, in trilogies or clusters or novels (K. Tahir, F. Baykurt, K. Bilbaşar). Another novelty is the theater, the serious, professional theater. In this area a small group of writers, all born in the years 1928-1931, is in the forefront: (in the order of their birth dates): Refik Erduran, Hidayet Sayın, Güngör Dilmen Kalyoncu Turgut Özakman, Özdemir Nutku.

It seems to me that the picture we get from this brief summary of the development of Turkish literature of the last 50 years confirms my *a priori* impression that its course can well be described as a sequence of three distinctly different periods corresponding to three generations, the early Republican period 1920-1935, the 'lost generation' 1935-1965, and the strictly contemporary 'liberated' generation. When Wilhelm Pinder wrote his book on the generation problem (in 1926) in which he connected the changes of styles in art with the succession of generations he distinguished between the radical turningpoints when none of the artists of the previous period participated in the new movement, and the other case when the new movement constituted for a significant segment of the artists just a new phase in their own personal development. If we apply these concepts to our subject, we can say that the early Republican period was basically a second phase of the preceding period (1908-1920) or at least of its younger elements, who have now entered into a more mature stage of their creativity. On the other hand, the break between the Post-War period and the 'lost generation' is a real, radical turning point with

an entirely new crew taking over. The change from this generation to the next in the mid 50's is again much less incisive and a number of the writers and poets whose beginnings were in the second period found themselves in the third in the maturer years of their life cycles.

If this hypothesis is correct, those born in the forties and fifties must already be waiting behind the scene and sharpening their pencils, and within the next five years we can expect them to burst forth on the stage.

CUMHURİYET TÜRKİYESİNDE NESİL RİTMİ

ÖZET

Bir cemiyette edebiyatın gelişmesi ritmik bir harekettir ve birbirini takip eden nesiller önderliği alırlar. Herhangi bir anda üç neslin temsilcilerinin bir arada bulunduğunu görebilirsiniz.

Cumhuriyet Türkiyesinde birinci nesil 1920-1935 arasındaki öncü «Cumhuriyet Yazarları», ikinci nesil 1935-1955 arasındaki «kayıp (lost) nesil» ve el'an hüküm süren «bağlarını kazanmış» nesildir.

Eğer bu nazariye doğru ise 1940-1950 ler arasında doğan yeni bir nesil bu sıralarda sahneye çıkmaya hazırlanmaktadır.