Melih Cevdet Anday: After the Second New
Orhan Koçak

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I ran after it, cursing my questions and my mind, and happily let myself go in the frothing water. The flesh being bathed was not my body, it was writing inscribed with an ink pen on a piece of wood; the indigo water was erasing the writing on the surface of the wood; whatever was left behind was what was really mine and as I lifted my head out of the water I saw the old writing was disappearing line by line.

...

As I was thinking that, all of a sudden I had the notion my love had ceased to exist. Because I was erased as a thing and remained as a common noun, a generic name: A human being, a man... if you like, we can add: Younger and luckier. Yes, wasn’t it rare luck to be alone with a girl like this in a far-off village house? But if you put someone else in my place, someone more or less my age, nothing would change. Then the girl would be loving him, sleeping with him. The fairy tale was ceasing to exist and erasing “I” along with itself. Once “I” was erased, of course, “love” would have no place to be either.

M.C.A., Raziye

It’s the face of the sky, is our brain’s skin,
Birds and clouds wander inside.

M.C.A., Teknenin Ölümü [Death of the Skiff]

Empty sky. Wherever I tie my horse.

M.C.A., Güneşte [In the Sun]

In Anday’s poetry there is something which prevents the reader from identifying with it, something that pushes him back, leaves him outside. We can’t easily make it ours, can’t draw it into the continuity of our experience. It does not become part of our inner time even when recorded in memory, it doesn’t open us to ourselves; among the familiar voices which make up the self, it remains the voice of another, the voice of otherness. We cannot experience this poetry as a journey of self-discovery whose each moment is at one with us.

But other poetry is. It has been said that poetry is a moment of “self-knowledge” for the reader as well. Poets who reflect on how the work they do is bound up with human life and everyday speech have talked of that instant illumination poetry creates in those who read it, that feeling of recognition and recall. A feeling of finding again something very old: The saying of a truth we never think of but seem always to have known, an obscure, fugitive experience won for speech and self, a momentary equation set up between the familiar and the alien: recall.

The poet of Tanidik Dünya [Familiar World], however, speaks to us not from the realm of recall but the lacuna of forgetting. He proclaims not the continuity of experience but its discontinuity. He takes up residence in the emptiness between us and the things we think we know. A placeless, atopic poetry whose only place to be is in indeterminate images of nature belying all feeling of ownership: Showing how easily words and images we suppose to be anchored in shared experience or the continuity of an unshakable sense of self can, in the light of thought, unravel and fade away: That impatient, distillate, unenchantable light was breaking up the entire map of my imagination (“Öğle Uykusundan Uyanırken” [Waking from a Mid-day Nap]).

One feature of lyric poetry which has not changed much since Romanticism is the continuous subject or self. The continuity seems to break down in Mallarmé and Rimbaud (“I is another”),

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but is reconstructed in the Surrealists: The subject or consciousness expands to absorb object and unconscious, it changes shape, but is always the same self. There have been some extreme experiments in modernist lyric as well, problematizing not only the self but its contents – the experience that is its function: I am thinking of Paul Celan. Anday too is an extreme experiment: He offers a new lyric at the point where experience has become impossible. Perhaps the last lyric poetry.

Whatever else, we are confronted with a difficulty, a blockage: A difficulty which prevents the subject from identifying with his own experience, and the reader from identifying with the subject in poetry. I have tried to come to terms with it before. But I went about things in the wrong way, trying to go around the obstacle, make the alien familiar, read difficulty as something easy. My attempt was unfinished. I will not continue with it here; this is a fresh start. It aims to put forth Anday’s specificity in a comparison with the Second New.

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There are certain cultural phenomena not sufficiently understood because they have not met up with the concepts proper to them. This is true of certain historical periods also: Because they have no bounding concepts, it is not even clear whether they constitute a specific period or not. They remain blurred, indistinct, invisible pieces of living.

Concepts are thought’s instruments of terror; they violate the sweet obscurity of being: They cut, trim, compress and condense, seeking to give it a clarity it does not really possess. But in order to speak of what is beyond boundaries, we must have boundaries to begin with; we need concepts in order to know what cannot be conceptualized.

Much has been said about post-1950 Turkish modernism. But the foundational concept capturing what was new about it has rarely been uttered. (The writings of İsmet Özel are an important exception in this regard. I will quote passages from those pioneering texts below in this essay.) Concepts are where thoughts and words conjoin, where thought touches language and clots, solidifies. This conjunction was not generally realized in the debates over Second New poetry and the modernist short story in Turkey: Those who employed the concept itself (its philosophical content) did not look for a term appropriate to it; and those who employed the term felt no need to conceptualize it. The missing term is experience [yaşantı]. We can understand the newness of “the new literature” only with the help of this concept.²

The pre-history of a concept

Yaşantı and deneyim – these two words, often used interchangeably to mean “experience,” are terms which signaled a concept quite new to Turkish culture. Until recently, up until the 1950s, Turks did not have experience; they had life as flux [hayat] or a predestined term [ömür]. And they had knowledge of life gained from observation [tecrübe]. The important date is 1959. The word yaşantı did not appear in the third edition of the old Turkish Language Committee’s Turkish Dictionary published in that year. Deneyim was defined as “An experiment performed for a specific purpose in conformity with specific methods and rules.” The same dictionary defined the older tecrübe, which has in recent years begun to give way to deneyim in personnel want ads, as follows:

“[I] Trial. 2. Observation of convention [görgü]. 3. Physics. Experiment.” There is also the verb “to live” [yaşamak], which has an apparently richer field of meaning:

1. To be alive: Is your grandfather living? 2. To exist: Fish live in water. 3. To reside, stay: To live in a village, to live in a city. 4. To subsist on: It isn’t easy to live on this income. 5. To abide in a certain condition: To live as a bachelor. To live alone. To live in a crowd. 6. metaphorical. To continue: His memory will live on. 7. metaphorical. To have a pleasant

² İsmet Özel also made experience (yaşantı or deneyim) a central concept in his writings on modern poetry. In a piece first published in Yaz thủ Edebiyat in 1982, he wrote: “Modern poetry was born not as a literary genre but as an experience.” Reprinted in İsmet Özel, Şiir Okuma Kilavuzu [Guide to Reading Poetry] (Istanbul 1989), p. 88. I would like to point out here that to employ certain explanatory concepts while avoiding taking responsibility for them, and especially with an anti-intellectual stance, as Özel did in that piece, is frivolous at least.
No, in this dictionary we cannot find the basic elements of the meaning of the word yaşantı began to acquire in this country during the 1960s. Firstly, the aspect of experience which comes from the past and opens out from the present onto the future, into the new, into the unknown; its affinity for encounters with nihility.

Secondly, the subjective dimension of experience: The individual subject’s encounters with objects, the data of life, and his interpretation, transformation, and distortion of these as he carries them over into his private recording system, writing them into his memory, his self. Thirdly, although experience comes from the past and opens out to the future, it is predisposed to value, even exalt, the now: The here and now gathers past and future into itself, condensing them into a single instant. When these elements are thought of in combination, there emerges another dimension of experience the dictionary does not clarify: The apparent continuity of subjective experience the tendency of the subject to maintain the same self throughout all its encounters; its ability to penetrate everything and draw all into itself. Thus, in philosophical terms, we can think of experience as a subject-object unity. 3

But we are still in 1959. In the official dictionary, the realm of experience is under occupation by life as flux [hayat], as an allotted term [ömür], as observation of convention [görgü], and by scientific experiment [bilimsel deney].

Life as hayat is an exceedingly general concept, it is everything, it is what goes on despite everything. Although it signifies a kind of continuity, it is one of a kind different from the subjective continuity of experience: It does not include the new, the not yet, the unknown. The unknown of experience always brings with it an emptiness, a possibility of annihilation or inability to escape nihility; that is why experience hurls passionately toward the object, in want, and embraces the data of life, because of the feeling of loss which always accompanies it, the fear of a return to nothingness. Hayat does not have that fear because hayat is always there: When “I” cease to be, it will still be there. It is not a risk, it is a support. It is not spiritual, nor can it be considered physical: It is organic. More precisely, it is the metaphor of an organism. And it is not individual, it is general, public. Nazım Hikmet most represents it in our literary modern. All of Nazım’s middle-period poems are dominated by the hayat metaphor. (Were the young poets who discovered Nazım after 1960 aware that as they made an absolute of hayat and put it forward as an alternative to experience, turning it into a hypothesis, they actually reduced it again to an experience, or experiment, a contention which must continually be proven? Hayat is not the rival of experience but its last resort. Their absolutism deprived the hayat concept in Nazım of its self-confidence. What was left to it? A continual struggle to be sure of itself: One experience among many possible others.)

Ömür: Live as an allotted term is Yahya Kemal’s territory. 4 And that of alla turca song. A concept older than hayat, more classic because more bounded and local. Ömür is granted to the subject;

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1 The unity of being idea is doubtless nothing new; more precisely, it is the oldest idea. It plays a central role in all the great religions, and particularly in Sufism and Western mysticisms. But the unity of being (vahdet-i vücud) is for these traditional systems ontologically prior and fundamental; partition is either illusory or ex post facto. Modern thought regards the unity of man and nature, of thinking and the thing thought, not as a point of departure but a result. Unity is at the end of the road called “experience,” the end of a road that can always be wiped away; in modern thought unity is in fact not the end of the line but a stop along the way making one sense that the road traveled is important. Erfahrung, the German word for “experience,” is derived from the root fahre, meaning “road,” and it has the association of travel as well. In The Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel used the term to mean the subject’s encounter with the object, the subject’s destruction of the object’s autonomous being and internalization of it, the acquisition of the object for itself. In Hegel experience is connected with the subject’s insufficiency, emptiness, its being without an object; the subject is a desire: An emptiness waiting to be filled.

Experience as a becoming, flux or continuity ensuring the subject-object encounter comes to the fore in the early twentieth century in the “philosophy of life” (lebensphilosophie, vitalisme) in Bergson, in Dilthey, and most of all in Lukács’s teacher Simmel. In History and Class Consciousness Lukács tried to interpret the historical process as a subject-object dialectic. Here we should point out the tension between the two elements of this concept of experience (flux and continuity on the one hand, and the “fullness” of a single instant outside of flux on the other).

2 So much so that the meticulous poet sometimes could not stop himself from using the word twice in consecutive verses:
the subject bears it trusting in (or rebelling against) God. It excludes the illusion of never-ending life. But within its allotted term, it seeks to enjoy life to the full, valuing what life has to offer. It is not impossible for ömür to open out to experience. The likelihood that it will increase to the degree that ömür distances itself from mindless hedonism, exits from the realm of “pleasantries” and moves closer to stoicism, to endurance in trial, to tragedy—one of the oldest formal expressions of experience. The term “comfort-loving,” used of old to shame people when they behaved selfishly, demonstrates the tension within ömür culture in this regard. And Yahya Kemal showed, in his writings and some of his poetry where he spoke of “the pleasures of pain,” that an education in solitude can open up a realm of experience even at a crowded dinner party.5 For ömür to make room for experience depends upon its coming face-to-face with emptiness. This can arise from the fear of death which nails a person to the present moment, and can appear in the form of the sudden expansion and joy in living which comes of escaping a heavy burden. If Cahit Sitki and Ziya Osman Saba exemplified the first, Orhan Veli and the Strange movement were spokesmen for the second. In both cases ömür, the life of the individual, has acquired the tendency to move away from its own natural, traditional, cultural fabric and toward independence.

Görgü, which the dictionary gave as one definition of tecrübe, is the most alien to “experience” of these concepts. Whether we take görgü as the etiquette of social intercourse or the accumulation of experimentation which is passed down, it is always already complete and indicates a totality of knowledge given to the subject from outside. Görgü is not felt when it is there, it is only noticed when it is lacking or in excess. Because it is not a matter of experience or experiment: a person who tries to turn görgü into an experience, to experiment with it or add new rules to it, only shows that he lacks it. But violation of good manners, the callowness which all of a sudden tears the membrane of traditional or public manners which veil experience, bringing raw experiment out into the open, is one of the sources of experience.6 The embarrassment of a glass knocked over, a social blunder committed, can be a moment when the reversal of thought upon itself—the famous Hegelian “self-consciousness”—is born. The transition to experience begins with selfconsciousness. Someone else’s görgü becomes the content of experience for a person who admires or disdains him. Tanpinar’s admiration of Yahya Kemal, for example, is experience because Tanpinar knew that he would never be able to write like his teacher, never be able to be like him: The distance in between is an emptiness arousing and nourishing selfconsciousness.

It may seem strange, but of its family of concepts the closest to “experience” is scientific experiment, rejected or kept at a distance by all the philosophical and art movements which undertook to speak for it (Romanticism, Symbolism after Baudelaire, Impressionism, Expressionism, Anarchism, Existentialism). In experience too, there is a timidity, an indecisiveness reminiscent of the trial-and-error, groping-in-the-dark practice which lies at the root of scientific experiment. Like experience, scientific experiment enters into the realm of the unknown, acquires territory there, secures more information, and transforms nihility into being. Both have one foot in emptiness, and both are nourished by a division between subject and object (life) — experiment with its cold neutrality situating the issue beyond the scientist’s subjectivity, emotion and will; experience with its constant fear of losing the object and returning to the emptiness from which it came. But the resemblance ends there. In scientific experiment the thesis to be tested is known from the start, it is a statement formulated outside the bounds

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5 “We are a nation that has seen much and felt much; our old poetry has the limitless pleasures of joy, love, longing and sadness. Only the pleasures of pain are lacking; Turkish taste is yet a stranger to that great delight. ... The pleasure of pain; it can be said that this leaf in the book of poetry is such that all else is empty talk and amusement! ... Each kind of feeling gives rise to a kind of poetry, but if there is a delight more powerful than poetry, a delight nearly like religion, it is the pleasure of pain. Yahya Kemal, Edebiyato Dair [Regarding Literature] (Istanbul 1989), pp. 156-158.

6 In Turgut Uyar’s poetry the callow and the awkward conjoin with error, alienation, incongruity and madness to become a fecund source of experience:
of experiment; experience does not know its own correct result beforehand, it constructs that
within its experiment. The subject-object division will abide as long science does, it is the
condition of scientific advancement. But experience is itself the transcending for a moment of
that division, a seeming transcendence within the dimensions of a moment which can slide into
the illusion of infinity.

None of the terms in the dictionary capture it. Until the late fifties, experience had no place in
Turkish culture – neither the word nor the concept.

It is not that this lack wasn’t felt by culture itself. While Yahya Kemal spoke of the new writers’
“expansive self” and their desire to be “original” (in the 1930s), he also complained that the
“imaginativeness” of the old literature was lacking.⁷ And Abdülhak Şinasi had it in his novel Fahim
Bey that the Ottoman approached every subject with a “pleasantry”-style frivolousness and
superficiality. As one might expect, it was Tanpinar who put the problem in a more general frame
of discussion; in 1936 he took up the following question:

Almost all of the problems occupying our newspapers and our lives have come into the
Turkish novel... The Turkish novel is concerned with life as we live it every day. Nevertheless, it is hardly possible not to find that novel often artificial, not to rail against its lifelessness, or even to establish a relationship between it and reality... Our lives are
straitened, complex. Very well, but in the end those lives do exist, and we live, love, hate,
suffer, die. Is that not enough for a novelist? Where a human being suffers, there is
everything to be said... Yet despite that, it does not happen; why?

The answer to the question is that “Turkish has not yet recognized the thing called tecrübe,
which begins with the enquiring search proper to the individual.”⁸ In one of his last writings, “The
Essential Differences Observed between East and West,” an article published in Cumhuriyet in
1960, Tanpinar put forth a similar thought:

In the famous elegy he wrote mourning the sovereign’s death, a poet who admired Crazy
Peter [Peter the Great] praised him, saying, “You brought to us the thing called personal
tecrübe”... The difference between East and West is this, this personally living what one
does, the modality of thereby taking up residence, fully and completely, in reality.

One can see that in this last article Tanpinar was no longer referring to a lack of “the individual’s
enquiring search” or “personal tecrübe” in Turkish literature as a contemporary problem but
merely contrasting “Eastern” and “Western” ideas. By the time we arrive at the autumn of 1960
something has changed. Let us return to the documents: We will see that in the new edition of
the Turkish Language Committee Dictionary, the noun yaşanti has been accepted and a ninth
entry added to the eight formerly devoted to the verb “to live”: “To be as if living a certain
condition, to identify with, to sense, to feel a certain condition.”

Subjectivity’s share has become explicit. The internalization (identification with, sensing) of the
lived event is mentioned. Something has changed, and this change has opened the way for the
eight known definitions of “to live” to begin interact and give birth to a ninth.⁹

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⁹ In the terms of the old dictionary: By that time a significant number of people were no longer staying in villages but
residing in cities. The number of unmarried, divorced, and other people left alone in the crowd had increased. Some
of them had work and they lived; for others, living on that income became even more difficult. While some lived on the
Islands and the Bosphorus, others watched them, yet this state of affairs did not decrease their appetite for living but on
the contrary, increased it. (Orhan Veli: Living is not easy, brother! Neither is dying! It’s no easy thing to leave this world.)
More importantly, in spite of all the busts, statues, and monuments that were made [of Atatürk], His memory was
weakening as time went on, and a decline in the production of poetry about Him was observed. Yes, it is also true that the
“individual initiative” developing from 1950 on opened the way for a “personal interest.” On the other hand, the
overthrow of Demokrat Party power on 27 May 1960 did not put the brakes on that individual initiative [on the contrary,
on the contrary], but did, by thrusting Demokrat high society into the background, strike quite a heavy blow against the
flabby, hedonistic interpretation of one’s allotted term of life (ömür). As for etiquette (görgü), faced with Menderes’s
expropriation of real estate and the rising prices of building lots, it turned over its dwelling to the contractor in exchange...
The modernism of the Second New

İsmet Özel has said that Turkish poetry made its last modern advance in 1954–1959. The literature of experience – literature as experience – which in poetry was given the name “Second New” but made its first entrance in prose, was born in those years: It was not a new movement, it was the new literature itself.

One could say that I exaggerate: It can be asserted that prose acquired experience in the 1930s with Sait Faik, that the new arrived in poetry with Nazım Hikmet or Fazıl Hüsnü, and modernism with the Strange movement. It’s all true. Strange created a kind of degree zero with its destructive work, opening the field where literature could meet up with raw experiment. It was Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca who brought to Turkish that shiver which has been the infallible mark of the new since Edgar Allen Poe. True. In prose, one could mention Sabahattin Ali, even Reşat Nuri (Miskinler Tekkesi [Paupers Cloister]), and in poetry Diranas, Asaf Halet, and Necip Fazil as well. The Second New difference is here: It took experience as “the sole authority”; it risked being led somewhere it did not know beforehand.

This posture may explain certain things the Second New poets (and modernist short story writers) shared. Their language was not transparent. But that does not mean simply that the referent of poetry is distanced, that what it is saying cannot be made out (that was there before). What was new was that the language gained an almost physical opacity, it was leavened, acquired a new consistency. This opacity was new, it was not a consistency come of what tradition stockpiles (not of görgü, not of rhetorical conceits); this poetry arose on the empty lot created by Strange and by the Republic itself, which had erased its own past; it had no before, it would create its own roots, its own pre-history. The new opacity had to do with how the poetry opened out to experience. The Second New was led into experience as one is led into sin, violating boundaries, with glee and shame.

for a flat, withdrew into dark, ill-kept rooms, and began to wait for the 1980s, when it would emerge again into daylight under the auspices of the tourism and culture industry. Hayat went on, as it usually does. If we add to this the fact that the city had been liberated from its garrison role but not yet transformed into a megalopolis, and that communications had increased but the world not yet captured and drowned by its own mirror image (TV), we will better understand how practicable a ground for experience (şonant) Turkey was in the 1950s and 60s.

10 I have said that 1959 was an important date. We see that it was then, during the years 1958-1960, that modernist narrative and Second New Poetry emerged in book form: Yusuf Atılgan, Aylak Adam [The Idler] (1959); Onat Kutlar, İşhak (1959); Tahsin Yücel, Düsterin Ölmüş [The Death of Dreams] (1958) and Mutfaḳ Çıkmaş [No Exit Kitchen] (1960); Vüzel Ö. Bener, Yaşasızçası [Unliving] (1957); Adnan Özyalçınler, Panayır [Street Fair] (1960); Leyla Erbil, Hallam [Hallaj] (1961), Turgut Uyar, Dünüyanın En Güzel Arabistan [The Most Beautiful Arabia in the World] (1959); Ülkü Tamer, Şoğuk Otların Altında [Under the Cold Weeds] (1959); Čemal Süreya, Uverčinka (1958); Ecę Ayhan, Čınar Hamann Denizleri [Čınar Hamann’s Oceans] (1959); Edip Canever, Umut Suçlar Parkı [The Park of the Despairing] (1958), Petrol (1959), Nerde Antigone [Where, Antigone] (1961); İlhan Berk, Gaille Denizi [The Sea of Galilee] (1958) and Čivi Yazısı [What the Nail Wrote] (1959). One may speak of an “explosion.”

11 The phrase “acceptance of experience as the sole authority” is Georges Bataille’s. While coming to terms with Christianity, traditional mysticisms and Hegel in Inner Experience, Bataille put forward a concept of experience which formed a fracturing point in the continuity of Western thought and art. “He who already knows cannot go beyond a known horizon… this experience born of non-knowledge… is not beyond expression—one doesn’t betray it if one speaks of it—but it steals from the mind the answers it still had to the questions of knowledge. Experience reveals nothing and cannot find belief nor set out from it. … The principle of inner experience cannot arise from a dogma (a moral attitude), or from science (knowledge can neither be its goal nor its origin), nor can it take its principle from enriching spiritual states (such a thing would be an experimental, aesthetic attitude); inner experience has no goal but itself. Opening myself to inner experience, I have placed in it all value and authority. Henceforth I can have no other value, no other authority. … I call myself a voyage to the end of the possible of man. Inner Experience (New York 1988), pp. 3-4, 7.

12 The “boundary violation” and feeling of “opacity” which it creates can be seen in Čemal Süreya, Ecę Ayhan, but most of all in Turgut Uyar’s Dünyanın En Güzel Arabistan [The Most Beautiful Arabia in the world] and Tütünler Islak [The Tobacco is Wet]; the following passage is from the second book:

“This was a dark thing!.. This was a dark thing!.. This was a dark thing!.. How good it was!.. That something touched my sensitivity for dark forms and wet pheasants.

They’d cast a wet rope, around my neck, wet, I’d be disgusted. How good it was! A solitude-less wet rope, its water made me wet. This emptiness time and again woman, time and again man. Where a wet cat hiding under soiled, wet beds was slowly, gradually, growing fuzz. This was a dark thing. How good it was! That a wet woman made my flesh happy. This was a dark thing. Lived!

This was a dark thing!.. How good it was!.. Objects blur my sleep. Old, sack, sack, old and thick through and through, wet...

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We can compare post-1950 poetry with Strange in this regard. In the Second New, most of all in Turgut Uyar and Cemal Süreya, shame acquires an indicative value, it becomes a motif. Whereas in Strange, in an Orhan Veli or a Celal Silay, there is no shame, there is anger and ridicule. While the Strange poets were “intentionally outrageous” (Cemal Süreya), they bypassed shame for irony, which is to say they proceeded to the realm of mind. Anger and irony are dispositions of mind, they break down the unity of experience, they separate subject from object. (We do not generally get angry at ourselves, and we generally ridicule others; a certain distance is preserved.) But shame, in the existential meaning of the term, is an experience; a sticky feeling, in which body and soul, or subject and object, merge, and there are almost always physical consequences. (We feel shame at our own behavior, we are ashamed of our emotions, we blush.) Anger and ridicule are venting behaviors: They allow us to immediately externalize and impose upon others the impulses or emotions we cannot hold within ourselves. They disown privacy, inner experience. But shame is a fullness, an internal experiment: The blushing subject feels, all of a sudden, filled by a disgrace which belongs only to him, rising from within himself. The opacity of Second New poetry has to do with that fullness that internalized behavior.

In the old literature the poet felt rage, awe, he even had thoughts; then he had dreams and fantasies too, he was amazed and felt sudden joy; on the way to the new he came to know what it was to feel improvised and arbitrary, he found things odd (Anday’s Strange period). But none of this led him to break away from public diction, it didn’t make him grow wild, it didn’t land him at any distance from a relatively transparent language of culture and communication. Because he didn’t own his behavior as an internal experiment, as a subjective experience: Between the things he lived and himself there were signs and codes belonging to the public (to society, religion, state, culture); it was those codes which gave meaning to his behavior, not he himself; and the horizon of meaning of words was drawn by them too. For that reason meaning was outside, not within; it was not something he created, it was given beforehand; it was not immanent, it was transcendent: In order to exist, it was in need of the approval of an authority transcending the subject and prior to him. And that approval was always there, because the insides of words were always being filled by the appropriate approval authority. And since everyone lived in a shared world of meaning, the language of the old poetry was transparent (its concretes were immediately translatable); it was closed to any indecision born of division, any vagary or opacity come of a difficulty in assigning meaning to a thing: The meaning given from

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Objects blur my sleep. O.b.j.e.c.t.s.l... My hands in deep waters was a dark thing. How good it was!... What bothered me was like... broken scales and grains from wet warehouses.

What we lay down did not have the taste of death. Any frills, childless frills maybe, shame our everything in the morning.”

("İslakt Tütünlerde Süülüler" [Pheasants were Wet in the Tobacco])

13 Cemal Süreya’s book, Beni Öp Sonra Doğur Beni [Kiss Me Then Give Birth to Me], appears to be entirely devoted to a “happy shame.” These lines are from the book:

Because just yesterday your shame pulled at you from all sides
You wanted a safe harbor for my poetry

("Bir Kentin Dişardin Görünüşü" [View of a City from Outside])

Now
it’s shame that’s forming grains
in blonde children’s sheaves

... My mother died when she was small
kiss me, then give birth to me.

("Beni Öp Sonra Doğur Beni" [Kiss Me Then Give Birth to Me])

14 A diary by Muzaffer Buyruğcu was published in an old issue of the journal Papirüs I cannot find now. There Buyruğcu wrote that Bilge Karasu praised one of his stories thus: “There is something sticky in your story, something that sticks to a person. That is what makes it effective.”

That “stickiness” is an affect not to be found in the old literature, under the rule of bodiless mind and readymade form as it was, and one not valued by the old aesthetic. It is meaningful that it was used as a measure of value by one of the founders of the modernist short story.

15 Although Edip Cansever objected to the characterization of the Second New as a distinct movement, he spoke for his generation in the answers he gave in a 1960 interview for the journal Yeditepe: “Or it was we who first recognized our own value, arriving at a consciousness of it.” Gül Dönuyor Avcumdu [The Rose is Turning in my Palm] (Istanbul 1987), p. 48.
outside and comprising all withered the aloneness of words, their materiality, their physical, sensory quality, from the start. Sound, here, could not be anything more than an ornament of meaning. For the Second New, the clouding of language which came with the separation of the individual from the whole was experience itself: As the subject slid into naked experience without beginning, the ties that bound it together unraveled also; as it groped for the world and its own interiority by means of a language whose meaning was not immediately clear, it blurred its speech and perceived the moment of contact with naked experience as one of synesthesia. It took on its own subjectivity, its interior fullness, sometimes as a miracle and sometimes as a curse. 16

The Strangers and those before them spoke a familiar language in a familiar environment. For them, the goal of poetry was quite clear: To create something “beautiful”; to defend a political or social proposition; to establish intimacy with a transcendent being, to become its manifestation or symbol; to sing the refrain of universal, literary themes such as love, loneliness or death... All were aims given to poetry from outside; all were conventions. One could perhaps say that the Strangers’ goal was relatively “immanent,” in that it came from within poetry itself: to ridicule the old poetry, to destroy it. But this was a very clear and obvious goal; the boundedness, the determined nature of the thing Strange sought to destroy led to a bounded, too obvious poetry. The Second New first took up residence in the realm of not-knowing, it took its energy from there. It knew the meanings of the words it used, knew that they had meanings, of course; but it did not know where those words and meanings might lead or how far they could be taken. 17 It sought to find that out in poetry, by means of poetry itself. And that way of going about things would transform the structure and fabric of poetry as well.

After 1950, a listening voice was heard in poetry: The poet seemed to be listening to the words he used. (Not just in İlhan Berk – İlhan Berk who turned words over and over with the innocence of a child, trying to understand them – but in all the poets of the Second New.) An emptiness, a silence, a kind of electrical field has formed around words, created by that attention, that listening. Every poet listens to words, that is his profession. The Second New poets listened to the voice of words as if it were the voice of their own being. Their existence was like a new continent: They were feeling it out for the first time, researching into it. They did not expect poetry to acquire a meaning right away, to slip comfortably into a pattern of thought. As they

16 When viewed from this vantage point, some lines of Second New poetry gain a “programmatic” value:

It’s an unsayable sword I bear girded at my waist, melancholy.

(Ece Ayhan, “Sword” [Kılıç])

We were like concealed plants completing long summer nights’ stillness with the swaying of broad leaves. ...

It was then I realized sweet things put in my nature, by God, had been there all along, and would go on being there for a long time to come.

(Turgut Uyar, “Akçaburgazlı Yekta’nın Mahkeme Kararını Aldığında Söylediği Mezmurdur” [The Psalm Akçaburgazlı Yekta Made Up When He Received the Court’s Decision])

I’ve tried it a lot, when the carnation’s stem touches water
It’s like someone is shot inside me
And there’s a resurrection carved in jade
The doorbell rings every morning
I open it: I’m June
Maybe it’s the tendency to live, live without duration.

(Edip Cansaver, “Bir Yitışten Sonra” [After a Loss])

17 Turgur Uyar: “The minstrel doesn’t know how he will write, it’s afterwards that he sees how he has written. ... And usually he, like any reader, is faced by a poem he believes in, but can only grasp some sides of.” Sonsuz ve Öbürü [The Infinite and its Other] (İstanbul 1986), p. 145. This is from his poem “İki Dalga Katı Arasında Yapacağıını Şairkan Akçaburgazlı Yektanın Söylediği Mezmurdur” [The Psalm Akçaburgazlı Yekta Made Up Not Knowing What to Do Between Two Tiers of a Wave]:

That scorching bleak trouble, howling fusions of scattered secret impressions you try but can’t exhaust that push you places you don’t know...
felt words out they tried to understand where the voice was coming from, which experience it came from and what kind of experience it could open up, what corpse it might resurrect. And they did it in the poetry, not before writing it: Experience was not something that happened outside of poetry, that was completed there, prettied up and then transferred into poetry. Poetry, as the searching out of a meaning that did not exist before, was experience itself. It was a living thing: It sought and was sought for, it listened, waited. It was experience: An emptiness being filled, wanting to be filled.

The autonomizing of the image, which Cemal Süreya put forward while comparing the order of imagery in Nazım Hikmet and the Second New, is based in this also. The now of experience acquired an importance independent of past and future, it exploded as a condensed image gathering past and future into itself: Tearing for an instant the linear logic of narrative, of storytelling.

But it can’t be said that this broke down the unity, the continuity, of subjective experience. In the Second New metaphor ceased for the first time to be a conceit with an obvious aim and bounded function (likening the beloved to a sultan, concrete being to abstract, transcendent being, etc.) and became a real economy of transformation: Desire, physical or psychic pain, shame and exuberance, mourning and joy, the senses of sight, hearing and touch, were ceaselessly transformed one into the other within the frame of one poem or from poem to poem. [Cemal Süreyya: They say Muhammed told us to give gifts / Think of how sexual a gift can be / If you want to see the unity of the five senses / Bring your dagger over here and press it slowly into me.]

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\(^{18}\) İsmet Özel wrote in his important book Şir Okuma Kilavuzu’nda [Guide to Reading Poetry]: “the importance of poetry is that it constitutes an experience... in this sense poetry is concreteness itself.” Idem, p. 54.

\(^{19}\) Again İsmet Özel: “The fruit of reading poetry is gathered only in between the unknown old and the not-yet-known new. Only with the extraordinary vividness of ‘the now,’ the freshness and excitement of the tasted moment of life in all its concreteness, is the reading of poetry on the right track. ... The richness of the now that is poetry exists with one arm stretched back (to the depths of the lived) and the other forward (for clues to the unknown). ... When imagination reaches us we feel both the heat of a moment we have lived and the coolness of an encounter with something different.”

The first section of Edip Cansever’s poem “Ha Yanıp Söndü, Ha Yanıp Sönmedi Bir Ateş Böceği” [A Firefly Flashed or Didn’t Flash] brings out the tense unity between the ideas “moment” and “way, process”:

I hit the south then
With an ancient sea floor engineer
From out of a now in nihility
Into a now running through my veins
I flowed as courtyards and balconies exploded from erupting tumuli
I. On my face that ancient sign of the fleur-de-lis, ancient
My and his and whose afternoon
I hit the south
That covers itself up with words not talked of.

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\(^{20}\) And maybe we should have thought of these lines here, also Cemal Süreya’s:

... Minibus-bruised blue streets
Where wheat is exchanged for money
Money is exchanged for bread
Bread is exchanged for tobacco
Tobacco is exchanged for pain
And pain is finally exchanged for nothing.
On those streets.
Watches show rain.
Today, this little tuesday
Istanbul’s everything is lacking; other than its hills,
Only Galata
Galata
Is feeding to the sea little by little
In the form of a harmonica
That inexhaustible passion for rusting
It nourishes in the basements of the night

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This is what I’ve wanted to explain all through this section: The thing which ensured the unity of experience in the Second New, ensured the union of subject and object, which kept the moments of experience from breaking apart completely and the poetry from collapsing into a kind of “schizo-language,” was the continuity of the I. The subject maintained itself throughout all metamorphoses, filling, emptying, filling. This is better expressed by the final lines of one of Edip Cansever’s poems recording his experiments in loss of consciousness, exuberance and loss of self:

When evening gave me back my eyes
The city got lost, the sea’s stillness too,
While a phoenix cheated its ashes again
While a crevice in a rock got itself used to emptiness
I said I was the sea, and the dreamer of the sea
And first thing in the morning, on top of my depth
I’ll find myself like a smile.

(“Ölü Sirenler” [Dead Sirens])

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The moment of experience not only separates the Second New from the old poetry but from what is being written today. It had an influence on the past as well: Poetry was reconsidered; under the name of opacity, of “imagism,” it acquired a kind of necessity; it turned into an experiment one must go through, a test. But the Second New did not remain in the same moment of fullness; it went on to a more solitary, more thinned-out poetry. Had it seen that experience was impossible, even that it had always been an illusion, a chimera, from the start? I don’t know. It may be said that the place where this poetry carried off its real tour de force, its death-defying somersault, was where it saw the fundamental emptiness of experience and managed not to fall into it: The place where the tightrope walker who survives believes in life no longer, where the insignificant difference between dying and staying alive is equated with poetry, born as poetry.

The Second New not only influenced its predecessors by the transformations it wrought, but was influenced by them as well. One could say that it first understood – really “heard” – its predecessors while writing its own poetry. But Melih Cevdet Anday was not among those the Second New adopted in that way. The indifference was mutual. But we are speaking of good poetry, and are thus in the world of necessity, the world of the laws of form: Here even the most virginal of coincidences must act as a representative of necessity; if not, it becomes unimportant. Is there a connection like that between the Second New and its predecessors? Might there be a relationship between the thing that would thin out experience in the Second New, that would sift its poetry, and the thing which put a stop to experience in Anday from the start but after 1960 made it possible for him to try out a different kind of opacity, a different kind of necessity? What is this “thing” or “things”?

After a hiatus of exactly six years (1956-1962) Anday began work on a new density in the empty space he himself had opened up earlier. But now we should speak not of an empty space but of “space-lessness”: I, the individual subject, “love’s place to be,” had begun to be erased. With Strange, really with the Second New, the kind of personal subject who could lay hands on poetry was fading away. But what took its place was not the historical, collective subject of the old poetry (Yahya Kemal). The seat of the empirical, concrete, personal subject bound by time and place was being taken by the merely linguistic, abstract subject, the subject as a mere point: The subject of Rationalism, the abstract possibility of experience which Descartes arrived at by negating all experiential content, the "I" of "I think, therefore I am." There are two Andays: The Anday before 1956 and the Anday after 1962, separated by a region of erasure, of nihilization. I
have looked at the Second New from within the first Anday and seen the birth of experience. Now I will view the second Anday from within the Second New: I learn that life, a kind of life, can be found in the place where experience fades away, where experience is lost.

Variations on a non-existent theme

I have argued that Anday’s poetry negated the concept of experience proposed here. But we are speaking not of a poetry yet to be acquainted with experience but rather of one that has already given up on it, or rejected it from the start. If experience is a moment of filling, of a fullness we feel with every beat of our pulse, then Anday’s poetry falls in the moments of silence between those beats. The emptiness which the Second New was always approaching on a limit slope is for Anday a point of departure, departure and arrival. Cansever’s poem working the phoenix motif was punctuated by a statement of convergence, restoration and unity: “I’ll find myself like a smile.” Anday’s poem “Death of the Skiff” also works a fire motif: A “dreambound firefly” falls into the bilge from “the bad-tempered darkness of the night,” sets the boat on fire and burns it down. But there is no rising from the ashes here; the poem ends:

Severed head anchor, my ropes, my oars
Are now a dazed heap on the sand.
Smoking hands and feet, smoking wet wood,
Brought by the sea from far away
I’m an alien, meaningless thing.

Restoration, the rescue and assembling of parts, is impossible here: Distance, difference and division will always triumph over understanding and wholeness. The tininess of the thing that starts the fire (a firefly!) tells us that the fire is always already started and finished: Because a dream (“dreambound firefly”), a nilhility, can only set fire to another dream, another nilhility. We can draw another comparison, with Cansever again (the Second New poet closest to Anday in motifs and images). In “Ha Yanıp Söndü Ha Yanıp Sonmedi Bir Ateş Böceği” [A Firefly Flashed or Didn’t Flash], one of the important poems in his Kirli Ağustos [Dirty August], there are the lines: What is left of those ascensions? What remains? / O brick-red spell, the South’s hot unit / Did someone die? Too late, then / Or maybe too early. This is the first couplet of Anday’s “Tekeleyen Gece” [Stuttering Night], from his last book:

It’s a hurry-up world this, everything early
And everything late, the sun will be eclipsed while we sleep.

If we put aside the difference between the softer, longing voice in Cansever and the unsuttering, sparkling but austere voice purified of all excess in “Stuttering Night,” we can say that both poems work the same motif, the not being there, not getting there in time motif. Both poems convey the theme with a dichotomy, the early/late dichotomy. But in Cansever the dominant term of the dichotomy, the term that has the last word, is “early,” and that gives his poem a more hopeful dimension, one more open to experience: The man who arrives late has missed the chance for experience; but he who arrives early may wait, he may hope. In Anday “being late” has the last word: In this hurry-up world everything is always already finished, we cannot be in time for any experience; between our experience (sleep) and the content that would fill that experience (solar eclipse) there is a distance, an incompatibility, that cannot be got round: We are not there, and it is not here.

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What takes form in Anday’s poetry is an aesthetic of nilhility: The aesthetic of distance, separation, otherness, of not being here, not saying. This was one reason why it did not find a broad field of influence, I think. In the 1970s and later, things were written that were like everyone else’s poetry; none of it was like Anday’s. It is significant that before 1980, when a critic such as Mehmet Doğan tried to draw a connection between a radical world view and modernist poetry, the poets he put forward included Oktay Rifat, Edip Cansever, even Behçet Necatigil, but not Anday (see Mehmet Doğan, Şiirin Yalnızlığı [The Loneliness of Poetry]). It was a time in
Turkey when everything—life, art, political practice, even economic development—was thought of according to a model of experience: Condensation of the past in the present, opening to the future, conquest of the new, sometimes sorrow, always hope. I would like to give an example. In 1972-1973 Tomris Uyar published an important series of pieces on the short story in Yeni Dergi; she dwelled upon epiphany (as instant illumination, the filling of a single moment by a reality greater than itself), one of the fundamental concepts of the aesthetic of experience, relating it to the transformation or maturation of character.  

[We] agree that the story is an art which creates a flash in one stroke, preparing perceptions to occur years later in the reader, in short, changing the reader. ... The contemporary story is an art genre which develops a human reality around a moment of illumination. ... In its first meaning illumination is a “flash,” a “coming face to face with reality”; a sudden perception of a reality, a realization, on the part of the writer, the reader, the character in the story. ... In every story [there is] an illumination, an insight, an awakening.

In the same piece Tomris Uyar related the concept of illumination to the concepts of time and experience: “The contemporary story writer (who has a clock that can run backwards and forwards)... can make the reader sense passing time in ‘a smooth-rumped mare’s shaky-legged foal,’ or in a wall torn down and the hotel built in its place. Furthermore, an image taken from what is tested, from what is lived, an image grasped by having been seen, can much more easily remain in mind than a crafted statement.” These thoughts are also valid for post-1950 poetry.

Anday is seen as poet of the clock that does not run, poet of “the wind that blows nowhere”: His work has developed around the theme of experience-lessness, the theme of not being. Experience-lessness leaves ideas of subjective development, process, progress and maturation outside. It apprehends time as repetition, understands it as the swinging of a pendulum.

Anday has been seen as a cold poet. And perhaps the critics sensed the cold, insensate region of his poetry, refusing to be named, to converge with a name. They were loath to take a place there. It wasn’t a place anyway: It was a lacuna. There was an interview done with Anday which should be touched upon here: In this 1982 Çağdaş Eleştiri interview, informal and interesting in every respect, Adnan Benk put forward a view very close to the thesis I have argued here and he spoke of the “immutability” or immobility “sector” in Melih Cevdet’s poetry. (There is a terminological disparity: Adnan Benk used the term “living” for what I have expressed here by the term experience [yaşanti or deneýim], and seemed to use yaşanti to mean experience [tecrübe] already lived and left behind.)

In the world you sketch there is a boundary of immutability we cannot cross, cannot transcend. An accumulation of experiences, things lived, actions... inertia... True, the realm of living which lies between the boundary of mobility and that of immutability has as many ups and downs as can be. ... Yet despite that variedness its possibilities are limited. ... Whatever we do, we cannot get free of that square, those four seasons, that accumulation of experiences. ... There is “to me,” “of me,” “ours,” but that “I” which is the focal point of emotional poetry is never there. ... Your point of departure is always outside. You start out not close up, not from yourself, but from far off. ... Transforming into lived things the mornings, the rain and etc. things being lived that you draw to yourself from outside, from nature. There is no life anymore in the place where you go. Or the place you lead us.

I too will touch on these things, these appearances of experience-lessness, phases of the subject’s erasure, immutability and inevitable repetition, events like the otherizing of voice, abstractedness and forgetting, the joy that is not ours, the cancellation of first sensation and last line of verse. But there is something else: the site of experience is the city-dweller, and the experience-lessness in Anday’s poetry emerges first with banishment of the city from poetry.

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That, in Anday’s work, along with his understanding of “time,” will be ground for another discussion.

Translated from Turkish by Victoria Holbrook