

## Epik Şiiri Yeniden Düşünmek: Nâzım Hikmet ve Pablo Neruda'da Tarihsel ve Toplumsal Hafıza\*

Reimagining the Epic: Historical and Collective Memory in Nâzım Hikmet and Pablo Neruda

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### Öz

Bu makale Nâzım Hikmet'in *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları* ve Pablo Neruda'nın *Canto General* eserlerinde tarihi ve toplumsal hafızayı incelemekte ve bu iki metni İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası yeni bir epik şiir arayışlarında bir araya getirmektedir. Hikmet'in *Manzaralar*'ı sıradan insanların hayatlarını ansiklopedik bir biçimde anlatan biyografik sözlük halinde bir şiir koleksiyonundan oluşur. Şiir yirminci yüzyıl tarihinin Türkiye'deki farklı izleyicilerin bakış açısından anlatılır. Eser merkezinde insan deneyiminin olduğu, 1908'den 1950'ye yarım yüzyılı ve Anadolu'dan Avrupa ve Moskova'ya geniş bir coğrafyayı kapsayan bir tarihsel anlatıdır. Hikmet'in *Manzaralar*'ı yazmayı bitirdiği yıl olan 1950'de Pablo Neruda 'genel şarkılar' anlamına gelen *Canto General*'i Meksika'da yayımlar. Bu, her şeyi anlatma arzusuyla yola çıkan geniş kapsamlı ve geleneklere aykırı bir eser; bir kıtanın ve dünyanın tüm tarihi üzerine genel ve toplumsal bir şarkıdır. Eserlerindeki pek çok farklılıklara rağmen, Hikmet ve Neruda'nın şiiri yirminci yüzyıl politik edebiyat anlayışını derinleştirecek önemli benzerlikler gösterir. Bu makale Nâzım Hikmet'in *Manzaralar*'ı üzerine odaklanarak, eserin epik unsurlarının eleştirel tarihi hafıza içindeki politik işlevini tartışacak. Çalışma aynı zamanda Hikmet ve Neruda'nın eseriyle benzerlikler çizerek *Manzaralar*'ı uluslararası edebiyat perspektifi içerisinde değerlendirecek. Yeni bir epik arayışı ile, Hikmet bir halkın tarihini farklı açılardan anlatan; geçmiş, şimdiyi ve geleceği milyonlarca insanın kaderinde bir araya getiren bir başyapıt yaratmıştır. Pablo Neruda da benzer bir arayışla Amerika kıtasının geniş manzarasına ve halk kitlelerine ses verecek *Canto General*'i "yeni bir epik şiir gerekliliği" üzerine yazmıştır. Epik türüne dönüşüm her iki şair için de kaçınılmazlığı, ikisinin de toplumu bir bütün olarak yakalama tutkusunun bir sonucudur. Bu çalışma Neruda'nın edebi mücadelesinin Hikmet'inki ile nasıl birleştiğini; her ikisinin de modern şiiri kökten değiştirecek yeni bir ses bulmak amacıyla epiğe yöneldiğini; zaman ve mekanı, geniş bir tarih ve coğrafyayı birleştiren geniş kapsamlı bir tarih yazarak bir ülkenin ve insanların bir bütün halinde betimlediklerini gösterecek.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Epik, Nâzım Hikmet, Pablo Neruda, Toplumsal Hafıza.

### Abstract

This article explores historical and collective memory in Nazim Hikmet's *Human Landscapes from My Country* and Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*, bringing these two books of poetry together in their pursuit of a new epic poetry in the aftermath of the Second World War. Hikmet's *Landscapes* is a collection of poems in the form of a biographical dictionary that profiles ordinary people's lives in an encyclopedic manner. The poem is an account

\* Bu çalışma taslak haliyle New School for Social Research ve New York Üniversitesi tarafından düzenlenen "International Conference on National Poets— Universal Poetics: Mahmud Darwish and Nâzım Hikmet in Comparative Literary Perspective" Konferansında sunulmuştur.

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of the history of the twentieth century from the perspectives of multiple characters in Turkey. It presents an alternative history centered on the lives of ordinary people, bringing human experience into the center of the historical narrative that spans nearly half a century from 1908 to 1950, with a vast geographic sweep from villages of Anatolia to Europe and Moscow. In 1950, the year Hikmet completed *Landscapes*, Pablo Neruda published *Canto General*, meaning General Song, in Mexico City, another extensive and unorthodox artistic project driven by the ambition to tell all; it is a general/communal song, about an entire history of a continent and of the world. Despite many differences in their works, the poetry of Hikmet and Neruda carry significant parallels that deepens our understanding of the poetry of engagement in the twentieth century. In this article, I discuss the epic elements in Nâzım's *Human Landscapes* in relation to its political function as a critical historical memory, and at the same time, by drawing parallels from Neruda's work I aim to place *Landscapes* in an international literary perspective. In his pursuit of a new epic, Hikmet created a poetic masterpiece that recounts the history of people through multiple perspectives, bringing together the past, present and future around the destiny of millions of human beings. Pablo Neruda also pursued a similar desire to give expression to a wide landscape and collective populace of America and created *Canto General* to satisfy "the need for a new epic poetry". This expression of necessity to turn to the epic genre reveals both poets' ambition to capture the community in its totality. This paper shows that Neruda's struggle echoes that of Hikmet who seeks to find a new voice that would revolutionize modern poetry in its embrace of the epic and to create a sweeping chronicle which spans time and space, history and geography to form a self-contained vision of a country and its people.

**Keywords:** Epic, Nâzım Hikmet, Pablo Neruda, Collective Memory.

## **Reimagining the Epic: Historical and Collective Memory in Nâzım Hikmet and Pablo Neruda**

In 1940 in Bursa prison, Nâzım Hikmet ventured into an ambitious project: writing a collection of poems in the form of a biographical dictionary that profiled ordinary people's lives in an encyclopedic manner. The portraits he worked on until his release from prison in 1950 evolved into *Human Landscapes from My Country*, the 537-page-long epic poem on his country, his poetic self, on the world, yet rooted in his own historical period. The poem is an account of the history of the twentieth century from the perspectives of multiple characters in Turkey. It presents an alternative history centered on the lives of ordinary people, bringing everyday human experience into the center of the historical narrative which spans nearly half a century from 1908 to 1950, with a vast geographic sweep from villages of Anatolia to Europe and Moscow.

In 1950, the year Hikmet completed *Landscapes*, Pablo Neruda published *Canto General* in Mexico City, another extensive and unorthodox artistic project driven by the ambition to tell all; it is the song of all, a general/communal song, about the entire history of a continent and of the world. *Canto General* is the product of Neruda's effort to create an alternative history of the Americas that brings humble masses to the front as the underlying historical force that shaped the continent's destiny. The sweep of Neruda's poem is larger than *Landscapes*. From pre-Hispanic America to the here-and-now of the poet, it covers the whole American continent in detail as well as other territories of the world. The two works certainly have essential differences. Neruda's interest lies in a form of poetry that would grow organically from the native landscapes and peoples of the Americas, written in a mythic language divorced from historical and temporal dimensions; while Hikmet's synthesis of poetry and prose, and of epic and novel, brings the work closer to storytelling in verse. Despite these differences, the poetry of Hikmet and Neruda carry significant parallels that deepen our understanding of the poetry of engagement in the twentieth century. In this article, I discuss the epic elements in Hikmet's *Human Landscapes* in relation to its political function as collective and historical

memory.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, by drawing parallels from Neruda's work I aim to place *Landscapes* in an international literary perspective.

Nâzım Hikmet, in his letters to Kemal Tahir from Bursa prison, reveals his search for a new style while he was working on the earlier version of *Human Landscapes from My Country*. "I want readers of this work to pass through a large crowd of people," the poet explains, "I want to give a concrete representation of these people coming from different social strata at a certain historical period... I do not wish to create memorable characters; my intention is to draw a landscape of my country by portraying typical characters from the society... although [this book] incorporates novelistic elements, I think it requires a different and higher genre form"<sup>2</sup> (Hikmet, 1991, p. 173). Hikmet hence employs folk realism to create not memorable characters but memorable *types* of simple men. He achieves the "higher form" in employing multiple genres like the novel, scenario, interview, letter and integrating them into its epic skeleton which sets forth the trope of journey—the framing device of a train going from Istanbul to Anatolia, connecting and unfolding sub-stories of its passengers from different classes.

The lyrical and political forms present in Hikmet's earlier poetry are extended and expanded in *Human Landscapes* and in *Epic of Independence War* to embrace the epic, a historical and collective portrayal of the entire country and its people with an all-encompassing vision. In the aforementioned letter to Tahir, the poet describes his work as "the social landscape of my country in its totality reflected from the mirror of its people". In his pursuit of a new epic, Hikmet once more reveals his role as a national poet: he sees a need for a poetry that expresses the history of people, speaking from multiple perspectives, that brings together the past, present and future around the destiny of millions of human beings. Pablo Neruda was also inspired by the desire to give expression to a wide landscape and collective populace of America. In the same explanatory manner, Neruda asserts that his *Canto General* was written to satisfy "the need for a new epic poetry." In his autobiography, first published in Spain in 1974, Neruda refers to the birth of his epic *Canto General*, which probes the nature of the Latin American experience: "the idea of a central poem that groups historical incidents, geographical conditions, the life and struggles of our people, came to me as an urgent task" (Neruda, 2005, p. 191). This expression of necessity to turn to the epic genre reveals both poets' ambition to capture community in its totality. Neruda's struggle echoes that of Hikmet who seeks to find a new voice that would revolutionize modern poetry in its embrace of the epic and create a sweeping chronicle which spans time and space, history and geography to form a self-contained vision of a country and its people.

Epic poetry has always been a politicized genre, which is typically associated with establishing a dynasty and empire building. David Quint in a seminal study of the genre's history introduces two rival traditions: epics of the imperial victors and epics of the defeated, "a defeated whose resistance contains the germ of a broader republican or antimonarchical politics" (Quint, 1993, p. 8). He draws attention to a rejection in *Paradise Lost* of imperialism and of the imperial epic tradition that reaches back to Virgil. Quint points to a different critical moment when the epic is transformed into

1 I use the terms "collective" and "historical" memory in line with Maurice Halbwachs' work on politics of memory. According to Halbwachs, the collective memory of a given community refers to a common cultural background, i.e. its traditions, customs and distinctive practices. Historical memory refers to a long-term collective past inscribed in various institutions, rituals and organization of space (Maurice Halbwachs, 1950/1997).

2 Translations from his letters are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

adventurous romance, and finally, Milton writes an epic that is against empire. The twentieth century has also witnessed such “critical moment,” when the epic is revived and once again transformed. Hikmet and Neruda, among other poets, have reanimated the “epic of the defeated” tradition and brought to the fore stories of the invisible masses against capitalist and imperialist ideology. *Canto General* opens with naming of ancient peoples of Chile and their descendants from Arauco to Macchu Picchu, making the dead who have suffered the poet’s muse, particularly the Incan laborers. The books on conquistadors, liberators and “The Sand Betrayed” foreground rebellions against colonialism between years 1520 and 1820, listing not only the oppressed people, but also the international and domestic exploiters. In the following books, the deep history of resistance to oppression in Latin America intertwines with Neruda’s personal history, together with many people and places he has encountered in the 1940s. Hikmet’s *Landscapes* in train journeys from Istanbul into the heart of Anatolia in 1941 chart the long history of repression and injustice in his country. He catalogues massacres of Armenians, and the end of multi-ethnic populace, through thirty-year-old newspapers prisoners find; police violence and torture against socialists and communists through characters Halil and Selim; and domestic capitalist exploitation through various characters—workers, peasants, soldiers and outcasts. Like Neruda, Hikmet recounts “first class travelers” such as politicians and businessmen as well, and weaves his own life story embodied in Halil’s with that of the country. In short, the “epic of the defeated” finds a renewed and contemporary voice in Hikmet and Neruda’s *pièces de résistance*, unearthing that which has remained in the margins of collective memory.

How can the epic genre, which is defined by Bakhtin and many others (Auerbach, 1953; Benjamin, 1968; Lukács, 1971) as the representation of a unified vision of the world inseparable from the concept of totality, reconcile with modern poetry? In other words, what makes those poets revitalize a fixed and completed genre in a world that has long renounced unity? Bakhtin would respond that the epic as an already antiquated genre is now trying to adopt itself to the dominant genre of the novel. Its canonic nature is being stylized; the epic is “novelized.” Bakhtin’s argument on novelization of other genres in the modern era may hold true for the urgency to create a new epic poetry Neruda raises. Hikmet, for example, refers to his work as an epic novel in verse. However, the stylization or ‘novelization’ of the epic is never taken to the point of parody as Bakhtin claims it would; nor do the epic works in question show canonic inflexibility or monoglossia—that is the absolute dominance of one language or of one perspective. This emergence of distinct epic poetry at the intersection of poetics and political culture, as in the case of other poets like Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound and Edouard Glissant (Whitman, 1855; Pound, 1925; Glissant, 1965) has remained unexplored in genre theory. We may speculate, in Bakhtinian key, that this is an example of “the deeper and more truly historical struggle of genres,” a battle between epic poetry and the novel instead of the “novelization” of the epic (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 5).

For Bakhtin the novel is the ultimate and absolute winner of this struggle. The dichotomy he draws in *Dialogic Imagination* between the epic and the novel delimits the former within the classical epic tradition of Europe. Unlike the polyglot, polyphonic and heterodox world of the novel, the epic narrates the national heroic past in closed and deaf monoglossia. The absolute past of the epic is the single source and beginning of everything good, it is a world of fathers and founders of families, a world of “firsts” and “bests.” Removed from the present and without any claim on the future, the epic for Bakhtin is conclusive and immutable. Novelistic discourse, on the other hand, is “dialogic,” because it accommodates different and competing systems of thought and does not presume to possess

a monopoly on truth and discourse. It exhibits an “indeterminacy” and “semantic openendedness” and, unlike the epic, remains in “living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7).

Despite dealing with the quintessentially epic subject of the destiny of a nation and possessing generic epic characteristic such as a broad historical and geographic sweep, and a kaleidoscopic portrayal of characters, Hikmet’s *Human Landscapes* does not fit in the generic dichotomy outlined by Bakhtin. Although one feels tempted to call it an epic poem, it is not simply and merely epic. The very difficulty in categorizing the work indicates that it has achieved an unprecedented form within the Turkish literary tradition. Hikmet and Neruda’s ambition to create a poetic *tour de force* leads to the prominence of the epic elements in *Landscapes* and *Canto General*. These works are called epic not because they conform to the conventions of classical epic poetry with a hero and a main action that transforms the destinies of people; they are epics in the sense that the two poets present the history of their lands, of Turkey and of the American continent in a large span of time, with its geography and its violent history. Ezra Pound once described the epic as a poem containing history, a tale of the tribe (Pound, 1968, p. 86; Terrell, 1980, p. vii). The poet in both works takes up the task of documenting the tribe and giving voice to entire people, he is the national poet, the chronicler, observer and the voice of a people removed from historical narratives. In the opening lines of Hikmet’s epic, for example, amid the bustle of the train station, some characters are introduced with brief and powerful descriptions:

Corporal Ahmet

He fought in the Balkan war  
he fought during mobilization  
he fought in the Greek War.

“Hang in there, brother, the end’s in sight” he’s famous for saying. (Hikmet, 1982, p. 6)

*Ahmet Onbaşı.*

*Balkan Harbine gitti.*

*Seferberlikte gitti.*

*Yunan Harbinde gitti.*

“*Ha dayan hemşerim sonuna vardık*” sözü meşhurdur. (Hikmet, 1966/1997, p. 14)

Galip Usta stops on the steps thinking  
if I could eat sugar wafers everyday he thought when he was five  
if I could go to school he thought at ten

[...]

what if I get laid off he thought at twenty-two

[...]

and out of work from time to time he thought what if I get laid off until he was fifty.”

(Hikmet, 1982, p. 3)

*Galip Usta*

*tuhaf şeyler düşünmekle meşhurdur:*

“*Kaat helva yesem her gün*” diye düşündü 5 yaşında.

“*Mektebe gitsem*” diye düşündü 10 yaşında.

[...]

22 yaşında. “*İşsiz kalırsam*” diye düşündü

[...]

*Ve zaman zaman işsiz kalarak  
"İşsiz kalırsam" diye düşündü 50 yaşına kadar. (Hikmet, 1966/1997, pp. 11–12)*

The authoritative tone of grand narratives of official histories that ignore the human element is challenged by the multiplicity of voices and the powerful presence of human experience as the central element in history. The forbearance of a war veteran or the daily worries of a worker relate to the endless progression of wars and hunger, presenting an alternative humanist perspective to the concrete reality of the twentieth century.

The *Human Landscapes* defies in and of itself the principle of monoglossia which is, according to Bakhtin, fundamentally a characteristic of the epic. Hikmet's poem aims to document multiple perspectives of characters from different sections of society, giving voice to peasants, soldiers, prisoners as well as industrialists, petty landowners and government officials. Through the multiple layers of stories, the narrative creates heteroglossia, a complex mixture of worldviews and languages, within one condensed social history. *Human Landscapes* generates a new poetic idiom, combining free verse with traditional forms of oral poetry, lyrical voice with everyday speech; making use of traditional folk and divan poetry, transforming them into new possibilities in the representation of his revolutionary ideas.

While Bakhtin claims that the epic is the official history of a nation transferred into a sacred and absolute past; Hikmet employs the epic form driven by the desire to write history differently, to create a critical historical memory from the perspective of common people, an unofficial and national as well as international history of the humble masses. He wrote prosaic, rational and political history cast in the language of personal testimony of "common heroes" with a social critical focus. Book Two of the *Human Landscapes*, the Epic of the National Liberation (*Kuvayı Milliye Destanı*) of Turkey recited by the waiter and the cook in the first class dining car, opens with these lines:

They who are numberless  
like ants in the earth  
fish in the sea  
birds in the air  
who are cowardly  
brave  
ignorant  
wise  
and childlike  
and who destroy/ and create/ my epic tells only of their adventures. (Hikmet, 1982,  
p. 111)

*Onlar ki toprakta karınca,  
suda balık,  
havada kuş kadar  
çokturlar;  
korkak,  
cesur,  
câhil,  
hakim*

*ve çocukturlar  
ve kahreden  
yaratan ki onlardır,  
destânımızda yalnız onların mâceraları vardır.* (Hikmet, 1966/1997, p. 178)

Here Hikmet takes on the role of the national poet, one among his ordinary fellow citizens, just like Neruda takes on the voice of the worker reborn through his poetry:

Behold me from the depths of the earth,  
laborer, weaver, silent herdsman:  
tamer of the tutelary guanacos:  
[...]  
I've come to speak through your dead mouths  
[...]  
give me silence, water, hope  
give me struggle, iron, volcanoes  
[...]  
speak through my words and my blood. (Neruda, 2011, p. 41)  
*Mírame desde el fondo de la tierra,/ labrador, tejedor, pastor callado:  
domador de guanacos tutelares*  
[...]  
*Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta.*  
[...]  
*Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza.  
Dadme la lucha, el hierro, los volcanes.*  
[...]  
*Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre.* (Neruda, 1950/1990, p. 140)

The unknown worker is brought to the forefront and given a voice in the alternative social history of the epic. In Neruda historical time is closely related to the natural cycle of continual rebirth, his poetry has resurrectional power, linked to his biblical style and the creation of a new genesis of the *pueblo*. Hikmet, on the other hand, accomplishes epic totality in free-floating verse mingled with powerful realism and passionate lyricism through the multiplicity of voices and uncovered sub-stories. The collective totality of “they who are numberless” is broken down to individual stories, creating a harmonizing dialectic between the individual and the communal and between the national struggle and international solidarity.

It is the anti-imperialist and humanist overtones of the *Human Landscapes* that set the epic tone of Hikmet’s work, which presents a particular version of historical and contemporary political events, exciting internationalist fervor and nationalistic zeal. The epic genre in Hikmet becomes the vehicle for putting forth a certain vision of reality, particularly in a time of struggle against fascism and imperial powers in order to inspire the public to stand for the cause. Hikmet is aware of the difficulty of the task he takes on. The convergence of politics and artistic representation in his work poses itself as a threat that endangers the poetic quality of his work. He makes a reference to this threat in Book 2,

after talking about two German passengers who facilitated the bombing of Rotterdam in a symbolic language. One of the central characters, Doctor Faik exclaims:

When poetry's brought into this business  
it's truly disgusting  
especially this kind of poetry  
But what can you do?  
These awful things build up inside you  
you're sickened, horrified  
enraged  
and then you look and find your hands are tied  
You can't do anything/ then come the words. (Hikmet, 1982, p. 110)  
*Ve bu bahse şiir girince kepezelik oluyor.*  
*Hele bu çeşit şiir.*  
*Ama ne yaparsınız, insan dehşetli bir şeylerle doluyor, müthiş kızıyor bir şeylere,*  
*gel gör ki bacağımızdan bağılsınız olduğunuz yere.*  
*Kımıldanmak ne mümkün?*  
*O zaman gelsin lakırdı*  
*şairanelik.* (Hikmet, 1966/1997, p. 163)

The difficulty of poetic representation voiced by the satiric tone of the Doctor is part of Hikmet's search for a new genre for his landscapes. He overcomes the strings of socialist realism and the stereotyping vision of propaganda-like narratives by bringing human experience into the center of his narrative.

For Hikmet the human condition comes before political engagement; he embodies the historical experience of people in *Human Landscapes*, which in turn becomes internationally recognized as his great masterpiece. The humanist resonance in his epic in a way enables the engaged poet to combine lyric and political elements without reducing poetry into a propaganda vehicle. The story of the German soldier Hans Mueller who is dead at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean provides a good example for the prioritization of the voice of people in the *Landscapes*.

Before becoming a submariner in the spring of '39  
Hans Mueller from Munich  
was the third soldier from the right in the Fourth Squadron  
of the First Company of the Sixth Battalion  
of Hitler's Storm Troopers  
Hans Mueller had three loves:  
1) A foaming golden brew  
2) Anna, fleshy and white like an East Prussian potato  
3) Red cabbage  
Hans Mueller had three duties  
1) To salute his superior officer like lightning  
2) To take an oath on a gun.  
3) To round up a minimum of three Jews a day  
and damn the sly ones who got away



In his head and heart and on his tongue,  
Hans Mueller had three fears:

1) *Der Fuehrer*.

2) *Der Fuehrer*.

3) *Der Fuehrer*.

Hans Mueller

with his loves, duties, and fears

lived

happily until the spring of '39. (Hikmet, 1982, p. 277)

39 ilkbaharında denizaltıcı olmadan önce

Münihli Hans Müller

Hitler hücum kıtası altıncı tabur

birinci bölük

dördüncü mangada sağdan üçüncü neferdi.

Münihli Hans Müller

üç şey severdi:

1-Altın köpüklü arpa suyu

2-Şarki Prusya patatesi gibi dolgun ve beyaz etli Anna.

3-Kırmızı lahana.

Münihli Hans Müller için

vazife üçtü:

1-Çakan bir şimşek gibi mafevke selam vermek.

2-Yemin etmek tabancanın üzerine.

3-Günde asgari üç çift çevirip

sövmek silsilelerine.

Münihli Hans Müller'in

kafasında, yüreğinde, dilinde üç korku vardı:

1-Der Führer.

2-Der Führer.

3-Der Führer.

Münihli Hans Müller

sevgisi, vazifesi ve korkusuyla

39 ilkbaharına kadar

bahtiyar

*yaşıyordu*. (Hikmet, 1966/1997, p. 424)

The human aspect at the center of multiplying stories with a procession of common protagonists constructs collective heroism. Hans Mueller is a common name for German soldiers who were inciters as well as victims of violence in the Second World War. It is a common name for those who were caught in the historical and social conditions of life; be it in the camp of the exploiters or the sufferers, just like the name Mehmet, which is a common name for privates in the Turkish army, as in the lines "The cars made for forty people each,/but holds eighty, a hundred Mehments /The doors of the cars are all locked/ The trains roll on, packed with Mehments" or of the name Juan in *Canto General* as in the lines "behind the Liberators you could always find Juan/ working, fishing, fighting/ .../ his bones

are buried everywhere". The epic poets here employ a series of biographies of common men to bring forth the people, *pueblo*, an international collective populace as protagonists of the epic. The land and history belongs to these people, its name is everyman's name, Mehmet, Hans or Juan, the worker, the soldier, the prisoner so often overlooked by history, although he has always been there.

Women, of course, have mostly stayed at the margins of the genre, as the world of epic is that of war and combat, defined by its distance from the domestic world of women. Female characters are typically mothers, daughters, healers or lovers of warriors, with marginal storylines (see Poor & Schulman, 2016). While *Canto General* and *Landscapes* differ from ancient and medieval epics with respect to female characters and female voice, they nonetheless stay within the confines of the genre in sidelining women's stories in the masculine world of struggles and defeats. In the aforementioned section (Book VIII) "The Earth's Name is Juan," for example, Neruda documents the struggles of Chilean workers through sixteen dramatic dialogues, out of which only one is female: Margarita Naranjo. In *Landscapes*, while there are female characters, such as civil servant Nimet, peasant Hatice Kadın, prostitute Aysel, Güllü Hanım and Halil's wife Ayşe, they remain in the peripheries of the main storylines of the socialist intellectual Halil, Doctor Faik, or nameless soldiers "Mehmetçik-Memet."

Nâzım Hikmet composes the epic panorama of the twentieth century as a poet anchored in his time, in the political destiny of his country and of the world. Contrary to Bakhtin's assumption that the epic cannot come into contact with the still evolving present in all its complexity and fullness, Hikmet derives his epic from the contemporary reality and tries to capture it in its totality. He is a chronicler of his time. *Human Landscapes* is not structured in the zone of the distanced image that has no possible contact with the present; on the contrary, its object of representation is the contemporaneity of wars and violence, of struggles and defeats. The present in its flowing and transitory nature is part of the narrative structure; the poem achieves splendid rhythm with the constant movement through space and time with the train journey, flashbacks, cuts and jumps. It invokes the constant movement of life, its ever-changing quality. The poem strives to be part of today's collective consciousness and therefore it invests in the future, a future where hopes for change, peace and universal justice will be realized. It is the hope for a better future that is essential in Hikmet's poetry of engagement.

Nâzım Hikmet and Pablo Neruda were driven by the same desire at the same time in different ends of the world: to give a collective and historical vision of an entire land and its people. Their poems hold on to faint voices and perspectives that may otherwise have vanished among official historical narratives. *Human Landscapes* and *Canto General* have gone beyond the historical sweep of the epic and its nation-building imaginary. While Bakhtin defines the epic as a genre that has already run its course, that can have no further meaning, no further development in the modern world; the two works transcended the classical conventions associated with the genre and revitalized it for a new poetry of social consciousness. They achieved epic grandeur with their plurality of voices and perspectives, with acclamation of international solidarity instead of national heroes, with their contemporaneity and their poetic as well as political value.

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