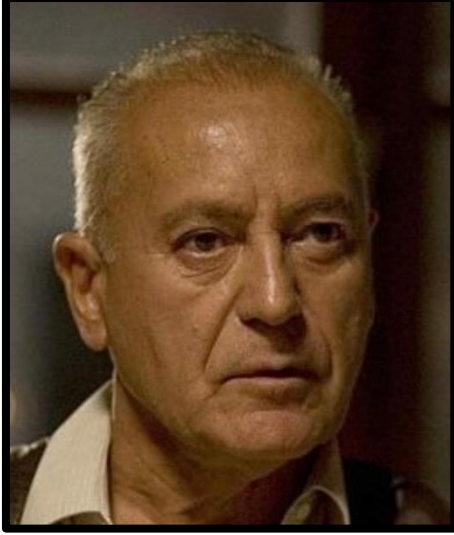


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## Tunç Okan (1942- )



### BIOGRAPHY

Tunç Okan was born in 1942 in İstanbul. He is the child of a family who were immigrants from the Balkans to Turkey. He studies as a dentist and while he is in mandatory military service, he applies to a competition held by the Ses Magazine to find new stars and actors for cinema, and he steps into Yeşilçam becoming the magazine's "cover star". His first film is *Veda Busesi* shot in 1965 where he co-acted with Türkan Şoray. He acted in 13 films in two years. According to his interviews, he found the stories of these films very similar to each other and because these films were also imitations of foreign films, he started to feel unsatisfied with his work. He was not content to play in these films. He quits acting and goes abroad in order to further his education as a dentist. From then on, he has lived in Germany, France and Switzerland, where he still resides. While he works as a dentist, he has not lost interest in cinema. In 1974, he directed his first film, *Otobüs (The Bus)*. Okan writes, directs and produces this film. He also plays one of the characters. In his later films he also writes, acts, directs and produces. Based on these qualities, it wouldn't be wrong to describe Tunç Okan as an independent filmmaker. The director has four feature-length films.

### FILMOGRAPHY AS DIRECTOR

- 1974 *The Bus (Otobüs)* (Writer, Director, Actor, Producer)  
1984 *Drôle de samedi - Saturday Saturday (Cumartesi Cumartesi)* (Writer, Director, Actor)  
1992 *Mercedes Mon Amour - The Yellow Mercedes (Sarı Mercedes)* (Writer, Director, Producer)  
2013 *Grapes of Hope (Umut Üzümleri)* (Writer, Director, Co-Producer, Actor)

### MAJOR AWARDS

- Otobüs* Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, 1975; Taormina International Film Festival, 1976; Strasbourg Film Festival, 1975.  
*Sarı Mercedes* Antalya Altın Portakal Film Festival, 1992; İstanbul International Film Festival, 1993.

### CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Tunç Okan tells the concepts and subjects, the human conditions and the contradictions of the characters that he approaches with a filmic language that has an impressive narrative structure which is still able to go further than recording whatever happens.

The first characteristic of Okan's films that catches the eye is his use of spaces. The lines and colors of the city square in *The Bus* have ordered, precise graphical relations while the bus where the story takes

place has old, soft contours. The bus standing in this space creates a metaphor for the opposition between West and East. As an interior space, with its old seats, curtains, and colorful textures, the bus also surrounds, repeats and emphasizes everything the characters represent. The contrast between the characters and an empty shopping mall is parallel to the contrast between the character and the bar he is brought into.

In *Drôle de samedi*, the director tells the plot by utilizing the town square and the nearby businesses, structures, and streets. Events unfold in these locations. Occasionally, Okan sets the camera at a distance that allows us to understand the relationships between these spaces. As a result, he does not separate people from their city, which is a part of their existence.

The primary place for *Mercedes Mon Amour* is the road. This road that Bayram takes from Germany to his village in Turkey serves as the ground for his experiences, recollections, and dreams from his life abroad. Visual relationships between vehicles (trucks, lorries, other cars, and Bayram's Mercedes) are developed through the contrasts of big-small, old-new, expensive-cheap. The final image of the film where Bayram, who learns that his village has been destroyed, stands at the crossroads without knowing where to go, strongly emphasizes the character's loneliness and homelessness.

In order to strengthen the story and message, Tunç Okan also employs the grotesque and absurd. Exaggerated contrasts are used in scenes such as where masked Westerners surround the bus's passengers in the mall, or when the famished passengers mistakenly think that the plastic food is real and shove it into their mouths. Similarly, we can see instances of creatively daring narratives that make use of the absurd such as where Maurice, the butcher, who appears as one of *Drôle de samedi's* characters, murders his wife and makes salami from the meat in his dream, hears that the judge in the court ate this salami, and encounters strange happenings in the restaurant.

## THEMES

**External Migration.** In the 1960s, industrialized countries with labor shortages in the production and service industries hired people through agreements, especially from nations with agrarian economies and labor issues. As workers who originally intended to make some money and return back to their homes acquired money and increased their standards of life, their stay in those nations has been prolonged and the majority of them have transitioned from being guest workers to citizens. Problems including human trafficking, cultural clashes, illegal marriages, and the breakdown of households who remained behind in Turkey have all been brought on by this labor mobility. This phenomenon is related to the main topics of *The Bus* and *Mercedes Mon Amour*.

*The Bus* tells the story of people who are deceived by a human smuggling network in the hope of working and make money, who are brought to Sweden and abandoned in a bus, where their passports and money are taken from them.

In *Mercedes Mon Amours*, we follow the story of Bayram, who bribes officials to steal someone else's turn to go to Germany with the status of a worker, who wants to buy his dream car with the money he saves and return back to his village to both show off to the people in his village and propose to Kezban, whom he left behind to pursue his dreams.

**Xenophobia.** Those who are different from the cultural values, the social and economic norms of the societies they relocate to are considered to be foreigners. This classification lies at the heart of xenophobia that emerges in some places throughout history.

The cultural and economic setting of *The Bus* establishes a contrast between the characters who were brought to Sweden from Turkey illegally, and the Swedes who belong to one of the rich nations of the West. This contrast is underlined by the scenes where protagonists witness a couple making out in a phone booth, where they witness a performance at a sex club, and their struggles with escalators. But the contrast progressively shifts to hostile circumstances. One of them who is unable to get back to the bus is forced to spend the night outside and perishes from the Swedish cold. A Swede passing by the frozen figure early in the morning pushes him into the river. There are other scenes in the film that illustrate the animosity people have for foreigners. The framework for xenophobia is established through discourses such as labeling people as "dirty foreigners".

**Class.** Director Tunç Okan cares deeply about the plight of the downtrodden, the underprivileged, and the poor. In all three of the movies we've looked at, it's clear that class issues emerge as a central motive. In search of a better life, the fictional characters of *The Bus* embark on a journey to escape

poverty, find employment, and make money. In *Drôle de samedi* Maurice the butcher kills three people after he gets upset by his supervisor and a coworker who both reprimand him. Naturally, this is not the sole factor, but it is the breaking point.

Maurice is a constant apologist who gets reprimanded for being even a little late and he represents the classes who are oppressed. While the boss' dehumanizing attitude towards the workers is revealed when he does not want to close up shop, the opportunism of workers who have no class conscience becomes obvious when even though three butchers are murdered, they go on working with the hope of more sales and maybe bonuses. Bayram's main concern in *Mercedes Mon Amour* is going back to his village, where he is shunned and ignored, and prove to everyone that he is wealthy and successful. As a form of revenge, he attempts to elevate himself above them. Which is why when Okan handles this theme, he does not rely entirely on the conflict between the top and lower classes; he also questions class consciousness through his films.

**Industrial society.** *The Bus* uses the ideas of consumption, pleasure, and arrogance in order to describe Western society, which can also be called a modernized or welfare society. Swedes are depicted as people who are entirely focused on consumption and pleasure, and they humiliate what they perceive to be as lower classes or inferior cultures. While the workers from the east are all characterized as rude, illiterate people who are unaware of the "civilized" world. The movie seems problematic from this perspective. It has drawn the most criticism in this sense. On the other hand, with an exaggerated emphasis on differences, the film stands closer to the critical attitude of the grotesque and absurd: As soon as that sophisticated approach which softens up the issue is removed from the equation, what is ugly and horrible hidden inside the real is revealed. In *Drôle de samedi*, Maurice's dreams, the terror created by the little boy, the shamelessness of the customers, the child who becomes charmless by acting like an adult, and the fact that people continue shopping despite what is happening around them are also part of this exaggerated narrative.

## CHARACTERS

### 1. Ambitious

**Bayram** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) Bayram betrays even those people who is friendly towards him and trusts him. The main cause behind his actions is his childhood history. He is beaten up in his village, he becomes the butt of the joke, his desires become worthless. He deceives his fellow villager İbrahim to emigrate to Germany, he steals his opportunity. His ambitions also cause him to race other drivers along the road and to get aggressive when his car is damaged.

### 2. Traitor

**Bayram** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) Even though he promised Solmaz that he would take her to Turkey in his car, Bayram gets on the road without her. In order to get to Germany quickly, he steals İbrahim's turn to emigrate and bribes officials to change his health report. He easily betrays those who put their trust in him.

**Bus Driver** (*The Bus*) He lies to the workers and takes all their money from them, then he abandons them in the square.

### 3. Selfish

**Bayram** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) He leaves Kezban behind in Turkey, who loves him and is worried that he is leaving, and he goes to Germany to realize his biggest dream, to buy a car. Instead of helping Veli, who crashed his car, he ignores the situation. He drives off to Turkey without taking Solmaz.

**Driving school student** (*Drôle de samedi*) He disregards the instructor's cautions. In a fit of rage, he pulls over in the middle of the road, gets out, and blocks the way for other vehicles.

**The customer in the shop** (*Drôle de samedi*) He makes the seller tell him about the cameras and he asks to see other machines without paying any heed to customers waiting on the line.

### 4. Honest

**Kezban** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) When she learns about Bayram's betrayal of İbrahim, she stops waiting for him to come back from Germany and marries someone else.

### 5. Rational

**Kezban** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) She has left her village and come to Ankara in order to work. She decides to take sewing courses in the evening while she works as a housekeeper. While working at a clothes factory later on, her boss asks her to work at his house as a cleaning woman which makes her quit her job at the factory and she starts to work as a cleaning worker at a bank.

## 6. Emotional

**Ayşegül** (*Drôle de samedi*) She gets crossed with Oğuz who did not like the hair she had done at the hairdresser; right after the murder, when she says that she is hungry she is a little bit reserved, she cannot shake off the effects of the event for a while. When Oğuz takes her out of the market in a hurry, she panics thinking that they will starve in the weekend.

**Bayram** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) Alongside his vices such as ambition and selfishness, Bayram is also emotional. He is both troubled by what happens to his car and Kezban who once described him as "lacking character". In situations like this he starts to cry or without realizing he even kicks his own car that he values above all else.

## 7. Conformist

**Ayşegül** (*Drôle de samedi*) As a member of the middle class, Ayşegül has embraced the kind of life and behaviours that society demands of her. She follows the necessities of the order such as making shopping lists, planning for Saturday excursions, making itineraries, keeping the home and life running.

## 8. Questioning

**Oğuz** (*Drôle de samedi*) He steals chocolate from the market that they have been accused of stealing and then he informs on himself; while they are about to finish shopping, he leaves everything behind and exits; he does not like the hair Ayşegül had done in the hairdresser, he tells the truth knowing that she would be sad. All these are against the expectations of the system from him as a member of the middle class who lives in an affluent society. There is a scene at the end of the film where Oğuz questions the impositions of society and tells Ayşegül all about it.

## 9. Content

**Kezban** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) Kezban tries to make Bayram give up his dream of Germany: "Bayram, what do we need Germany for? Your job is fine, and I'm here too...". The life they would build together, even though it would be hard to get by, is good enough for her.

## 10. Greedy

**The boss** (*Drôle de samedi*) After Maurice kills three workers in the butcher, the boss talks about how sales on Saturday are better and he does not want to close up shop. And because he does not have the courage to say this directly and openly, he asks workers if they would like to work.

## 11. Conscientious

**Kezban** (*Mercedes Mon Amour*) The children of the village stone Bayram in the middle of the village and while Kezban tries to protect him, she also gets hit by stones.

## 12. Unconscientious

**The bus driver** (*The Bus*) He leaves behind people inside a cold bus with nothing to eat, no passports, no shelter, as if he abandons them to their deaths. He does not feel remorse or sadness for what he did.

## 13. Naive

**Illegal Workers** (*The Bus*) After a considerable amount of time passes after the bus driver takes their money and leaves, one of them says that they have been swindled. Another one defends the driver, saying that something bad may have happened to him. They never once question what they are doing while they give all their money to this man. It may be that their dreams of building a better life may have blinded them to evil.



Tun Okan with Trkan Őoray in *Veda Busesi* (*The Kiss Goodbye*) (1965)

#### References

Workers Film Festival, Tun Okan Interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xe-Q1kfB1A> (date of access: 12.16.2021)