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### **Oscar Wilde in Turkish**

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The translation history of Oscar Wilde's works in Turkey is fascinating and full of surprises and is closely connected with the initiation of the cultural revolution which supported the Westernization programme of the secular Republic of Turkey (Paker 578). Oscar Wilde died in 1900, 23 years before the proclamation of the Republic. The Republic immediately ignited the efforts to create a national modern Turkish literature. As one of the cultural reforms of the Turkish Republic, the literary vacuum in the polysystem had to be replaced by the creation of an indigenous national literature which would be based on national sources and models that were dormant or not properly surfaced. The use of vernacular language of the people especially after the transition to the Roman script in 1928, that is, the alphabet reform, was one of the most important objectives in this cultural project.

Wilde's first entrance into the Turkish literary polysystem can be seen within the frame of such an ambitious cultural project which was to be carried out by means of translations of Western canonical works. The promotion of Westernization after 1923 (which actually dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Reformation period) went hand in hand with a deliberate policy of encouraging translation activities. As nation states all over the world evolved and established a coherent language policy, the importation of texts with significant

value from outside national boundaries required extensive policies. These were designed to transform and modernize the state and the language, as well as to motivate the artists of the receiving culture to produce works of similar value. This was the situation in the Turkey of 1923's and after. The principle motive for the translation activities, which were rather individually carried out, and disorganized at the beginning until 1940, was one of acculturation/enrichment and linked to the efforts of creating a literature of our own. The first individual initiatives in that sense were: Remzi Kitabevi, a private publishing company, which started its series Translations from World Authors, Hilmi Kitabevi, Abdullah Cevdet's publications and a few others (Paker 578).

Against, this background, Oscar Wilde is one of the first foreign authors to appear in translation in the very early days of modern Turkey where paper was scarce, printing houses few, translators few and a very small circle of readers, with no coherent translation policy yet. Nevertheless, in spite of these obstacles and difficulties, we come across Oscar Wilde translations, the earliest one being in the years 1926-27 in Abdullah Cevdet's journal, *İçtihad*. The first translator of Oscar Wilde is Salih Zeki Aktay. He translated six stories of Oscar Wilde, namely "The Happy Prince", "The Selfish Giant", "The Remarkable Rocket", "The Devoted Friend", "The Nightingale and the Rose", "The Sphinx without a Secret." The first four of these stories are printed in 1926 and 1927 in the *İçtihad* periodical.

In order to understand how and why Oscar Wilde made such an early entrance into the modern Turkish literary polysystem and his reception in the cultural and literary milieu of those times, a look at the *İçtihad* periodical and Abdullah Cevdet, the owner, is necessary.

*İçtihad* was first printed and published in Geneva in 1904 by its owner Abdullah Cevdet, a medical doctor. The journal's life in Geneva ended after a year, in 1905, when it was closed down, and Abdullah Cevdet had to move the journal to Cairo. In 1911, he moved to İstanbul where he opened the house of *İçtihad* and continued the periodical's publication along with other translations and his own writings. *İçtihad* periodical was published for twenty-eight years until the death of Abdullah Cevdet in 1932. It consisted of twelve volumes and 358 numbers. Abdullah Cevdet, is an important figure in the late Ottoman and early Turkish translation tradition. In fact, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* edited by the distinguished translation studies scholar Mona Baker, in the Turkish Tradition

Section prepared by Prof. Dr. Saliha Paker an eminent and one of the earliest translation studies scholar in Turkey, Abdullah Cevdet's name appears in one paragraph on page 580, along with Nurullah Ataç, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, Ahmet Mithad Efendi, Mütercim Asım, Şemseddin Sami and Ahmet Vefik Pasha. Abdullah Cevdet translated and published nearly 60 books of which a small number were printed in Switzerland and Cairo. He is the first to produce full translations of Shakespeare's tragedies (Paker 580). He also translated Gustave Le Bon, Schiller Alfieri, Byron, Guyau, Dozy, Emile Boutry and others. Dr. Abdullah Cevdet was born in Arapkir in 1869; he was an Ottoman Turkish intellectual, and died in 1932. He was a poet, translator, radical free-thinker and an ideologist of the Young Turks who led the Westernization movement in the Ottoman Empire from 1908 until 1918 during the Second Constitutional Era. Abdullah Cevdet was brought up under strict religious education, but he later put a distance between himself and religion under the influence of his readings. He went to İstanbul Military Medical Academy. He was influenced by Western materialistic philosophies. In *İctihad* periodical he published his own articles on socio-religious, political, economic and literary issues and expressed and promoted his modernist thought. Cevdet was tried several times in the Ottoman Empire, because some of his writings were considered to be blasphemous. He is regarded as one of the leading figures of Westernization in the social, economic, cultural and education aspects of the Turkish society (Uçar 7-30; Gündüz 1067-1088). Through his literary translations, Cevdet aimed to introduce new literary and cultural "options" into the Ottoman "culture repertoire", especially with his Shakespeare translations. His non-literary translation presented materialist options to mobilize and modernize Muslims and received large-scale active resistance by the conservative Ottomans (Ayluçtarhan).

Thus, *İctihad* periodical was a spokesman of his idea of creating a liberal, free-thinking arena of publication, consisting of writers and thinkers of varied opinions. In that sense, the periodical was innovative in the Ottoman society. It was published in French and Ottoman Turkish and had a life span of twenty-eight years (1904-1932), beginning in Abdulhamid II era, until the early years of the Republic, covering a wide spectrum of social, cultural, economic changes and transformations from the Ottomans to the Republic (Esemenli 55-58). The periodical was published in Ottoman Turkish until November 30, 1928, and after that date, it was published in Roman Script (Seçkin 24-6). *İctihad* was regarded as an influential mouthpiece and the first periodical to reflect and promote Western thought and modernization since its first volume.

Oscar Wilde's first and earliest appearance took place in a periodical of such qualities in 1926 and 1927. The translations were in Arabic script at that time. The purpose of the selection of Oscar Wilde as a representative of the Western canon must be evaluated against such an atmosphere. The translator is also very important in this frame, since, it was the translator who proposed that Wilde should appear in the periodical.

Salih Zeki Aktay (1896-1971) was born in Şarkikaraağaç, Isparta. After 1918, he worked as a teacher of Turkish Literature, and as a librarian in İstanbul libraries. There, he took part in the classification of works written in foreign languages. He is a poet, a translator, and a man of letters. He was especially interested in and admired Greek mythology and history. He learned French at high school, and worked as a high school French teacher after the end of World War I. Later, he moved to İstanbul after a family tragedy that resulted in his pregnant sister's suicide. This event gravely upset him and caused him to cut off links with his family and birthplace. He worked as a librarian in İstanbul in the department of foreign publications.

Salih Zeki wrote poetry under the influence of Greco-Roman mythological themes, elements and mystical topics. It should be remembered that, Oscar Wilde's engagement with ancient Greek had also influenced his lifelong interest in Greek language and culture. Wilde visited Greece, had courses at Oxford in Greek and ancient languages, and used Greek mythology, especially the royal foundling theme, in two children's stories "The Young King" and "The Star Child", and later in some of his poems (Şahbaz 140-150).

Looking for answers to the questions why Salih Zeki picked Oscar Wilde to translate and get them published may be explained by the affinity caused by their common interest in Greek mythology. "The Happy Prince" translated as "Bahtiyar Prensi" (1926), "The Selfish Giant" as "Hodkâm Dev" (1926), "The Remarkable Rocket" as "Maruf Fişenk" (1927), "The Devoted Friend" as "Cömert Dost" (1927) were the stories that were published in *İçtihad* during the years 1926-27, and they were all translated into Ottoman Turkish in Arabic script. Later, with the addition of "The Nightingale and the Rose"- "Gül ve Bülbül" and "Sphinx without a Secret" as "Esrarsız Heykel", all six stories were reprinted by Ahmet Sait Matbaası, İstanbul (1943) in today's Turkish.

Salih Zeki published more than 50 translations during the years 1927-1948 among which, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the most

striking one. *Metamorphoses*, translated as *Değişişler*, was transformed into Turkish from French, and was published in *Dün ve Yarın Tercüme Külliyyatı*, Vakıf Matbaası, İstanbul (1935).

Oscar Wilde translations also seem to be second language or mediating language translations. They were translated from French and the sources are Jozef Rene, Hanri, D. Davroy, Renelalo (Şahbaz 140-150). At the beginning of the translations in *İçtihad*, Salih Zeki presents a preface on Oscar Wilde, under the title "Oskar Wilde'e Dair Bir Tetkikten".

In the year 1927, the second translation of "The Happy Prince" appeared under the title of *Oskar Vayld'ın Masalları* by Şaziye Berin Kurt. Şaziye Berin Kurt's translations of "The Nightingale and the Rose", "The Remarkable Rocket", "The Birthday of Infanta" were a selection of Oscar Wilde's stories. They were published by Yeni Matbaa, which, unfortunately, can not be traced and there is no information about it. Information about Berin Kurt is also little. I have found out that she studied philosophy in Germany under a special scholarship programme especially designed by Atatürk which aimed at sending bright Turkish students to distinguished foreign universities to transfer knowledge of science, arts, and humanities to Turkey, and to contribute to the process of advancement in science and arts in the modern Republic. In that sense, Berin Kurt is regarded as the first Turkish woman philosopher, and she was very fluent in German and French. The stories are translated into Ottoman Turkish, German as the mediating language. Kurt's translation is important. In Anıtkabir, Atatürk Library, this translation appears as the 2127<sup>th</sup> book in the list of books that Atatürk read. ([www.tsk.tr/ing/ii\\_anitkabir/kutup/vw.html](http://www.tsk.tr/ing/ii_anitkabir/kutup/vw.html)).

"The Happy Prince" is followed by Nurettin Sevin's *Salomé*, published by Hilmi Kitabevi (1935), and Burhan Toprak's translation *De Profundis* (1935) the same year.

I would now like to take a look at the first appearance of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Turkey, as *Dorian Gray'in Portresi* (1938), translated by Süreyya Sami Berkem, from its original, and published by Hilmi Kitabevi, İstanbul. The same year, Ferhunde and Orhan Şaik Gökyay's translation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared as *Doryan Gray'in Portresi* (1938) by Remzi Kitabevi, reprinted in 1968.

Süreyya Sami Berkem, the first translator of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a Turkish author who wrote *Anı Kitabı Unutulmuş Günler*. His initial name was Samizâde Süreyya. *Unutulmuş Günler* is

about Atatürk and the War of Independence, and the events that happened in those times (Hilmi Kitabevi 1960). He was a journalist and a translator too, and for a time, chief editor of the periodical *Hayal-i-Cedid*, a humor magazine in İstanbul, between March 1910-1911, in Ottoman Turkish. He worked as a columnist in 1939 for *Cumhuriyet* newspaper.

Süreyya Sami Berkem is one of the fervent followers and supporters of the Westernization efforts in the Ottoman and the Republican periods, and a devoted follower of Atatürk and his reforms. In 1937, *Varlık* periodical published articles on the issue of creating a national culture which necessitated reading and translating Western classics, and Süreyya Sami Berkem was one of the contributors (Demiral www.academia.edu).

Hilmi Kitabevi, on the other hand, initially called Kitaphane-i İslam (1896) is also very significant in the modernization and Westernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire and in modern Turkey. The founder of Hilmi Kitabevi was Tüccarzade İbrahim Hilmi Çığırçan. He was born in Romania in 1876, and is one of the first publishers in the Ottoman State and in the Republic. He was also a journalist and an Ottoman intellectual who published the first daily newspaper *Millet* after the Second Constitution. He also published initially military books and religious books and later text books for primary school (especially during the War of Independence) (Dosay 425-432). He published Turkish authors such as Hüseyin Rahmi, Ahmet Refik, Mehmet Rauf, and others. He published Western classics under the title of "A Selection of Western Classics". *Doryan Gray'in Portresi* was published with an introduction in 1938 under this serial. This is the first recorded translation of *Dorian Gray* in Turkish, translated from English.

Likewise, in 1938, Remzi Kitabevi, under the serial "A Selection of Translations from Authors of the World" published Ferhunde and Orhan Şaik Gökyay's translation. Remzi Kitabevi, as compared to Hilmi Kitabevi or İctihad is more recent. It was established in 1927 by Remzi Bengi. It also published Western classics along with translations in the fields of education, arts and social sciences.

Orhan Şaik Gökyay (1902-1994) was born in İnebolu. He was a teacher of literature, a poet, a turcologist and a man of letters. He worked in various high schools and teacher training colleges in İstanbul, and for two years between 1959-60 as a lecturer in Turkish Studies in London. He is the poet of the famous poem "Bu Vatan

Kimin" (1937), the second best-known poem in Turkey after "İstiklal Marşı" (the national anthem). It is a very nationalistic poem emphasizing the Turkish national and spiritual characteristics, the process of nationalisation and formation of a national culture within a Turkish homeland. Orhan Şaik Gökay is also an educationist who believed in progress, and supported the efforts to enrich Turkish culture through translated models, and to open up to foreign cultures.

Consequently, as mentioned in Turkish scholars Gürçağlar, Paker and many more, translation since the Reformation period in the Ottoman Empire, has been used as an object of planning and organizing, as a tool for cultural change which would be a means of transformation in other aspects of life. In the context of Oscar Wilde's appearance in the Turkish literary polysystem, although the first translations were from a mediating language, it is seen that they were selected and produced under a concrete project of culture-planning, which was carried out by private publishing houses before the establishment of the Translation Bureau in 1940. The private publishing houses emerged with the proclamation of the Republic, and some of them can be traced back to 1921. The Alphabet Reform in 1928 accelerated the initiative to create a new literary canon in Turkey, which in turn, would give rise to a new Turkish literature (Gürçağlar 308). The history of early Oscar Wilde translations in Turkey demonstrates the complications and difficulties encountered in these efforts to instigate an awakening in the literature of Anatolia.

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