

II. THE GARIP PREFACE

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Together with Melih Cevdet (1915–2002) and Oktay Rifat (1914–88), Orhan Veli (1914–50) was a founding member of the Garip Movement, a small group of poets who promoted the use of simple language in a radical break from the elevated rhetoric of the classical Ottoman poets. While poets of the earlier twentieth century such as the humanist Tevfik Fikret, the modernist Ahmed Haşım, and the lyrical Yahya Kemal laid the foundations of modern Turkish poetry, they still did not break completely from all aspects of the Ottoman tradition. It wasn't until the advent of the Garip Movement that this total break was achieved by repudiating the older tradition in every way. The classical tradition had relied heavily on the lavish use of language as well as high forms of Ottoman poetry such as *aruz* (an historically Arabic meter that depends on the arrangement of open and closed syllables) and the traditional Persian literary forms of the *ghazal*, the *beyit* (a couplet form), and the *mesnevi* (an epic form in couplets, used most often to recite romantic and panegyric tales).

In rejecting the elitism of court poetry, the Garip poets wrote simple poems in the vernacular about the ordinary details of the lives of common people, subjects not considered of interest in the classical tradition. With their use of simple imagery and pared-down language, taking as their subjects the objects and events of daily life, and eschewing meter and formal rhyme schemes, the Garip Movement poets directly opposed the unities of traditional Ottoman couplets in bringing everyday lightness and randomness into their verse.

The impact of Garip's preface was immense in its day. The great literary critic of the time, Nurullah Ataç immediately wrote in support of the poems. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, a scholar of Persian and Ottoman classical poetry as well as an expert on the Rumi corpus, criticized and subsequently rejected the aesthetics of Ottoman court poetry as elitist and offered Garip's manifesto as an alternative poetics in 1945.

Of course the Garip poets experienced swift opposition to their manifesto as well, especially from a literary group formed around the literary journal *Mavi* (Blue) in the 1940s. Headed by the romantic socialist Attilâ İlhan, the Mavi group accused Garip poets of avoiding social realism and concentrating instead on the more frivolous aspects of life. Another powerful critique of Garip was brought by the İkinci Yeni (the Second New) generation, which has been so far the most influential generation of poets in Turkish literature. İkinci Yeni sees Garip poetry as mundane and strives consciously to break from the plain syntax and narration inherited from their predecessors.

Today, Garip's influence is still widely visible. Orhan Veli's poems are some of the most studied works of poetry in Turkish schools, and the popularity of Garip has never waned.
SW & EM

Poetry, the art of rhetoric and figures of speech, has undergone many changes in its journey to its current stage. At this point we understand that poetry is very different from proper spoken language. Turkish poetry, in its current form, differs from natural, or unaffected and ordinary language, and offers its readers a relative strangeness (*garabet*). Yet it is interesting to note that this strangeness has created a new set of conventions of its own in poetic language, which removes the very strangeness, or peculiarity, from poetic speech. The child who is being educated by today's intellectuals perceives the world from a conventional or traditional point of view, and so the new poetry will sound strange (*garip*) to the child. The new poetry will show him the relativity of poetic language so that he can question what he has been taught.

For centuries, convention preserved poetry in verse form. The principle elements of verse are meter (*vezin*) and rhyme (*kafiye*). Rhyme was first used by poets as a mnemonic device, and they later developed aesthetics in its use and came to consider the use of rhyme and meter a skill. At the root of poetry, as is often the case in other art forms, there is a fundamental desire for playfulness (*oyun arzusu*). For earlier poets, this desire was significant, but poets have changed a great deal over time. Today's poets find fewer aesthetics and excitement in the use of meter and rhyme. They more often consider that if there is a sense of harmony (*âhenk*) to be acknowledged in a poem, it is not meter or rhyme that hold it. That sense of harmony already exists in spite of the meter and rhyme. However, it is meter and rhyme that makes it evident to the average reader. I will now explain why the belief that poetic harmony is dependent on meter and rhyme is needless and harmful.

We do understand that meter and rhyme are registers of language. But the syntactic (*nahiv*) oddities or irregularities in standard poetic language were mostly created because of the necessities of meter and rhyme. When narrow-minded opinion asserts that poetry is dependent on meter and rhyme, it will accuse the new *Garip* poems of sounding too much like our spoken language. The poetics rooted in the use of meter and rhyme will find relative oddities in the new poetry, which concerns itself more closely than traditional poetry with the realities of everyday life.

Meaning (*mâna*) and figures of speech (*lâfız*) often take advantage of the mind's altering and destructive force on nature. Simile (*teşbih*) is the act of showing something in a different light. Today's intellectuals consider those who refrain from using simile and metaphor (*istiâre*) in poetry as "strange" or "weird" (*garip*). The mistake here is that those who believe this understand the classical view of poetics as truth. From the day when writing was first invented, a great many poets have used similes in their verse. What does adding more examples of simile and metaphor bring to poetry? Simile, metaphor, overstatement (*mübalâğa*) or a poetic vision that could develop from the combination of all of these, I hope, would be able to satisfy the greedy eyes of history.

There have been many developments in form in the history of literature, and these changes have always been adopted and approved, years after being considered *garip*. The hardest changes to accept are those belonging to aesthetics. Traditional poetry, a slave to bourgeois culture today and to religion and feudalism before the Industrial Revolution, has always appealed to the upper classes. The prosperous do not have the need to work every day and have comprised, for centuries, the ruling classes. However, the aesthetics of a new poetry should represent the common laboring man. The laboring classes today have established their right to live after a long tug-of-war. The new poetry is theirs and should appeal to them. This should not mean they have to use the tools of past literatures in order to generate their own. The problem is not about defending the needs of a class; it is about looking for and finding its own aesthetics.

The new aesthetics will only be achieved with new ways and vehicles. There is nothing new or artistic in squeezing certain ideologies into already accepted forms. The structures should be changed completely. In order to get away from the prosaic and suffocating influence of literatures that have for centuries shaped and ruled out our will and aesthetics, we must reject everything those literatures have taught us. If possible, we should discard the language itself that limits our creative activity.

Those regarded highly by history are those who find themselves at major turning points in history. They demolish one tradition and create a new one. Actually, they discover a new system of registers that emerges naturally from within the old one. It becomes a tradition when it is transmitted to the following generations. The great artist exists only within the context of literary or artistic registers. The new artist is the one who looks always for more than what he has seen in books, who tries to bring new registers to the art. Seventeenth-century French classicism was full of principles or norms, but was never traditionalist. It established its own principles. The eighteenth-century French writers were traditionalists, but they never established rigid principles or norms, because they did not feel the need of new registers; instead they learned them from previous conventions. Writers feel or do not feel the necessity of new literary registers. Those who feel the necessity are called founders, and those who feel it is needless are demolishers. In the end, both of these groups are more beneficial than those who continue previous conventions without adding anything new to it. Both of these groups cannot be successful all the time. Permanently valuable artistic works should follow changes in the social structure and be relevant to them. One of the reasons literary movements are sometimes unsuccessful is that their programs do not match with the realities of their times. One may not be able to make what he has founded complete, but entrusts a good share to those who will follow his new literary conventions. He might discover a new paradigm or assert that the old paradigm is wrong. This person is the flag-bearer, the bodyguard of a struggle in literature. Someone who has the courage to be a martyr should be regarded highly, because many would never risk losing power within their conventional frameworks for an ideal.

I am not a supporter of the interdisciplinary in art. Poetry should be regarded as poetry, painting as painting, music as music. Each of these arts has its own specific traits and vessels of expression. They explain their purpose through these vessels, and not only do they limit themselves with these vessels and their respect for past values, but they also make room for challenge and labor. This is very difficult. Music in poetry, painting in music, or literature in painting are simply tricks of those who cannot establish norms within one artistic convention but feel they must establish an interdisciplinary approach. When certain arts are combined with others, they lose their essence. For instance, we cannot compare the singular music of poetry that has been created as particular words come together in harmony, with a musical piece with all of its variations in music and the richness of its scores. To bring words that have the same sounds together is a cheap trick that creates artificial harmony in poetry. In general, works of art that are easily accepted and liked by the common people are those that are most easily understood. For instance, those who appreciate aesthetics in music might listen to the themes in Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture as if it were a painting depicting events during Napoleon's Moscow campaign. Those with this sort of aesthetic might consider Saint-Saëns's "Danse Macabre," a piece that tells the story of corpses rising from their graves after midnight and then returning to their graves after finishing their dances, and Borodin's "On the Steppes of Central Asia," which tells the story of a caravan moving slowly along the river with the sound of water,

the greatest of all musical pieces. This is a cheap trick. Using such a vast art, music, as a simple tool of illustration is a great weakness. No great artist should use intertextual imitation to attract the common person's appreciation. An artist needs to discover the unique essence of his own art and demonstrate his skills via this essence. Poetry, at the end of the day, is a form of speech that unveils its essence in the way it expresses itself (*eda*). In other words, it is only made out of expression. Meaning does not appeal to one's five senses; it appeals to the soul. Poetry, whose real value resides in its meaning and its relation to one's soul, might be taken for granted if one depended on the cheap and secondary slights of hand like the musical quality of its language.

Apollinaire, in his book *Calligrammes*, combines poetry with another art, that of painting. Here he formats the lines of a poem about rain vertically. Similarly, there is a poem in the same book about a journey in which Apollinaire positions letters and words as if composing a painting in front of us, with wagons, telegraph poles, moon beams, and stars. I confess, these tricks do in fact give us the sense of rain and journey; Apollinaire's artificial tricks do help us get into the mood of the poems. Apollinaire is not the first poet to achieve this effect. Many have brought the aesthetics of painting into poetry through the use of visual shapes. For instance, Japanese poets often gave words the shape of reeds, lakes, moon rays, and sailboats, depending on the themes of their poetry. Ahmet Haşim introduced some magic into the word "flame" when he wrote with Arabic characters. Poetry has, in fact, made use of painting as it has used music in the past.

Why wouldn't a poet who accepts that one might make use of music in poetry consider making use of sculpture or architecture? Picasso, who extended his paintings into the realm of sculpture eventually came to believe that it had been a mistake. Poetry that makes use of painting does not appear to have many supporters today. Some poets consider any writing full of descriptive imagery (*tasvir*) to be poetry. Descriptive imagery is a natural element of poetry and each poem is more or less descriptive at heart. Words are symbols of either things or ideas. Abstractions sometimes seem irrelevant to the natural world; however, we all think the most abstract (*mücerret*) thoughts along with the concrete (*müşahhas*) and make them correspond to matter and things.

The riches of poetry do not consist only of a natural world described in words. Poetry may contain descriptive imagery, yet this is not the fundamental element of poetry. What makes a poem a poem is the characteristics of its manner of expression (*eda*) and the meaning it conveys.

As the French poet Paul Éluard says, "The time will come when poetry will only be read in the head, and literature will have a new life that day."

Every new movement in the history of literature has brought new paradigms to poetry. We are lucky to have had the opportunity to expand the limits of literature to the maximum and to finally release poetry from these limits.

In one of his letters, Oktay Rifat attempts to explain this view when talking about the notion of schools in literature: "the idea of a 'school' represents a break (*fasıla*), or a static position in the historical trajectory, as opposed to the idea of speed (*sür'at*) and movement (*hareket*). The school of literature that does not go against the dialectical mind is the movement of anti-schools in literatures."

Can the idea of limitlessness or anti-schools in literature exist in poetry? Without a doubt, no! However, this notion will help people discover new fields and will greatly enrich poetry. What the *Garip* group has given to poetry is the expansion of purity (*safiyet*) and plainness (*besatet*) in the art. The desire to find poetry in purity and plainness brought us closer to the world of the subconscious (*tahteşsuur*). It is only here that nature

is unchanged by mental activities. The human soul is found here in its most primordial sense, characterized, paradoxically, by intricate plainness and simplicity.

We find purity and plainness in childhood memories, unburdened by either intricacy or abstraction. The image of God as a white-bearded old man, or of *djinn*s as red dwarves or nymphs as ethereal girls in white dresses indicate how a child's mind cannot bear abstraction.

One should not mistake the act of stirring up one's subconscious to find poetic purity and plainness with that of the Symbolist idea of touching the cords of the secret self, or the act of transcending consciousness which Paul Valéry uses as a definition of creative activity. The artistic movement closest to our taste, in fact, has been Surrealism. The Surrealist poets who made automatic writing (*ruhî otomatizm*) the foundation of their idea set and artistic understanding also jettisoned the practice of writing in rhyme and meter. However, even as we favor Surrealist practices and ideas, we do not have any relationship with them and consider ourselves unaffiliated with any literary school.

Automatic writing is only the starting point of Surrealism. The act of emptying one's subconscious, considered the real function of poetry by Surrealists, is different from the ecstatic outpouring of one's self. If this were the case, everyone would be an artist. The artist-poet is the one who can use an acquired faculty outside the context of dreaming. The worth and grandeur of a poem can only be measured by the manner in which the artist acquires and uses this faculty, as described many years ago by the great Doctor Freud and as skillfully demonstrated by the great Surrealist poet André Breton.

What, more particularly, is this faculty? Control of consciousness exists in the act of mining the inner, or spiritual world. In normal conditions, it is impossible to translate the subconscious into writing. It is not simply the emptying of one's subconscious; it is, rather, the act of representing the subconscious. The subconscious feels everything deeply, and the great artist is the perfect imitator of this world.

Plainness and simplicity bring the genuine aesthetic touch to a work of art. However, one should not accuse poetry written in this manner of being "plain" or "primitive." If you see a poet who has suffered much and overcome many obstacles in his art, do not be judgmental about his work. You might think he is writing like an amateur; in fact, he has perfectly imitated and thereby mastered the qualities of plainness and simplicity.

Art is not only about automatism, it is about struggle and talent. Artists are those who make us believe that what they say is absolutely sincere.

One of the assumptions poets often make is that the line (*misra*) is the perfect unit. This is a bad habit. Orhan Veli understands the wish to produce the perfect line as a pernicious addiction. A poem should not rely on perfect lines, but on an overarching theme whose meaning is conveyed through its lines. A poem is a literary convention of wholeness and unity.

The idea that the line should be taken as the basis of a poem makes us pay attention to each word and analyze it as the unit of a line. This practice encourages us to think of words as abstract entities in a poem and to assign beauty or ugliness to the words. However, words, like bricks in a building, are never beautiful. Plaster is never beautiful. It is only an architecture composed of these elements that is beautiful. If we beheld a building made of agate, heliotrope, and silver but which had no overarching aesthetic beauty, it could not be considered a work of art. If the words of a poem simply sound good but do not add anything of beauty to the poem itself, the poem is not a work of art.

Certain words, by long usage and convention, are considered “poetic” (*şairane*). We are engaged in a struggle to bring a new vocabulary to poetry and hope to rise above the old conventional use of “poetical” words. We do not confine ourselves to the old order but hope to bring fresh meaning and energy to poetry. If the reader cannot accept the use of words such as “corns,” or “Süleyman Efendi,” he or she is only interested in the passé and should confine his reading to poetry that abides by old and stale conventions.¹ We will work against everything that belongs to the past and all outdated notions of “poeticity” in poetry.

¹Here they are referencing not a specific “Süleyman Efendi,” but rather making a distinction between spoken and written conventions for referring to a person.