

From the Greek newspaper To Vima [The Tribune], May 2015

*My adventure started one night
Knee-deep in snow
Pulled from the dinner table
Thrown in a patrol car,
Packed onto a train,
And shut in a room.
In three days, I finished nine years*

Among the most important voices of Turkish literature of the 20th century, Nazim Hikmet is known for his leftist action and, of course, his poetic works. As shown in the above excerpt from his poem "In prison," Hikmet was a virtuoso at handling the Turkish language, which introduced free verse and a wide range of new issues to the Turkish poetry.

What is perhaps not widely known is Hikmet's work in cinema. Hikmet, who was born in Thessaloniki in 1902 and died of a heart attack in Moscow on June 3, 1963, had worked as a writer and as a director, while many of his poems, novels and plays were turned into films with or without his participation.

First in Alkionis

Nazim Hikmet films are the news this time through the great tribute to him in Alkionis cinema. But the tribute is not limited to the cinema.

In conjunction with various events (plays, concerts, photo exhibitions, posters and paintings the poet created in prison, and Karagiozis performances inspired by Hikmet's poetry) the tribute will last until June, with eight fiction and documentary films, all but one, the documentary "The Blue-Eyed Giant," shown in Greece for the first time.

In his early life, Hikmet became famous by writing patriotic poems. Then when he met Russian futurism in Moscow, he abandoned the traditional poetic forms and began using exuberant poetic images in impressive and unexpected correlations. The work has been called "romantic revolutionary."

It is well known that in Greece, the poems of Nazim Hikmet have been translated by Yannis Ritsos, and some of them set to music by Manos Loizos and Thanos Mikroutsikos. "Poetry that is social, deeply human, wonderfully unfussy, an inexhaustible source of emotions full of the noble lesson of the poet's responsibility for his time and for the world" Ritsos said of Hikmet's work.

The directorial eye of Nazim Hikmet is seen in four films: "Cici Verber" ("The Barber," 1933), "Düğün gecesi" ("Wedding Night," 1933), "Günese dogru" ("To the sun," 1937) and the short film "Bursa Senfonisi" ("Bursa Symphony," 1934). Among the fiction associated with the work of Hikmet but shot by others is the Russian "Two Neighborhood Children" (1957) by Ilia Gkourin and Asntar Impragkimof, "Ayse, Girl of the Muddy Village" (1934) by Mousin Ertougkoul, "Love and My Sorrow" (1978) based on a play by Hikmet and "Officer Tosun Pasa" (1976), taking place in Egypt and based on the author's novel. It will also highlight the film "Red River, black Sheep" (1967) by Lutfi Akantia, a bucolic Turkish drama starring the future ambassador of the Turkish cinema abroad, the director Yılmaz Güney.

The most complete biography

Documentaries concerning Hikmet are "Nazim's Trip to Cuba," the "Master Galip," by France's Maurice Piale that in 11 minutes explores the life of a Turkish through Hikmet's poems, and, **most important of all, "Nazim Hikmet: Living Is No Laughing Matter," by Stephanie Capparell, a thorough biography of Hikmet that, among other things, includes rare footage of Hikmet in Russia.**

For special color, add the "Oratorio for Nazim," an oratorio for choir, soloists, piano, narration and orchestra by pianist Fazil Sai, a filmed Bolshoi ballet performance rested on a libretto by the poet, and a view of short animated films inspired by Hikmet's poetry. Finally, "Letter to Nazim Hikmet" by Kostas Aristopoulos as a tribute to the poet.

Fighter till the end

Both during the period of directing (1933 -1937) and throughout his life, Hikmet faced enormous problems with the Turkish justice system because of his leftist ideas. Hikmet had published his first poem in 1918 in "Yeni Mecmua" under the pseudonym Mehmet Nazim, and during his student years from 1921 to 1924, met with Russian futurists who contributed to the development of a new poetic language. He lived several years in Moscow and with Nick Zacharia was a member of the honor guard at the funeral of Vladimir Lenin.

When Hikmet returned from Moscow, where he attended the Communist University of the Workers of the East, in 1928, the Turkish authorities arrested and imprisoned him. It was the beginning of a series of trials carried out based on his poems and opinions. The poet was arrested several times because of organizational activities and in his arrest in 1938 he was accused of "encouraging rebellion against the Army and the Navy." Hikmet was sentenced to 28 years and four months in prison, but was released in July 1951, taking advantage of the general amnesty granted to political prisoners, the new government of Adnan Menderes (ideological ancestor to Recep Tayyip Erdogan).

That same year, he left Turkey and moved back to Moscow. In 1956, shortly after the start of the liberation struggle in Cyprus, he was one of the first intellectuals of Turkey invited by the Turkish Cypriots to live in peace with the Greek Cypriots and to support their struggle for the overthrow of the British occupation of the island.