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Foreword

A TIME-HONORED LITERATURE
From Orhon inscriptions to Orhan Pamuk. That could serve as a definition of the life-story of Turkish Literature from the eighth century A.D. to the present day. A geographic span from Outer Mongolia and the environs of China through Inner Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa, the Balkans and Europe all the way to North America. An amalgam of cultural and literary orientations that embraced such traditions and influences as Chinese, Indian, Turkic, Mongolian, Uyghur, Russian, Arabo-Persian, Islamic, Sufi, Judaeo-Christian, Greek, Mesopotamian, Roman, Byzantine, European and Mediterranean, Scandinavian, Germanic and British, French and Spanish, North American, and Latin American.

Always receptive to the nurturing values, aesthetic tastes, and literary penchants from diverse civilizations, Turkish culture succeeded in evolving a *sui generis* personality. It clung onto its own established traits; yet, it was flexible enough to welcome innovations—or even revolutionary change.

Among living literatures that preceded Turkish literature, one can only cite Hebrew, Chinese, Greek, Arabic, Persian, German, Indian, Irish, Spanish, and perhaps two or three others.

Literature, the premier genre of Turkish culture, had its dawn in Mongolia’s Orhon Valley where the Köktürks erected stelae featuring their historical narratives in the 720s and 730s. These inscriptions still stand in situ. They relate the Köktürk experiences of conflict, defeat, and regained sovereignty. In moving terms, they emphasize the importance of cultural authenticity, of a quasi-national consciousness.

Turkic poetry made its debut, in the Uyghur dialect, presumably from the sixth century onward although it is difficult to ascertain the dates. By the tenth century, it had become a living tradition.

The *Dede Korkut* tales (*The Book of Dede Korkut*), often characterized as “the Turkish national epic,” probably had their origins in the tenth century although the epic took about another
five centuries to make its transition from the oral tradition to its first written version.

It was in the second half of the eleventh century that the two early major literary works, Kutadgu Bilig (Wisdom of Royal Glory) and Divanü Lügâti’t Türk (Compendium and Lexicon of Turkish), made their advent. If one disregards all the preceding works (inscriptions, lyric poetry, myths, tales, etc.), these two substantial books mark the outset of Turkish literature in the beginning of the millennium.

The story of Turkish literature from the eleventh century to the twenty-first is rich and complex, full of firm traditions and daring transformations. It straddles the creative endeavors of small states, tribal communities, and principalities; a major state like the Selçuk, the expansive and enduring Ottoman Empire, the modern Turkish Republic, and newly independent Cypriot Turkish and Central Asian Turkic republics.

It made an impressive élan with the humanistic mystic folk poet Yunus Emre who lived in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Ottoman literary creativity matured in the fifteenth century and produced its best works until the end of the eighteenth century. In the classical age of Ottoman culture, the urban elite distinguished itself with its prolific corpus of formal lyrics that dealt with empyreal themes, without ignoring real-life depictions. Although verse was regarded as intrinsically superior to prose, numerous prose works, principally the ten-volume Seyahatname (Book of Travels) by Evliya Çelebi in the seventeenth century achieved an enduring place of pride.

As the power of the Ottoman Empire waned, intellectuals and writers engaged in a dynamic search for Western aesthetics, genres, and techniques. In the second half of the nineteenth century, European-type fiction, drama, criticism, and newspaper writing gained popularity. Consequently, Turkish literature embraced Europeanization.

With the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, modern literature gained ascendancy. The leftist poet-playwright Nazım Hikmet revolutionized Turkish poetry and attained to world-class stature. The woman novelist Halide
Edip (Adıvar) made an impact with her works, some of which she wrote in English and published in England and/or the United States. The genre of fiction was dominated in the second half of the twentieth century by Yaşar Kemal whose prolific output came close to securing a Nobel Prize for him. That honor ultimately was won by a stimulating younger novelist, Orhan Pamuk, in 2006, the first Nobel ever for a Turk in any field. It stands as the culmination of a nation’s passion of many centuries for literature. It will probably herald future triumphs for Turkish poets, playwrights, essayists, and critics as well as fiction writers.

The present book entitled *A Millennium of Turkish Literature* tells the story of how those genres evolved and grew in stature on the Turkish mainland in the course of a thousand years.

*Talat S. Halman*

The poems and excerpts in this book are all translated by the author unless otherwise indicated. Portions of Talat S. Halman’s earlier publications have been incorporated in this book.

The author is grateful to Dr. Jayne L. Warner, a long-time colleague and collaborator, for her excellent editing. Thanks also go to Ceyda Akpolat and Demet Güzelsoy Chafra for their help.

This book employs American rules of spelling. Turkish names and terms conform to present-day rules in use in Turkey, see “Note on Turkish Spelling and Names.”
Note On
TURKISH SPELLING
AND NAMES
For Turkish authors, place names, publications, and special terms, this volume employs modern Turkish spelling.

a  (like gun)   var. â (like are)
b  (as in English)
c  (like jade)
ç  (ch of chin)
d  (as in English)
e  (like pen)
f  (as in English)
g  (g of good)
ğ  (makes preceding vowel longer)
h  (h of half)
i  (like second vowel of portable)
î  (like it)   var. î (like eat)
j  (like measure)
k  (k of king)
l  (as in English)
m  (as in English)
n  (as in English)
o  (like eau in French)
ö  (like bird or French deux)
p  (as in English)
r  (r of rust)
s  (s of sun)
ş  (sh of shine)
t  (as in English)
u (like pull) var. û (like pool)

ü (like tu in French)
v (as in English)
y (y of you)
z (as in English)

Exceptions include words which have become common in English and appear in English dictionaries in anglicized forms. Proper names have been kept in modern Turkish with one major exception—İstanbul has been rendered with normal English spelling using I rather than İ unless it is part of a title.

Considerable confusion persists in the spelling and forms of transliteration of earlier words, terms, and names. For centuries before and during the entirety of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish language, which had an extensive vocabulary borrowed from Arabic and Persian, employed the Arabic script.

The Turkish Republic, established in 1923, changed the orthography to a Latin typescript in 1928. Because no coherent system of spelling was created at the time of the transition from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, extensive and frequent adjustments were made, and continue to be made. The editor cautions that spelling variations persist. One example is the terminal d found in many pre-Republican names. Some of the same or similar names appear with a terminal t in recent decades.

To complicate matters, surnames were legally introduced with the passage of the Surname Law by the Turkish Republic in 1934. Consequently scores of authors and scholars whose prior publications had come out without surnames, appear in reference books, bibliographical entries, and on title pages with official surnames subsequent to 1934.

All these variations are reflected in the present book as well, although certain proper names have been standardized.
Sait Faik took the last name Abasıyanık following the passage of the Surname Law, but virtually never used it for his books, therefore Sait Faik has been maintained. Orhan Veli Kanık, however, frequently used his surname and, although he is often simply referred to as Orhan Veli, his full name is given. Nazım Hikmet used his official surname, Ran, so infrequently that it is not even given in this history. Late in his life Ahmet Muhip Dranas inserted an Ḳ in his surname; it is that spelling (Dıranas) that appears here. The modern Turkish spelling of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi has been employed throughout.
THE DAWN IN ASIA
Turkish literature is among the world’s oldest—and youngest—literatures. Its creative tradition, according to some debatable claims made by numerous scholars, dates back to before Christ. It is commonly accepted, however, that its legacy of written works spans twelve centuries.

In their long history, the Turks have gone through more changes than most nations, and yet—paradoxical as it may sound—they have preserved most of their basic cultural traits. Through the centuries they lived as nomadic tribes, built small and large states in parts of Asia, created the Selçuk state in Asia Minor and later the sprawling Ottoman Empire, which endured from the thirteenth to the early twentieth century, and finally established the modern Republic. At different stages of their history, Turkic communities embraced Shamanism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeanism, Zoroastrianism, and other creeds until most of them accepted the Islamic faith more than a thousand years ago. Their language, one of the world’s most regular in grammar, and most agglutinative, has used five separate scripts: Köktürk, Uyghur, Arabic, Cyrillic, and (since 1928) Latin.

The pattern of the main ages of Turkish literature follows the foregoing outline of the major periods of Turkish history. But scholars have pursued a variety of approaches to the periodization of Turkish literary development. The simplest approach sets up two stages: early (8th to 19th century) and modern (19th to 21st century). Another breakdown involves three periods: pre-Islamic (until the 11th century), Islamic (11th to mid-19th century), and modern (mid-19th century to the present). A different three-pronged categorization is: pre-Ottoman (until the 13th century), Ottoman (13th to 20th century), and twentieth century to the present. A more elaborate—also more meaningful—approach sets up five stages: pre-Islamic (until the 11th century), pre-Ottoman Islamic (11th to 13th century), Ottoman (13th to mid-19th century),
transitional (mid-19th century to the 1920s), and modern (1920s to the present). All these periods have their subdivisions on which there is no unanimity among literary historians.

Few cultures have changed as drastically and remained as intact as has Turkish culture throughout history. Changes have included some cataclysmic transformations in terms of locale, cultural orientation, faith, system of government, allegiance. Language is a particularly compelling example of transformation and continuity. From the tenth to the twentieth century, Turkish intellectuals and men of letters voraciously absorbed Persian and Arabic vocabulary as well as some of the grammatical devices of these two languages. Yet, despite the elite’s enthusiasm for such borrowings, the language spoken by the masses remained remarkably unchanged and was preserved not only in colloquial use from generation to generation but also in folk literature. As a result, the Turkish language, in terms of morphology, syntax, and a substantial portion of vocabulary, is essentially the same as it was a thousand years ago.

“Whosoever is born must die, but his words live on. Language is the interpreter of thought and science. It gives man dignity. Human beings attain happiness through language. But language can also demean man and cause heads to roll. It is on words that man can rise and acquire power and prestige.” Yusuf Has Hâcib of the eleventh century, the first Turkish poet to produce a major original work, Kutadgu Bilig (Wisdom of Royal Glory), proclaimed in these words the supremacy of language in Turkish life and culture. Throughout the later stages of Turkish history, and most significantly during the Ottoman period, the poetic word was a more prevalent way of expression than most other modes. Today, too, the spoken and written word is the pivotal force of Turkish culture.

Because the Turks originated in the Ural-Altai region of Central Asia, their language is often referred to as Ural-Altaic, together with such other Turkic languages as Uzbek, Azeri, Chaghatai, Kirghiz, and Yakut. It is an agglutinative language
rich in rhythmic effects and rhyme potential, with a mellifluous phonological structure ideally suited for poetic utterance.

It is, however, with the Orhon inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. that we get the most significant documents of early Turkish literature. Those inscriptions, as well as the oral epics and a large body of oral lyric verse, constitute the best work of the nomadic and settled Turkish communities until the latter part of the eleventh century.

Thus the Turkish migration that started around the sixth century A.D.—a migration into China, India, Persia, the Caucasus, and Asia Minor—brought with it a rich oral tradition. Between the ninth and early thirteenth centuries, a vast majority of the Turks who settled in Asia Minor accepted Islam as their faith. By the end of the eleventh century, much of Turkish literature, oral and written, had already acquired an Islamic flavor. This orientation, together with the influence of Arabic and Persian cultures, was to continue throughout Ottoman history.

The oral tradition, in addition to the early Dede Korkut tales, which recount the Turks’ heroic exploits, produced a large body of legends and stories. This tradition’s principal achievement is folk poetry, composed by minstrels and troubadours, who voiced in a spontaneous, sincere, and simple language the sensibilities, yearnings, social protests, and critical views of the uneducated classes. Utilizing Turkic verse forms and syllabic meters, often extemporized and sung to musical accompaniment, replete with assonances, alliterations, and inexact rhymes, folk poetry harped on the themes of love, heroism, the beauties of nature, and, at times, mysticism.

The epic and the lyric traditions among ancient Turks probably emerged in Central Asia. Some of the earliest specimens of verse attributed to them are available only in Chinese translation. These epigrammatic poems (possibly excerpts) reveal a refined and subtle poetic sense:
Young girls are weaving cloth,
I can’t hear the sound of the loom,
But I hear those girls breathing.

In Uyghur texts we find many early verses, some attributed to individual poets who were obviously accomplished practitioners of their art, as can be seen in the closing stanzas of Aprin Çor Tigin’s “Love Poem”:

Gods of light, grant me this bliss
Let my soft gentle darling and I
Join our lives forever.

Mighty angels, give us power
So that my black-eyed sweetheart and I
Can live and laugh together.

In settled communities and among the nomadic tribes alike, the epics and song lyrics served as a principal vehicle of aesthetic experience and communal solidarity. Although all but one of the long epics, the Oğuzname, failed to survive intact, the material, which has come down to the present in partial or fragmentary form, charts the continuity of literary evolution while presenting a panorama of life and culture among the Turks before their conversion to Islam.

The early epics are usually poetically conceived depictions of gods and heroes. Among them we find a fairly elaborate cosmogony, mythic accounts of the emergence of the Turks, stories about preternatural phenomena, and many legends of victory and defeat, of migration and catastrophe.
Epic literature evolved as a collective creative endeavor and was kept alive, with substantial changes over the centuries, by minstrels—often called ozans, sometimes bahşıs—who, accompanying themselves on a stringed instrument commonly referred to as a kopuz, narrated stories and chanted poems.

The legend of creation, perhaps the earliest of Turkish legends, traces the origin of the universe to a single creator, a god named Kara Han, who finds his inspiration in the appearance of White Mother’s face emerging out of water. Kara Han’s first creature is Man, who attempts to soar higher than his creator. Man is therefore deprived of the power to fly and remains condemned to earthbound life. The Devil is shown in the legend as stronger than Man but powerless before God.

The early Turks had animistic and pagan forms of worship. Shamanism held sway in many communities. Most of the moral themes in pre-Islamic Turkish legends appear as metaphors which seek to contrast good and evil. The dominant view is anthropomorphic.

The Ergenekon epic, an extended version of the popular Bozkurt (Gray Wolf) legend, is a picaresque depiction of a major Turkish community which escapes extinction thanks to the procreation and protection of its totem-god Gray Wolf. A tale of survival, Ergenekon culminates in the story of how the Turks, incarcerated in a death valley surrounded by mountains which give no passage, dig a tunnel through an ironclad mountain and escape from the valley under the guidance of Gray Wolf.

Among the oldest specimens of written literary works are memorial tablets, stone monoliths, and stelae found in the Yenisei Valley of northeastern Mongolia as well as documents unearthed in the Sinkiang region of modern China. These, dating from the seventh to the ninth century, include stories of the battles the Turks fought against the Chinese, a variety of legends, and numerous specimens of verse (found mostly in Chinese translation) written in Uyghur Turkish.
The epic literature which evolved in the Uyghur period is a narration of the emergence of tribes, their peripatetic adventures, their fight for survival against natural disasters and hostile communities, of exodus and injustice, of brave deeds and social disintegration, of victory and enslavement.

The only long epic to remain intact is the Oğuz epic, whose origin might conceivably go as far back as twenty centuries. It is an elaborate and lyrical description of superhuman and worldly episodes in the life of the legendary hero Oğuz. The focal themes are those of heroism and struggle for survival. In blending miracles with daily life, the epic utilizes the motifs of nature’s power and beauty. Interspersed in it are lyric passages which are further proof that ancient Turkic verse, in substance and form, had attained an appreciable level of artistry.

Early Turkish communities produced many poems for different social and ritual occasions. It was customary to chant poems at quasi-religious ceremonies held before the hunt (sığır) and at the festivities after the hunt (şölen). Poetry was a vital ingredient of the funerals and memorial services (yüğ) where elegies called sagu were recited. Poems of joy and love were featured on all festive occasions. The lyrics of the songs offered as part of communal entertainment represented a major segment of the poetic lore.

In the pre-Islamic era, Turks composed their verses in indigenous quantitative meters, which were based on an identical number of syllables, with one or two caesurae to a line. The stanzatic form, usually in units of four lines, relied heavily on rhyming, the most frequent pattern being abab / cccb / dddb. In some of the early poems rhymes appeared, not at the end of lines, but at the beginning.

The lyric and epic traditions of the early centuries led to the masterworks of the pre-Ottoman period: Divanü Lügâti’t Türk, an encyclopedic compendium of Turkish linguistics and poetry; Kutadgu Bilig, a mirror for princes; and Yunus Emre’s
mystic folk poetry which is notable, *inter alia*, for its universalist humanism.

Some fine accomplishments of early Turkish poetry have been preserved in the comprehensive survey of Turkic languages compiled under the title *Divanü Lügâti’t Türk* by Kâşgarlı Mahmud in the late eleventh century. This first work of “national cultural consciousness” contains many lyrics of love and sorrow, of hero worship and lament:

*Is Alp Er Tunga dead and gone*

*While the evil world lives on?*

*Has time’s vengeance begun?*

*Now hearts are torn to shreds.*

In the *Divanü Lügâti’t Türk*, Kâşgarlı Mahmud, the 1000th anniversary of whose birth was celebrated in 2008, cited a probably apocryphal *hadith* (traditional saying attributed to Prophet Muhammad) conferring God’s blessing on the military and political power of the Turks: “God Almighty said: ‘I have an army to which I gave the name Türk. I had the Turks settle in the East. Whenever a nation displeases me, I send the Turks against that nation.’ ” Mahmud also made the statement: “Learn Turkish, for Turkish sultans will rule for many years to come.”

The writing of the *Kutadgu Bilig* by Yusuf Has Hâcib coincided almost exactly with the *Divanü Lügâti’t Türk*. Yet few works could be more disparate in orientation: the *Divan*, although written mostly in Arabic, is “Turkish” par excellence while the *Kutadgu Bilig*, a monumental (about 6,500 couplets) philosophical treatise in verse on government, justice, and ethics, reflects the author’s assimilation of Islamic concepts, of Arabic and Persian culture, including its orthography, vocabulary, and prosody.
The disparity was to become the gulf which divided Turkish literature well into the twentieth century—the gulf, namely, between poésia d’arte and poésia popolare, to use Benedetto Croce’s two categories. The first embodies elite, learned, ornate, refined literature; the second represents spontaneous, indigenous, down-to-earth, unassuming oral literature. Poésia d’arte is almost always an urban phenomenon while poésia popolare usually flourishes in the countryside. The former, as the name suggests, has a strong commitment to the principle of art for art’s sake whereas the latter is preponderantly engagé or utilitarian in function and substance.

In the two centuries prior to the establishment of the Ottoman state while the process of Islamization gained momentum, the intellectual elite of the Anatolian Turkish states produced Islamic treatises, poems, translations, and Koranic commentaries. In the second half of the twelfth century, the Divan-ı Hikmet (Poems of Wisdom) by Ahmet Yesevi, founder of a principal mystic sect, and the Atebet-ül Hakayık (The Threshold of Truths), a long poetic tract about ways of achieving moral excellence, by Edib Ahmed, wielded wide religious and literary influence. The Turkish legends, principally the Oğuz epic, and particularly the Dede Korkut tales, which had antedated the conversion to Islam, acquired a distinctly Islamic flavor. The Book of Dede Korkut, composed of twelve legends, narrates in prose and verse the adventures of the Oğuz Turks migrating from Central Asia to Asia Minor. These tales of heroism constitute the Turks’ principal national epic, which invites comparison with the world’s best epic literature. Although the martial spirit dominates it, The Book of Dede Korkut has eloquent passages expressing a yearning for peace and tranquillity:

If the black mountains lying out there were quite safe,

Then people would go there to live.

If the rivers whose waters flow bloody were safe,
They would all flood their banks for joy.

If black stallions were safe,
They would then sire colts,

If the camel were safe in the midst of the herd,
She would mother young camels there.

If the white sheep were safe in the fold,
She would bear there her lambs,

And if gallant princes were safe,
They would all be the fathers of sons.

(Translated by Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal, and Warren S. Walker)

The earliest identifiably Turkic groups of Central Asia were settled communities with a distinctive culture and oral literary tradition. Most of them became peripatetic tribes after leaving their homeland under the pressure of natural hardships (perhaps droughts or floods) or marauding enemies. Some resettled in nearby regions, others moved on to the distant Far East or the Near East. The exodus brought them in contact with diverse cultures and communities from which the Turks acquired tools and terms, concepts and concrete objects—also evolving a penchant for receptivity to anything useful which would serve their purposes.

The individual and the conglomerate nomadic tribes migrating into Anatolia, combating on the way, intermingling with other people, carrying their values of survival and mobility, evolved into principalities, into small and major states, until the end of the thirteenth century. They conquered Baghdad in 1055 and gained control of Anatolia in 1071 as a result of the victory at Manzikert against the emperor of Byzantium. The
Turkish Selçuk state emerged with a high culture of its own, affluent, excelling in theology and the arts.

It was not an accident of history that most of the fighting Turks of a millennium ago bypassed Judaism and Christianity, with which they had come into close contact in Asia Minor. Islam’s appeal to them was manifold. In Geoffrey Lewis’s words:

*The demands which it makes are few; the rewards which it promises are great, particularly to those who die battling “in the Path of Allah.” But what must have had even more weight with the Turks who came over to Islam in such numbers during the tenth century was the fact that acceptance of Islam automatically conferred citizen-rights in a vast and flourishing civilization.*

Once conversion to Islam became firmly entrenched, the Turks started serving the cause of Muslim domination and *propaganda fide*. As Julius Germanus has observed: “Islam and its martial spirit was one of the greatest motives in the uninterrupted success of the Turks. They had fought, as idolaters before, for the sake of rapine and glory, but the propagation of the faith gave a moral aim to their valor and enhanced their fighting quality.” In time, Islam became so pervasive a force that the Ottomans ceased to consider themselves Turks, proudly identifying themselves as Muslims.
**Dede Korkut Tales**

The Book of Dede Korkut has been called the Iliad of the Turks. The similarities are too few and too inconsequential to warrant systematic comparison, but, like the Iliad, the stories of Dede Korkut represent and embody the epic élan of a nation’s literary imagination. Constructed not as a monolithic work but as a series of interrelated legends, The Book of Dede Korkut relates in prose and verse the tribulations of the Oğuz, an ancestral nomadic Turkish tribe, in their migration from Central Asia to parts of the Middle East. The stories that comprise the epic have collective authorship in the form in which they were transcribed, although originally they may have been the work of a single writer. Since its emergence, possibly in the tenth century, the epic has undergone much substantive and stylistic change as a part of living oral literature. A significant aspect of its evolution was the introduction of Islamic themes as the Turks gradually adopted Islam.
SELÇUK
SUFIISM
Turkish communities, through many centuries, experienced the duality of the gazi (warrior, conquering hero) and Sufi (mystic) spirits. While the raiders and the soldiers of Islam kept waging war to expand the frontiers of the faith, the Sufis—men of peace, humanism, and love—preached the virtues of tranquillity in the heart and all over the world. The mystic philosopher whose thoughts and spiritual guidance were to dominate Anatolia from the thirteenth century onward and inspire many nations in modern times was Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207–1273). With his poetic celebrations of love and the arts and life itself, he heralded in the thirteenth century a new glittering age of humanistic mysticism. His ideas which stressed the deathlessness of the loving soul, the joys of passion, the inherent worth of the human being, the aesthetic as well as the ecstatic imperative of faith, the need to go beyond the confines of scholasticism and to transcend schisms, and above all the godliness of man not only gave renewed vigor to Islamic mysticism but also represented for the Islamic religion in general a counterpart of the Renaissance which was to emerge in Europe a century after Rumi’s death.

Recognition of Rumi’s enduring moral force in the Islamic world and his intellectual impact elsewhere has prompted many prominent figures to praise him. The British Orientalist Reynold A. Nicholson, an indefatigable translator of Rumi’s verse, paid tribute to him as “the greatest mystical poet of any age.” For his Westöstlicher Divan, Goethe drew inspiration from some of Rumi’s poems translated into German. One of the immortals of Persian classical poetry, Jami (d. 1492), said of him: “He is not a prophet, but he has written a holy book,” referring to the Mesnevi (Persian original: Mathnawi), which has also been called “The Koran of Mysticism” and “The Inner Truth of the Koran.” Gandhi used to quote his couplet “To unite—that is why we came / To divide—that is not our aim.” UNESCO’s first Director-General, Julian Huxley, lauded his spirit of international brotherhood. In 1958, Pope John XXIII wrote a special message: “In the name of the Catholic world, I bow with respect before the memory of Mevlana.” On the
philosophic value of his poetry, Hegel saw him as one of the great poets and thinkers in world history. At the close of his Encyclopaedia, in approaching God as Absolute Mind, Hegel cites the “excellent” Celaleddin Rumi at length, saying that “if we want to see the consciousness of the One . . . in its finest purity and sublimity,” we cannot do better than to read that mystic’s verses. The unity with the One, in love, set forth there is, Hegel concludes, “an exaltation above the finite and vulgar, a transfiguration of the natural and the spiritual, in which the externalism and transitoriness of immediate nature, and of empirical secular spirit, is discarded and absorbed.”

Celaleddin was born in Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan) in 1207, the son of a renowned scholar and mystic, Bahaüddin Veled. When Celaleddin was about twelve years old, his family was forced to flee probably either because of an impending Mongol onslaught or the result of an intellectual-political disagreement between Bahaüddin and the sultan. The family wandered through Persia and the Arab lands for ten years without finding a city receptive to Bahaüddin’s independent spirit and unorthodox ideas. Finally Konya welcomed them. Celaleddin was twenty-two years old when he arrived in Konya. Konya had been a Selçuk city for nearly 150 years. The capital of the Turkish Selçuk Empire, it was a center of high culture and enjoyed a climate of tolerance and freedom. Although predominantly Turkish and Muslim, the new home of Rumi had a cosmopolitan population with Christian, Jewish, Greek, and Armenian communities. Islamic sects and non-Muslim communities coexisted and flourished. He lived there until his death on 17 December 1273 at the age of sixty-six. The city afforded him the atmosphere and the opportunity to evolve and express his new ideas which received cultural values from the diverse religions and sects active in the Selçuk capital. He achieved distinction as a young theologian and Sufi (mystic). It was in Konya that Rumi’s philosophy engendered the Mevlevi movement or sect (which has come to be known in the West as “The Whirling Dervishes”).

In 1244, a dramatic encounter changed Mevlana’s spiritual
life. In Konya he met a wild mystic who seemed to have come out of nowhere—Şems of Tabriz. It is said that Rumi discovered the inner secrets of love through the influence of Şems—and came to the realization that love transcends the mind. At this stage in his life, at age thirty-seven, he was above all a scholar. He had read in depth in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Hebrew, and commanded vast encyclopaedic knowledge. But now passion reigned supreme over his mind. The frontiers of the intellect suddenly appeared too narrow, constricting, claustrophobic.

As a result of his affection, perhaps love, for Şems, he embarked on a period of virtually constant ecstasy and excitement, of poetic creativity, of immersion in music—and the sema, mystic whirling.

The passions of the mystic mind which Mevlana called “my spiritual kingdom,” intensified by his pains and ecstasies, gave rise to his collection of odes and quatrains entitled Divan-ı Kebir, and to the great Mesnevi, consisting of some 26,000 couplets, which is a masterwork of poetic narration and Sufi wisdom.

It is small wonder that the great mystic was given the supreme title of Mevlana (Our Lord, Grand Master). His reputation rests not only on the spiritual heights he attained in his poetry, but also on his having brought the dimension of aesthetics to mysticism in a systematic and comprehensive way. Poetry, music, dance, and the visual arts—rare in most Islamic movements—were integrally combined in the practices of the Mevlevi Order. Not only the synesthesia of the verbal, musical, and visual genres, but more comprehensively, the unified use of intellectual, spiritual, and artistic elements constituted the hallmark of Mevlana’s faith.

Rumi may well be the only major philosopher in history to express and formulate an entire system of thought in poetic form. Taken together, his Mesnevi, Divan-ı Kebir, and Rubaiyat represent perhaps the world’s most resourceful synthesis of poetry and philosophy, conflating the lyric, narrative, epic, didactic, epigrammatic, satiric, and elegiac norms. It embodies
the aesthetics of ethics and metaphysics. His *Mesnevi* makes a monumental synthesis of mystic ideas ranging from Neo-Platonism to Chinese thought, embracing Indian, Persian, and Greek mythology, stories from the holy books, Arab and Persian legends and folk stories. Certainly, no mystic poet has surpassed him in the more than seven centuries since his death.

The mystic’s predicament is that he or she has fallen apart from God’s reality and beauty temporarily. The divine image, God’s human manifestation, yearns to return to the beloved Godhead. The mystic feels a sublime love which remains unrequited until he suffers so intensely in his spiritual exile that he finally reaches the blissful state of the submergence of his selfhood, the death of his ego.

The time of attainment is celebrated in one of Rumi’s most rhapsodical *rubais*:

This is such a day: the sun is dazzling twice as before
A day beyond all days, unlike all others—say no more . . .
Lovers, I have great news for you: from the heavens above
This day of love brings songs and flowers in a downpour.

One of his most subtle *rubais* evokes the mystery of spiritual elevation beyond the proverbial spring. But only a unique soul is capable of it—a single branch among all the trees:

This season is not the spring, it is some other season,
The languid trances in the eyes have a different reason,
And there is another cause for the way each single branch
Dallies by itself while all the trees sway in unison.

For Rumi, love is the paramount component of mystic theology:

The religion of love is apart from all religions;
The lovers of God have no religion but God alone.

He felt little respect for organized religion and stressed the primacy of internal faith and inner allegiance:
I roamed the lands of Christendom from end to end
Searching all over, but He was not on the Cross.

I went into the temples where the Indians worship idols
And the Magians chant prayers to fire—I found no trace of Him.

Riding at full speed, I looked all over the Kaaba
But He was not at that sanctuary for young and old.

Then I gazed right into my own heart:
There, I saw Him . . . He was there and nowhere else.

Peace, in Rumi’s view, was a focal virtue to be nurtured and defended for the individual and the community. In his lifetime he witnessed the ravages of the Mongol invasion and the Crusades. World peace was a supreme ideal for him. He stood against injustice and tyranny: “When weapons and ignorance come together, pharaohs arise to devastate the world with their cruelty,” an observation that still holds true more than seven hundred years after Rumi’s death. One of his most eloquent couplets proclaims:

Whatever you think of war, I am far, far from it;
Whatever you think of love, I am that, only that, all that.

Rumi had a humanistic, universalist, humanitarian vision: “I am,” he declared, “a temple for all mankind.”

Like a compass I stand firm with one leg on my faith
And roam with the other leg all over the seventy-two nations.

— — —

Seventy-two nations hear of their secrets from us:
We are the reed whose song unites all nations and faiths.

Proclaiming that “my faith and my nation are God,” Rumi made a plea for universal brotherhood in a world torn asunder
by conflicting ideologies, sectarian divisions, religious strife, and jingoistic nationalism. One of his universalist statements is remarkable for its age: “Hindus, Kipchaks, Anatolians, Ethiopians—they all lie peacefully in their graves, separately, yet the same color.” “The Sultan of Lovers” also wrote one of the most eloquent lines of ecumenism:

In all mosques, temples, churches I find one shrine alone.

From the twentieth century onward, Rumi’s poetry gained international recognition thanks to extensive translation activity. Mevlevi ceremonies, too, earned passionate interest worldwide. In ballet, documentaries, music, literature, and scholarship, Rumi and the dervishes left their imprint. The year 2007, the 800th anniversary of Rumi’s birth, was a year of celebrations in dozens of countries and at the UN and UNESCO.

Rumi is included in this survey despite the fact that he composed his vast poetic corpus in Persian (except for a smattering of verses in Arabic, Turkish, etc.) because he lived and wrote in Konya in the heartland of Anatolia for almost two-thirds of his life, and his spirituality, mysticism, and poetics have exerted an encompassing and enduring impact on Turkish culture since the thirteenth century, starting with the prominent folk mystic poet Yunus Emre (d. ca. 1321).

By the late thirteenth century, Islamic mysticism—particularly Rumi’s Sufi philosophy—had become influential in many parts of the new homeland of the Turks. After several centuries of turmoil in Anatolia—with the ravages of the Crusades, the Byzantine-Selçuk wars, the Mongol invasions, strife among various Anatolian states and principalities, and frequent secessionist uprisings still visible or continuing—there was a craving for peace based on an appreciation of man’s inherent worth. Mysticism, which attributes godlike qualities to man, became the apostle of peace and the chief defender of man’s value.
Hacı Bektaş Veli

(13th Century)

An influential Anatolian mystic who formulated compelling ethical precepts and the founder of the Bektaşi sect which was to become the most popular of Anatolian sects. His teachings continue to inspire the people of Turkey.

—“If a road is not traveled with knowledge and science, it leads you to darkness.”
—“Never forget that your enemy, too, is human.”
—“Do not hurt even if you are hurt.”
—“If you sow a heart, you will reap a heart.”
—“If you want to live proud and brave, be just above all.”
—“How happy is he who holds a torch to darkness.”

The tradition of Turkish humanism is best represented by Yunus Emre. His poetry embodies the quintessence of Turkish Anatolian-Islamic humanism. He was the most significant literary figure of Turkish Anatolia to assimilate the teachings of Islam and to forge a synthesis of Islam’s primary values and mystic folk poetry. Yunus Emre, the first great Turkish humanist, stood squarely against Muslim dogmatists in expressing the primary importance of human existence. He spoke out for human dignity and put forth an image of man not as an outcast, but as an extension of God’s reality and love:

We love the created
For the Creator’s sake.

He went in search of God’s essence and, after sustained struggle and anguish, made his ultimate discovery:

The Providence that casts this spell
And speaks so many tongues to tell,
Transcends the earth, heaven and hell,
But is contained in this heart’s cast.
The yearning tormented my mind:
I searched the heavens and the ground;
I looked and looked, but failed to find.
I found Him inside man at last.

Suffused through the verses of Yunus Emre is the concept of love as the supreme attribute of man and God:

*When love arrives, all needs and flaws are gone.*

He found in love a spiritual force that transcends the narrow confines into which human beings are forced:

*The man who feels the marvels of true love Abandons his religion and nation.*

Naturalistic and ecumenical visions form an integral part of Yunus Emre’s theology:

*With the mountains and rocks I call you out, my God;*  
*With the birds as day breaks*  
*I call you out, my God.*

*With Jesus in the sky,*  
*Moses on Mount Sinai,*  
*Raising my scepter high,*  
*I call you out, my God.*

His poems frequently refer to his full acceptance of the “four holy books” rather than a strict adherence to the Koran, the other three being the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Talmud.
Many of Yunus Emre’s fundamental concepts are steeped in the Sufi tradition, particularly as set forth by Rumi who utilized the legacy of Persia in cultural and linguistic terms. Like the medieval authors and thinkers in Europe who set aside their national languages in favor of Latin, Rumi chose Persian as his vehicle of expression. But Yunus Emre, like Dante, preferred the vernacular of his own people. Because he spoke their language and gave them the sense and the succor of divine love in such lines as “Whoever has one drop of love / Possesses God’s existence,” he became a legendary figure and a folk saint. In his lifetime, he traveled far and wide as a “dervish,” not “colonizing” like many of his fellow dervishes, but serving the function of *propaganda fide* through his poetry. For more than seven centuries, his verses have been memorized, recited, and celebrated in the heartland of Anatolia. His fame has become so widespread that about a dozen towns claim to have his burial place.

Yunus Emre had a penchant for indigenous forms, used simple syllabic meters, and expressed his sentiments and the wisdom of his faith in the common man’s language. Among his stylistic virtues were distilled statements, plain images and metaphors, and the avoidance of prolixity. He explicitly cautioned against loquaciousness and bloated language:

*Too many words are fit for a beast of burden.*

Yunus Emre practiced *aemulatio*, free use of living tradition, whereas others often produced *imitatio*, servile copies of earlier verses. He was able to use the forms (particularly the *gazel*), the prosody (the quantitative metric system called *aruz*), and the vocabulary of Arabic and Persian poetry. But most of his superior poems utilize the best resources of Turkish poetics, including the syllabic meters.

Yunus Emre’s permanence and power emanate not merely from his language, but from his themes of timeless significance, from his universal concepts and concerns. He is very much a poet of today not only in Turkey, but the world over. We
live in an age which articulates the dramatic contrast of love and hostility. War is renounced as the immediate evil and the ultimate crime against humanity. Love is recognized as the celebration of life. A mighty slogan of the 1960s and 1970s was “Make love / Not war.” Miraculously, this forceful statement is an echo from seven centuries ago, from Yunus Emre who expressed the same idea in a rhymed couplet:

*I am not here on earth for strife,*

*Love is the mission of my life.*

In his own age and down to the present, Yunus Emre has provided spiritual guidance and aesthetic enjoyment. His poetry is replete with universal verities and values, and expresses the ecstasy of communion with nature and union with God. In his thought, the theme of union with God frequently appears as an incipient utopia. Also, his humanism includes, in Hegel’s words, the “urging of the spirit outward—that desire on the part of man to become acquainted with his world.” Yunus Emre goes beyond this urge, and aesthetically revels in the beauty of the world. He expresses the typical humanistic joy of life:

*This world is a young bride dressed in bright red and green;*  
*Look on and on, you can’t have enough of that bride.*

Yunus Emre spurned book learning if it did not have humanistic relevance because he believed in man’s godliness:

*If you don’t identify Man as God,*  
*All your learning is of no use at all.*

In this sense, he was akin to Petrarch, also a fourteenth-century poet, and to Erasmus, a century later, who, as a part of classical or Renaissance humanism, shunned the dogmatism imposed on man by scholasticism, tried to instill in the average man a rejuvenated sense of the importance of his life on earth. Similar to Dante’s work, Yunus Emre’s poetry symbolized the
ethical patterns of mortal life while depicting the higher values of immortal being. Yunus Emre also offered to the common man “the optimism of mysticism”—the conviction that human beings, sharing godly attributes, are capable of transcending themselves:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The image of the Godhead is a mirror;} \\
\text{The man who looks sees his own face in there.}
\end{align*}
\]

The central doctrine of Sufism is \( \text{vahdet-i vücut} \) (the unity of existence). Yunus Emre explicitly states this fundamental tenet:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The universe is the oneness of Deity,} \\
\text{The true man is he who knows this unity.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{You had better seek Him in yourself,} \\
\text{You and He aren’t apart—you’re one.}
\end{align*}
\]

“God’s revelation in man” and “the human being as a true reflection of God’s beautiful images” are recurrent themes in Yunus Emre’s poems:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He is God Himself—human are His images.} \\
\text{See for yourself: God is man, that is what He is.}
\end{align*}
\]

In an age when hostilities, rifts, and destruction were rampant, Yunus Emre was able to give expression to an all-embracing love of humanity and to his concepts of universal brotherhood which transcended all schisms and sects:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For those who truly love God and His ways} \\
\text{All the people of the world are brothers and sisters.}
\end{align*}
\]

Humanism upholds the ideal of the total community of mankind. Yunus Emre’s humanist credo is also based on international understanding which transcends ethnic, political, and sectarian divisions:
The man who doesn’t see the nations of the world as one
Is a rebel even if the pious claim he’s holy.

In a similar vein, Yunus declares his belief in virtue and unitarianism:

Mystic is what they call me,
Hate is my only enemy;
I harbor a grudge against none.
To me the whole wide world is one.

Yunus Emre’s view of mysticism is closely allied with the concept that all human beings are born of God’s love and that they are therefore equal and worthy of peace on earth. He decried religious intolerance and dwelt on the “unity of humanity”:

We regard no one’s religion as contrary to ours,
True love is born when all faiths are united as a whole.

In Yunus Emre’s view, service to society is the ultimate moral ideal and the individual can find his own highest good in working for the benefit of all. His exhortations call for decent treatment of deprived people—“To look askance at the lowly is the wrong way”—and for social interdependence and charity:

Toil, earn, eat, and give others your wages.

Hand out to others what you earn,
Do the poor people a good turn.

He spoke out courageously against the oppression of underprivileged people by the rulers, landowners, wealthy men, officials, and religious leaders:

Kindness of the lords ran its course,
Now each one goes straddling a horse,
They eat the flesh of the paupers,
All they drink is the poor men’s blood.

This humble mystic struck hard at the heartlessness of men in positions of power:

The lords are wild with wealth and might,
They ignore the poor people’s plight;
Immersed in selfhood which is blight,
Their hearts are shorn of charity.

Yunus Emre denigrated the orthodox views and the strict teachings of the pharisees:

The preachers who usurp the Prophet’s place
Inflict distress and pain on the populace.

He had no use for the trappings of organized religion:

True faith is in the head, not in the headgear.

— — —

A single visit into the heart is
Better than a hundred pilgrimages.

Claiming that the true believer “has no hope of Paradise nor fear of Hell,” the mystic poet is capable of taking even God himself to task:

You set a scale to weigh deeds, for your aim
Is to hurl me into Hell’s crackling flame.

You can see everything, you know me—fine;
Then, why must you weigh all these deeds of mine?

In poem after poem, he reminds the fanatics that love is supreme and stringent rules are futile:
Yunus Emre says to you, pharisee,
Make the holy pilgrimage if need be
A thousand times—but if you ask me,
The visit to a heart is best of all.

He warns that worship is not enough, all the ablutions and obeisances will not wash away the sin of maltreatment, offense, or exploitation committed against a good person:

If you break a true believer’s heart once,
It’s no prayer to God—this obeisance.

Like Mansur al-Hallaj, one of the greatest Islamic Sufis of all time, who was put to death for proclaiming “Anal Haq” (I am God), Yunus Emre announces that he has achieved divinity:

Since the start of time I have been Mansur.
I have become God Almighty, brother.

He made a poetic plea for peace and the brotherhood of mankind—a plea for humanism which is still supremely relevant in today’s world convulsing with conflict and war:

Come, let us all be friends for once,
Let us make life easy on us,
Let us be lovers and loved ones,
The earth shall be left to no one.

This medieval humanist achieved new international stature when, in November 1989, the UNESCO General Conference unanimously passed a resolution declaring 1991, the 750th anniversary of the poet’s birth, “The International Yunus Emre Year” in recognition of his enduring ideals of universalism, of the ecumenical spirit, of humanitarian values, and of human dignity raised to the level of divinity.
That year marked an extensive program of Yunus Emre activities, including translations into numerous major and minor languages, symposia and seminars, telecasts and radio broadcasts, lecture series, poetry readings, and exhibitions, in Turkey and in numerous other countries on all continents.

Yunus Emre’s humanistic and aesthetic values, which were kept alive in Anatolia’s oral tradition, have had a powerful impact on Turkish culture since the early part of the twentieth century and appear likely to remain influential in the future.
OTTOMAN GLORIES
The Ottoman state had a life span of more than six centuries (1299–1922). A single dynasty reigned in unbroken continuity. Islam was not only the religious faith but also the political ideology of the basically theocratic Ottoman state. The empire was multiracial, multinational, multireligious, multilingual. In ruling over these disparate elements, the Ottoman establishment achieved remarkable success in administrative, military, and fiscal organization.

Ottoman literature, which stressed poetry as the superior art, utilized the forms and the aesthetic values of Islamic Arabo-Persian literature. The educated elite, led by the sultans (many of whom were accomplished poets themselves), produced a huge body of verse whose hallmarks included refined diction, abstruse vocabulary, euphony, romantic agony, and dedication to formalism and tradition, and the Sufi brand of mysticism. Prose, although not held in high esteem by the Ottoman literary establishment, accounts for some excellent achievements, particularly the travelogues of the seventeenth-century cultural commentator Evliya Çelebi. The Ottoman Empire also nurtured a rich theatrical tradition, which consisted of Karagöz (shadow plays), Meddah (storyteller and impersonator), and Orta oyunu (a type of commedia dell’arte).

Three main literary traditions evolved: 1) Tekke (sect, denomination) literature; 2) Oral folk literature; 3) Divan (elite) literature. Oral folk literature and Divan literature hardly ever influenced each other; in fact, they remained oblivious of one another. Tekke literature, however, had an easy intercourse with both, utilizing their forms, prosody, vocabulary, and stylistic devices in a pragmatic fashion.

Religious (Tekke) poetry flourished among the mystics, the Muslim clergy, and the adherents of various doctrines and denominations. It served as the main repository of theological sectarianism and was in itself a poetry of dissent and discord. It embodied the schism between the Sunni and Shiite segments of the Muslim-Turkish population and embraced a whole spate of unorthodox doctrines (tarikat), from tasavvuf, libertarian
mysticism, to anarchical Bektashiism and the Hurufi, Yesevi, Mevlevi, Bayrami, Alevi, Kadiri, Halveti, and Melami sects that were often hotbeds of political opposition within the theocratic system and contributed to unrest and strife in Anatolia.

Members of the *tekkes* (sect lodges, theological centers) were particularly prolific in the domain of religious verse. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Sultan Veled (son of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi), Âşık Pasha (also a fervent advocate of developing the literary resources of Turkish), and Gülşehri and Şeyyat Hamza (both early masters of Islamic poetry) set the inspirational tone which would remain as the hallmark of this voluminous literature.

The fourteenth century produced a remarkable collection of religious epics, tales, and stories in verse marked by didacticism rather than lyric artistry. These poems, composed principally for uneducated listeners, served to spread the Islamic faith.

The *magnum opus* of religious literature emerged in 1409: the *Mevlid-i Şerif* by Süleyman Çelebi (d. 1422), an adulation of the Prophet Muhammad chanted as a requiem among Muslim Turks. The tradition which yielded this masterpiece about the Prophet’s life and the magnificence of Islam also produced many other verse narratives about the Prophet and Islam.

A great poet to lose his life because of passionate mystic verse, which incensed the traditionalists, was Nesimi (d. early 15th century). Two folk poets, Kaygusuz Abdal (15th century) and Pir Sultan Abdal (16th century), whose poetry represented the Alevi-Bektaşi movement (long considered heretical) and expressed a strong challenge to the orthodoxy of Islam, fired the imagination of many Anatolian communities. Even God was not spared from badinage. Kaygusuz Abdal wrote several poems that have barbs against God:

> You produced rebel slaves and cast them aside,
> You just left them there and made your exit, my God.

> You built a hair-thin bridge for your slaves to walk on,
> Let’s see if you’re brave enough to cross it, my God.
Pir Sultan Abdal challenged imperial power and local authorities in abrasive terms:

*In Istanbul he must come down:*

*The sovereign with his empire’s crown.*

Legend has it that he became the leader of a popular uprising and urged kindred spirits to join the rebellion:

*Come, soul brothers, let’s band together,*

*Brandish our swords against the godless,*

*And restore the poor people’s rights.*

Pir Sultan Abdal lambasted a judge:

*You talk of faith which you don’t heed,*

*You shun God’s truth, command and creed,*

*A judge will always feed his own greed,*

*Could Satan be worse than this devil?*

He defied his persecutor Hızır Pasha, who was to have him captured and hanged:

*Come on, man! There, Hızır Pasha!*

*Your wheel is bound to break in two;*

*You put your faith in your sultan:*

*Some day, though, he will tumble too.*

The following lines, attributed to Dadaloğlu (d. ca. 1868) were meant, in Pir Sultan Abdal’s tradition, to fire the blood of the masses:

*The state has issued an edict against us*

*The edict is the sultan’s but the mountains are ours.*

Oral folk literature, created by the collective poetic and narrative faculty of the common people of Anatolia, has been kept
alive through the centuries and down to the present day by ozans (minstrels), saz poets (poet-musicians), and âşık s (troubadours). Folk poetry has always voiced, in its spontaneous, sincere, and often matter-of-fact fashion, the sensibilities, yearnings, social protests, and criticisms of the uneducated classes. It uses Turkic verse forms, i.e., türkü, koşma, manı, destan, semai, varsağı. Mostly extemporized and sung to musical accompaniment, replete with assonances, alliterations, and inexact rhymes, and composed in simple syllabic meters, folk poetry harped on the themes of love, heroism, beauties of nature, and at times Islamic mysticism. Unsophisticated and based on folk wisdom, it evolved a serene realism, an earthy humor, and a mellifluous lyric quality.

Köroğlu

This folk poet, who probably lived in the sixteenth century, became a legendary hero, who rebelled against oppression and exploitation in the rural areas. Succeeding generations have celebrated him as a symbol of courage in deed and in words.

In a poem Köroğlu challenged the Bey (lord) of Bolu:

Here I send my greetings to the Bey of Bolu!

He should come up these hills and get his comeuppance

As the rustling of arrows keeps echoing through

And the clanking of shields resounds off the mountains.

In the same poem, Köroğlu tells the story:

Then we were faced with legions of the enemy

And on our brows appeared dark words of destiny.

Rifles were invented—that ruined bravery:

Now the curved sword has to stay in its sheath and rust.

But Köroğlu and his braves never lost their indomitable spirit:

Even so, Köroğlu’s fame as a hero will glow!

Enemies will flee as I deal blow after blow,

Covered with all that froth from my Gray Horse’s mouth

And with my trousers steeped in the blood of the foe!
When people in nearby villages heard that their hero’s forces were vastly outnumbered, they rushed to give Köroğlu their support. Most of them did not even have bows and arrows, let alone rifles: they brought their pickaxes and shovels. The Bey was frightened by this massive turnout of support, by these multitudes ready to give their lives for the rebel cause—and he ordered his army to retreat. Köroğlu rejoiced . . .

The hero holds fast, cowards flee,
The battlefield rumbles and roars.
Supreme king’s court opens its doors:
The palace shakes, rumbles and roars.

The proud hero will never yield.
His arrows pound the battlefield;
When his mace strikes hard at the shield
That huge shield shakes, rumbles and roars.

Arrows are shot from his fortress:
May God save you from that distress!
Hearing Köroğlu’s battle cries,
Every place shakes, rumbles and roars.

Popular culture in the Ottoman state, keeping alive the Turkic rather than the Islamic patterns of thought and values, also constituted a sub rosa system of deviation from the norms of the educated classes. Folk poetry came to typify and embody the gulf between the urban elite and the common people of the rural areas. It retained the pre-Islamic and nomadic values of the Turks, and regenerated them in archetypal form. Written for (or composed) by ill-educated and often illiterate minstrels and troubadours, it had little susceptibility to or proclivity for the characteristics of Divan poetry, which boasted of erudition. The folk poet probably had no sense of participation in the
Arabo-Persian flavor of Ottoman culture; his concern was local and autochthonous, and for purposes of direct communication he used a simple vernacular immediately intelligible to his uneducated audiences. So, the substratum of indigenous culture resisted the temptation to borrow from the elite poets who, in turn, were imitating their Persian and (occasionally) Arabic counterparts. In this sense, one could conceivably regard the corpus of folk poetry as a massive resistance to or a constant subversion of the values adopted by the Ottoman ruling class. It also gave voice at times to the spirit of rebellion against central authority and local feudal lords.

Anatolian minstrelsy produced such major figures as Köroğlu, the stentorian heroic poet of the sixteenth century, Karacaoğlan (17th century), who wrote lilting lyrics of love and pastoral beauty, Âşık Ömer and Gevherî in the eighteenth century, and Dadaloğlu, Dertli, Bayburtlu Zihni, Erzurumlu Emrah, and Seyrani in the nineteenth century.

Karacaoğlan

With its tender flakes, snow flutters about,

Keeps falling, calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”

This frenzied heart of mine wanders about

Like minstrels, calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”

Elif’s robe is embroidered all over;

Her eyes—like a baby goshawk’s—glower.

She smells lovely like a highland flower,

With those scents calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”

When she frowns, her glance is a dart that goes

Into my heart: I fall into death’s throes.

In her white hand she holds a pen—she knows

What she writes, calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”
Right in front of her home a trellis stands;
There’s Elif, holding glasses in her hands.
It’s as if a duck whose head has green strands
Gently floats, calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”

I am the Minstrel: your slave for my part.
There’s no love for other belles in my heart.
Unbuttoning the shirt, I tear apart
The collar, calling out “Elif . . . Elif . . .”

The moods of folk poetry ranged from tender love to angry protest. For instance, the closing lines of an old anonymous *mani* (quatrain) inquires: “There’s the trace of a gaze on your face / Who has looked at you, my darling?” And in the nineteenth century, Serdari be moans: “The tax collector rips through the villages / His whip in hand, he tramples on the poor.”

Folk literature produced a large corpus of stories, tales, allegories, fables, and riddles. The common people’s dramatic imagination nurtured the *Karagöz* shadow plays. It is significant that in these plays the two principal characters, Karagöz and Hacivat, respectively represent a folksy good-hearted simpleton and a foxy foolish blabbermouth who tries to simulate urbane speech.

In Ottoman culture no “tragedy” evolved, and “comedy” was confined to *Karagöz* and *commedia dell’arte* (*Orta oyunu*). Tragedy places the human predicament in an identifiable setting and usually depicts personal or social rifts by dint of the vicissitudes of heroes, and comedy pokes fun at society in explicit terms. Conceivably, Ottoman society, particularly the establishment, had little sympathy for such representations by live actors. Or perhaps poetry was so pervasive and satisfying that authors did not consider it necessary or useful to experiment with other genres. In the vacuum, satire flourished. It performed the function of exposing folly, challenging prevailing values,
unmasking hypocrisy, and denouncing injustice. In more recent
times, the focal targets of satire have been morals and manners,
cant, political norms, and politicians themselves.

The Ottoman elite was passionately devoted to poetry. Perhaps the crowning achievement of Ottoman culture was
poetry, which also served as the propaedeutic to all other literary
arts and as an element of visual and plastic arts like calligraphy,
architecture, miniature painting, and the decorative arts. Divan
poetry, as the Turkish elite poetry influenced by Arabic and
Persian literature is often called, found favor at the court and at
the coffeehouse, it satisfied the aesthetic needs of the elite and
the man in the street. Significantly, two thirds of the sultans
were poets—some, particularly Mehmed the Conqueror and
Süleyman the Magnificent, were first-rate.

“Prose,” as E. J. W. Gibb observed, “was as a rule reserved
for practical and utilitarian purposes.” Poets and intellectuals
spurned prose as being too easy. Nefî, the great classical lyricist
and satirist of the seventeenth century, boasted: “I would not
deign to write prose, but if I did / Heavenly angels would chant
it time and again.” Verse often preempted the functions of
prose. Consequently, in addition to the massive output of lyric
and mystic poetry, a great many didactic, theological, narrative,
historical, and scholarly works were also written in verse.

These included chronicles of war and conquest, albums of
festivities and weddings, books of counsel, etc. In the nineteenth
century, versifiers even came up with a chemistry textbook in
poetic form and Turkish–French, Turkish–Armenian, and
Turkish–Greek dictionaries in meter and rhyme.

Notwithstanding the classical poets’ pejorative view of prose,
a fair retrospective assessment today leads one to numerous
praiseworthy prose works produced by the Ottomans—religious
commentaries, narratives, epics of the fourteenth and fifteenth
centuries, the histories of Âşıkpaşazade (d. 1502), Neşrî (d.
second decade of the 16th century), Lütfi Pasha (d. 1563), Âli
(d. 1600), Peçevî (d. 1649?), Naima (d. 1716), and Silâhtar
Evliya Çelebi

Evliya Çelebi never ceases to amaze. His ten-volume Seyahatname, in unfurling the panorama of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century, defies genres. It is geography and history, sociology and literature, data bank and euhemerism. Its bland title, which simply signifies “book of travels,” is an expression of humility from the author-narrator, who frequently refers to himself as humble, lowly, and poor. Seyahatname, in its sweep and thrust, invites comparison with Strabo, Procopius, Marco Polo, and Ibn Battuta. Passages from it read like Carlyle or Rabelais, Pepys or Pater. In Evliya Çelebi’s sprawling saga of the Ottoman world lies an immensely rich source of precise information, as well as hearsay and flights of imagination, for scholars in the Ottoman field to draw on and to savor. To savor, to be sure, because this travelogue is also an engrossing literary work which comes close to ranking as the Ottoman prose masterpiece.

Mehmed (d. 1724), the theological treatises of Sinan Pasha (d. 1486), the tract on ethics by Kınalızade Ali (d. 1572), the philosophical narratives of Veysî (d. 1628), commentaries on reforms by İbrahim Müteferrika (d. 1745), who also introduced the printing press to the Ottoman Empire, and Koca Sekbanbaşı (d. 1804). Among the chief works of Ottoman prose are the monumental travelogues of Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682), a fascinating account of the geography, social and economic aspects, and culture and daily life of the Ottomans, the political and cultural commentaries of Kâtip Çelebi (d. 1658), the famous essay (Risale) about sociopolitical reforms by Koçi Bey (17th century), the ambassadorial journals of Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1732), and the semi-surrealistic imaginative stories by Aziz Efendi (d. 1798).

Ottoman literature produced no literary criticism except for biographies, bibliographies, and superficial commentaries. These, referred to as tezkire’ tüş-şuara, are little more than a “Who’s Who in Ottoman Poetry.” Among the best specimens are those produced in the sixteenth century by Şehî, Lâtîfî, Âşık Çelebi, and Kınalzade Hasan. The glaring fact is that Ottoman literature from its beginnings until the second half of the nineteenth century functioned in a critical vacuum, aside
from extravagant sycophantic praises or scathing satire that one finds—and immediately dismisses as worthless—in the work of some poets.

_Divan_ poetry was composed by and for an intellectual elite mostly affiliated with the court. Most of the prominent poets received a theological education at a _medrese_ (Muslim academy) where instruction was given in Arabic and Persian, both considered a _sine qua non_ for a man of letters. The Ottoman poets as a rule considered it the epitome of literary achievement to publish a collection of poems in Persian or Arabic—or preferably both. One of the two or three greatest classical poets—Fuzuli—actually wrote three _divans_ (collections of poems)—in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

From beginning to end, classical poetry remained under the pervasive influence of Persian and Arabic poetry: it imitated and tried to emulate the verse forms, rhyme-and-rhythm patterns, meters, mythology, even the _Weltanschauung_ of the Persian and Arabic masters. It also adopted a substantial portion of their vocabulary.

_Aruz_ (Arabic: _arud_), a quantitative prosody devised by the Arabs and perfected by the Persians, dominated _Divan_ poetry. This metric form is based upon the arrangement of syllables according to vowel length and consonantal ending. Each short vowel at the end of a syllable accounts for a short sound (‘). A syllable ending in a consonant or a long vowel is taken as a long sound (–). To illustrate the meter of a famous line:

Â-şîk ol-dur kim ki-lar câ-nîn fe-dâ câ-nâ-m-na


In this complaint by Fuzuli, that “The lover is he who sacrifices his life to his loved one,” the meter as it stands is one of the most frequently used. The name of the meter is _Fâilâtûn_ / _fâilâtûn_ / _fâilâtûn_ / _fâilûn_, which reproduces the sound pattern. The final _k_ of _âşık_ is linked with the word _oldur_ and the final syllable of the line, as in the case of all meters, is automatically accepted as long even though it ends in a short vowel. The poet could choose from about a hundred different meters.
This prosodic structure was essentially ill-suited to Turkish phonology. Aruz meters have a preponderance of long syllables whereas Turkish makes frequent use of short vowels. Three successive short syllables, for instance, can be used only at the end of just a few meters, and there is no meter which can accommodate four successive short syllables. (The word A-na-do-lu, meaning Anatolia, to cite one blatant example, could not fit any aruz meter.) This incongruity caused two anomalous situations: it forced poets to distort the pronunciation of hundreds of Turkish words in order to fit them into the molds of the meters and to borrow in huge numbers Persian and Arabic words with long vowels. The prosody afforded definite rhythms and predetermined euphonic structures which, as pleasing to the ear as they certainly are, can become repetitious and tedious to the point where the substance is virtually subjugated to the meter.

Divan poetry also used the major verse forms of Persian and Arabic literatures: gazel, the lyric ode, with a minimum of five and a maximum of fifteen couplets (aa / ba / ca / da / ea); kaside (often used for the panegyric, with the same rhyme pattern as the gazel, but running as long as thirty-three to ninety-nine couplets); mesnevi (self-rhyming couplets by the hundreds or thousands used for narratives or didactic works); rubai (the quatrain a / a / b / a expressing a distilled idea); tuyuq (a quatrain utilizing a specific aruz meter); şarkı (originally called murabba, often used for lyrics of love and levity); and musammat (extended versions of many of the other basic verse forms).

Form reigned supreme over Divan poetry. Content, most Divan poets felt, should be the self-generating substance whose concepts and values were not to be questioned, let alone renovated. As in the case of the performance of classical music in the West, craftsmanship was creative artistry, virtuosity was virtue.

Despite the tyranny of form, which even forced on the poet the requirement that each poetic statement be contained within the couplet or distich and that a static metaphorical system be
regenerated with such sets of conceptual congruity as **gül**, the rose representing the beautiful sweetheart, and **bülbül**, meaning the distraught nightingale symbolizing the eloquent poet in love, prominent Divan poets attained a profound spirituality, a trenchant sensitivity, an overflowing eroticism. The themes recurring in the work of the masters range from self-glorification to self-abnegation, from agony to ebullient joy, from fanatic abstinence to uninhibited hedonism. Islamic mysticism, as the soul’s passionate yearning to merge with God, constitutes the superstructure of much Divan poetry.

Among the early masters of the Divan tradition are Ahmedî (d. 1413), Ahmed Pasha (d. 1497), Ahmed-i-Dâi (14th–15th century), and Necatî (d. 1509). In the early fifteenth century, Şeyhi, a physician-poet, wrote one of the most remarkable satires of socioeconomic inequity, a verse allegory called “Harname” (The Donkey Story) in which he contrasted a starving donkey with well-fed oxen:

*Once there was a feeble donkey, pining away,*
*Bent under the weight of his load, he used to bray.*

*Carrying wood here and water there was his plight.*
*He felt miserable, and languished day and night.*

*So heavy were the burdens he was forced to bear*
*That the sore spots on his skin left him without hair.*

*His flesh and skin, too, nearly fell off his body;*
*Under his loads, from top to toe, he was bloody.*

*Whoever saw his appearance remarked, in fact,*
*“Surprising that this bag of bones can walk intact!”*

*His lips dangled, and his jaws had begun to droop;*
*He got tired if a fly rested on his croup.*
Goose pimples covered his body whenever he saw,
With those starving eyes, just a handful of straw.

On his ears there was an assembly of crows;
Over the slime of his eyes flies marched in rows.

Whenever the saddle was taken off his rumps,
What remained looked altogether like a dog’s dumps.

One day, his master decided to show pity,
And for once he treated the beast with charity:

He took the saddle off, let him loose on the grass;
As he walked on, while grazing, suddenly the ass

Saw some robust oxen pacing the pastureland:
Their eyes were fiery and their buttocks grand.

With all the grass they gobbled up, they were so stout
That if one hair were plucked, all that fat would seep out.

Jauntily they walked, carefree, their hearts filled with zest;
Summer sheds, winter barns, and nice places to rest.

No halter’s pain for them nor the saddle’s anguish,
No heavy loads causing them to wail or languish.

Struck with wonder and full of envy, he stood there,
Brooding over his own plight which was beyond compare:
We were meant to be the equals of these creatures,
We have the same hands and feet, same forms and features.

Why then is the head of each ox graced by a crown
And why must poverty and dire need weigh us down?

This depiction of oxen graced by crowns was certainly courageous as satire, because the target in the allegory could well be the sultan and his entourage.

Fuzuli (d. 1556), the great figure of Ottoman literature, emerged at the peak of the Ottoman Empire’s grandeur. He is the author of the *mesnevi*, a long narrative poem of close to 4,000 couplets, entitled *Leylâ vû Mecnûn* (*Leylâ and Mejnûn*), which explores the philosophical implications of worldly and mystic love.

Perhaps no other poet exerted as much influence as Fuzuli on the elite poetry of the succeeding few centuries. Among his most memorable lines are:

\[ I \text{ wish I had a thousand lives in this broken heart of mine} \]
\[ \text{So I could sacrifice myself to you once with each one.} \]

---

The state is topsy-turvy like a cypress reflected on water.

---

*Fuzuli*

16th Century

*I reap no gains but trouble at your place when I come near;*

*My wish to die on your love’s path is all that I hold dear.*

*I am the reed-flute when griefs assemble. Cast to the winds*

*What you find in my burnt-up, dried-up body except desire.*
May bloody tears draw curtains on my face the day we part
So that my eyes will see just that moon-faced love when they peer.

My loneliness has grown to such extremes that not a soul
Except the whirlwind of disaster spins within my sphere.

There’s nobody to burn for my sake but my heart’s own fire;
My door is opened by none other than the soft zephyr.

Oh waves, don’t ravage all my surging teardrops, for this flood
Has caused all welfare buildings save this one to disappear.

The rites of love are on; how can the poet hold his sighs:
Except for sound, what profit could be found in me to clear?

Hayalî (d. 1557), Yahya of Taşlıca (d. 1582), Şeyhülislâm Yahya (d. 1644), and Nailî (d. 1666) achieved well-deserved renown for virtuosity, graceful lyricism, and an elegant use of the language. Baki, the great sixteenth-century poet laureate, attained wide fame for the aesthetic perfection of his secular gazels and kasides:

**With all our heart, we’re at love’s beck and call:**
We don’t resist the will of fate at all.

**We never bow to knaves for this vile world;**
*In God we trust, we’re only in His thrall.*

**We don’t rely on the state’s golden staff—**
The grace of God grants us our wherewithal.
Although our vices shock the universe,
We want no pious acts to save our soul.

Thank God, all earthly glory must perish,
But Baki’s name endures on the world’s scroll.

Since Divan literature was inundated by vocabulary borrowed from Arabic and Persian, much of it arcane and inaccessible, some poets opted for a more dominant use of words of Turkish origin. This “re-Turkification” process received impetus from literary precedents. In the first half of the sixteenth century, for instance, a movement called Türki-i basit (Simple Turkish), led by Nazmi of Edirne (d. after 1554) and Mahremî of Tatavla (d. ca. 1536), advocated the use of colloquial Turkish, free of Arabic and Persian borrowings and of all Persian izafet formulations, in the classical stanzaic forms utilizing the Arabic-Persian prosody (aruz) and showed, on the strength of their large and impressive output, that success could be achieved along these lines, pointing to the emergence of an original body of “national literature.”

Ottoman elite poetry has often been criticized for being too abstract, too repetitious, and excessively divorced from society and concrete reality. Modernists in the latter part of the nineteenth century took the classical poets to task for having abandoned the mainstream of Turkish national literary tradition in favor of servile imitations of Arabic and Persian poetry. In Republican Turkey, not only the advocates of folk poetry and of modern European poetry, but also a prominent scholar of Ottoman literature, Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı (d. 1982), launched frontal attacks. Among the principal objections were stringent formalism, abstract substance and formulations, frozen metaphors and cliché images, and a masochistic and misogynistic view of love and life.

Although there is a measure of truth in these critical comments, Divan poetry achieved impressive success as poésie pure with a commitment, in Platonic terms, to abstraction being more
real than reality itself. The auditory imagination operative in its aesthetics never fails to impress the sensitive ear. While it may be steeped in evocations of *la belle dame sans merci*, the emotional dimensions that the most accomplished classical poets like Fuzuli and Şeyh Galib establish in their poems sway the romantic souls on one level and the cerebral readers on another. And despite much repetition of metaphor and stock epithets, *Divan* poets offer innumerable fresh, compelling, imaginative metaphors and images.

Baki’s proverbial line, which posited the supremacy of eloquent sound in a fleeting world, still holds true:

*What endures in this dome is but a pleasant echo.*

The mystic strain seems to have embodied the sense of alienation experienced by the Ottoman intellectual. A famous couplet by Neşatî (d. 1674) epitomizes this feeling:

*We have so removed our physical existence*

*We are now hidden in the gleaming mirror.*

The same sense of dissociation from reality in its worldly or external aspects, the anguish of exile, and the sorrow of spiritual banishment that run through Ottoman mystic poetry are not simply the stock sentiments of Islamic mysticism, but also statements of discontent about the structure and the functioning of society. The tone is almost always pessimistic, and often nihilistic, albeit in anticipation of ultimate happiness. A sullen craft and art, the poetry of the mystics nurtured a special branch of literature, as it were, of complaint, chronic dissatisfaction, and disenchantment with the times. Fuzuli voiced this gloomy attitude in many well-known lines:

*Friends are heartless, the world ruthless, time without peace, Trouble abounds, no one befriends you, the foe is strong, fortune is weak. — — —*

*Rifts are rampant, the community of peace is rent with fear, I am at a loss, for I can find no true pathfinder.*
Within the theocratic framework, the sultan was seen and shown by the poets as sacrosanct. Ottoman panegyrics charted a progression of love—from an ordinary sweetheart to the sultan and ultimately to God. In fact, in many Ottoman poems, written by the court poets as well as by the independents and mystics, a three-level interpretation of the “beloved” is possible: darling, king, and divine being.

This progression—or perhaps deliberate obfuscation—growing in concentric circles was reinforced by the attribution of absolute beauty (cemâl-i mutlak) and absolute perfection (kemâl-i mutlak) to God. The element of celâl (implying might, greatness, and awesome presence) also figured prominently. So the composite picture of the “loved one,” of the sultan, and of God in Divan literature is one of inaccessibility, beauty, glory, and cruelty. In a much subtler conception than mere masochism, the Divan metaphor equates beauty with pain and strives to arrive at pathei mathos, that is, wisdom through suffering. In a sense, establishment poets seemed to present the sultan or any person in power as having the divine right—like God—to inflict pain and misery. The mystics, in their insistence on the human predicament whereby separation from God is woeful, intensified the myth—particularly when they offered the ideals of love’s torture and self-sacrifice.

The metaphorical progression from the “beloved” to the sultan and further on to God had its concomitant of complaint. Prostration became, in effect, a form of protest:

Fuzuli is a beggar imploring your grace’s favor;
Alive he is your dog, dead he is dust at your feet.

Make him live or die, the judgment and the power are yours,
My vision my life my master my loved one my royal Sultan.

Because the poets frequently bemoaned their suffering in the hands of the loved one, the complaint was thereby about the sultan and about God, whose will the sultan represented on earth.
Love letter in poetic form sent by Süleyman the Magnificent to his wife Hürrem

My very own queen, my everything, my beloved, my bright moon;
My intimate companion, my one and all, sovereign of all beauties, my sultan.

My life, the gift I own, my be-all, my elixir of Paradise, my Eden,
My spring, my joy, my glittering day, my exquisite one who smiles on and on.

My sheer delight, my revelry, my feast, my torch, my sunshine, my sun in heaven;
My orange, my pomegranate, the flaming candle that lights up my pavilion.

My plant, my candy, my treasure who gives no sorrow but the world’s purest pleasure;
Dearest, my turtledove, my all, the ruler of my heart’s Egyptian dominion.

My Istanbul, my Karaman, and all the Anatolian lands that are mine;
My Bedakhshan and my Kipchak territories, my Baghdad and my Khorasan.

My darling with that lovely hair, brows curved like a bow, eyes that ravish: I am ill.
If I die, yours is the guilt. Help, I beg you, my love from a different religion.

I am at your door to glorify you. Singing your praises, I go on and on:
My heart is filled with sorrow, my eyes with tears. I am the Lover—this joy is mine.

Muhibbi (Sultan Süleyman’s pen name)
16th Century
Those sultans who were themselves poets also contributed to the view of their reign being less valuable than love, particularly the love of God. Mehmed the Conqueror (d. 1481) expressed this concept in a pithy line:

*I am the slave of a Sultan whose slave is the world’s sultan.*

Kanuni Süleyman (better known in the West as Süleyman the Magnificent), like many other sultan-poets, including Selim I, Ahmed I, Mustafa III, and Selim III, denigrated worldly power, choosing to glorify the supremacy of love:

*What they call reigning is nothing but worldly quarrel;*

*There is no greater throne on the earth than the love of God.*

So it devolved on the fifteenth-century poet Ali Şîr Nevâî to indicate the focal significance of the monarchy in mystical as well as political terms:

*Away from the loved one, the heart is a country without a king,*

*And that country stands as a body whose life and soul are lacking.*

*Tell me, Muslims, what good is a body without its life and soul—*

*Just black earth that nurtures no life-giving basil nor rose of spring*

*And the black earth where no life-giving basil nor sweet roses grow*

*Resembles the darkest of nights in which the moon has stopped gleaming.*

*Oh, Nevâî, tortures abound, but the worst punishment is when*

*Separation’s pain is all and reunion’s solace is nothing.*

A thorough study of the ramifications of the darling–king–divine being triad, which is offered here more in speculation than in substantiation, would give us a new understanding of Divan poetry—particularly mystic poetry—as a massive subversive literature, a strong protest about ruthless rule by the
sultan who dispenses cruelty although his subjects profess their love for him.

Seen in this light, the sultan, metaphorically depicted, is a ruthless tyrant who symbolizes cruel love, a supreme being, like God, who has no feelings for his suppliants. Mystic poetry eventually lost its nonconformist function when it veered away from its original concept of man as an extension of God and insisted on the bondage of the lover to God the beloved, thereby becoming almost identical with the orthodox view of “submission,” and suffered a weakening of its valuation of man as possessing godly attributes. But Ottoman mystic poetry in general validates Péguy’s observation: “Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique.”

By and large, Divan poetry conformed, almost subserviently, to the empire. An empire can seldom afford to be empirical and its literature runs the risk of becoming empyrean. So the conformist poets, century after century, perpetuating the same norms and values, offering variations on unchanging themes, and looking to virtuosity as the highest literary virtue, wrote celebrations of the triad of the Ottoman system: dynasty, faith, and conquest. When no special occasion was being committed to verse, these “establishment poets” turned out lyrics of private joy and agony sufficiently safe as comments on life and couched in abstractions. That is why Divan poetry is often characterized as having been “hermetically sealed” from life.

In my opinion, however, this “house organ” aspect of Ottoman poetry has been oversimplified and overemphasized. The empire also produced a large body of nonconformist, subversive, protest poetry.

Taken in its entirety and in anagogic terms, mystic poetry may be regarded as a continuing opposition to, and an undermining of, the theocratic establishment—a quiet, undeclared war against central authority. By refusing to serve as the amanuensis of imperial glory, but, far more significantly, by insisting on the supremacy of love over “cardinal virtues,” by passing over the sultan for absolute allegiance to God, by ascribing the highest value to the afterlife and denouncing
mundane involvements, by rallying against the orthodox views and institutions of Islam, the mystics not only maintained a stand as “independent” spirits, which in itself was detrimental to a literature and culture seeking to be monolithic, but also eroded entrenched institutions and endeavored to explode some of the myths of the empire. So, while the palace poets subserved, most of those outside of the cultural hierarchy subverted. The mystics, over the centuries, maintained a vision of apocalypse not only in the metaphysical but also in a political sense.

Many Divan poets protested against the chasm between the rich and the poor. In the sixteenth century, Yahya of Taşlıca wrote:

The poor must survive on one slice of bread,
The lord devours the world and isn’t fed.

He who gives a poor man’s heart sorrow,
May his breast be pierced by God’s arrow.

A Janissary commander and poet, Gazi Giray, at the end of the sixteenth century, sent the following report in verse to the sultan about impending defeat and disaster:

Infidels routed the lands which belong to true Muslims,
You have no fear of God, you take bribes and just sit there.

If no action is taken, this country is as good as lost,
If you don’t believe what I say, ask anyone in the world.

from: Elegy to the Cat

I.

He’s dead and gone! Alas! What shall I do? Pity, pussy!
The flames of death devoured you! A calamity, pussy!
The lion of doom tricked and mauled you: Woe is me, pussy!
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!
III.
That cat of mine was so playful, such a wonderful guy.
He had a grand time catching the birds that fly in the sky.
He’d eat anything he got—a roll, a patty, a pie.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

IV.
Sure, he caught sparrows just like that, but hens and geese as well;
Great fighter, he even turned the lion’s life into hell;
Soldier of faith, he’d kill mice as though they were the infidel.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

VII.
Fearless like a lion, a ferocious beast in combat . . .
You think he was old? No, he was a young and sprightly cat:
Every hair of his whiskers was a scimitar, that’s that.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

Me‘âlí, 16th Century

There were animadversions against tyranny. Pir Mahmut wrote in the latter part of the fourteenth century:

The oppressed who stay awake and moan from torment
Will bring on their oppressors’ dismemberment.

In the sixteenth century, Usûlî defied the sultan in the following words:

We never bow our heads to this land’s crown and throne,
On our own thrones we are sultans in our own right.

Also in the sixteenth century, Ruhi of Baghdad, a vehement critic of the establishment, railed against the peddlers of status:

What good is a lofty place if it has its price,
Boo to the base fellow who sells it, boo to the buyer.
There were numerous poems of protest and complaint directed against, not the central government, but local authorities and religious judges. In the fifteenth century, Andelibî denounced a judge for taking bribes:

Go empty-handed, his honor is asleep, they say;

Go with gold, they say: “Sir, please come this way.”

Critical views of Ottoman life and manners were offered by some poets in *kasides* (long odes) and *mesnevis* (narrative poems). Among these, the detailed commentaries by Osmanzade Taib (d. 1724) on commodity shortages, black market operations and profiteering, the plight of the poor people, and the indifference of the officials and judges are particularly noteworthy.

In the sixteenth century, Ruhi distilled the theme of inequity into one couplet:

Hungry for the world, some people work nonstop

While some sit down and joyfully eat the world up.

The nineteenth-century satirist İzzet Molla wrote many verses in which he denounced prominent public servants by name. In the following quatrain built on satiric puns, his victims are Yasinizade and Halet, whose names could be roughly translated as “Prayer” and “State”:

Mr. Prayer and Mr. State joined hands

To inflict all this on the populace:

One brought it into a state of coma,

The other gave his prayers for solace.

The great debate through the course of *Divan* poetry was between the mystic and the orthodox, the independent spirit and the fanatic, the nonconformist and the dogmatist, the latitudinarian and the zealot (*rind* versus *zahid*), who hurled insults at each other.

In the early fifteenth century when Nesimi was being skinned alive for heresy, the religious dignitary who had decreed his death was on hand watching the proceedings. Shaking his
finger, the Mufti said: “This creature’s blood is filthy. If it spills on anyone, that limb must be cut off at once.” Right then, a drop of blood squirted, smearing the Mufti’s finger. Someone said: “Sir, there is a drop of blood on your finger. According to your pronouncement, your finger should be chopped off.” Scared, the Mufti protested: “That won’t be necessary, because just a little bit of water will wash this off.” Hearing this, Nesimi came out with the following couplet *in extempore* and in flawless prosody while being skinned alive:

> **With his finger cut, the pharisee will flee from God’s truth,**
> **They strip this poor believer naked, yet he doesn’t even cry.**

The supreme satirist of Ottoman literature was Nefî (d. 1635), who put down a conventional theologian with the following invective:

> **The wily pharisee is bound by beads of fraud;**
> **The rosary he spins becomes the web of cant.**

In addition to resonant panegyrics, he wrote many devastating poems lampooning hypocrisy and affectation. In a famous quatrain, Nefî gave the following retort to Şeyhülislâm Yahya, the empire’s chief religious dignitary as well as a prominent poet:

> **So the Mufti has branded me an infidel:**
> **In turn I shall call him a Muslim, let us say.**
> **The day will come for both of us to face judgment**
> **And we shall both emerge as liars that day.**

Nefî once devastated the orthodox theologian Hoca Tahir Efendi in four lines utilizing a wordplay on Tahir, which means “clean”:

> **Mr. Clean, they say, has called me a dog;**
> **This word displays his compliment indeed,**
> **For I belong to the Maliki sect:**
> **A dog is clean according to my creed.**
Poetry was an Ottoman passion—not only for men but also for women who reveled in listening to or reading poems. Some composed impressive poems in the formidably difficult conventional forms and meters. From the fifteenth century until the end of the empire in 1922, they produced a considerable number of polished verses, vying with the best of their male counterparts, and often achieving prominence.

Zeyneb, who died in 1474, was a cultivated lady. This first major Ottoman woman poet was also a fine musician. One of her couplets is symptomatic of the male domination which, in Ottoman society as well as in many others, often made woman poets follow the aesthetic norms established by men:

\[
\text{Zeyneb, renounce womanly fondness for the decorative life;} \\
\text{Like men, be simple of heart and tongue, shun flashy embellishment.}
\]

In the following exquisite quatrain, she expresses the pain of love. The second line refers to the story of Joseph in the Koran’s twelfth sura. Joseph was regarded as the embodiment of ideal human beauty.

\[
\text{To you, O Lord, those enchanting looks are God’s grace:} \\
\text{The story of Joseph is a verse from your lovely face.} \\
\text{Your beauty and love, your tortures and my endurance} \\
\text{Never ebb or end, but grow in eternal time and space.}
\]

Mihri Hatun (d. 1506) proclaims women’s—and her own—superiority over men in the prefatory verse of her divan (collected poems):

\[
\text{Since, they say, woman has no brains or wit,} \\
\text{Whatever she speaks, they excuse it.}
\]

\[
\text{But your humble servant Mihri demurs} \\
\text{And states with that mature wisdom of hers:}
\]
Far better to have one woman with class  
Than a thousand males all of whom are crass;

I would take one woman with acumen  
Over a thousand muddleheaded men.

*Mihri Hatun*, who died in 1506, lived a free life of lovemaking and levity. Her beauty was legendary and she had affairs with some of the celebrities of her time. For many years she was a member of the intellectual circle around Prince Ahmed. When she was criticised for her affairs, she struck back in verse:

*At one glance*  
*I loved you*  
*With a thousand hearts*

*They can hold against me*  
*No sin except my love for you*  
*Come to me*  
*Don’t go away*

*Let the zealots think*  
*Loving is sinful*  
*Never mind*  
*Let me burn in the hellfire*  
*Of that sin*

One of Mihri’s most accomplished poems is a gazel (lyric ode). Her mention of Alexander is a reference to her lover İskender.

*I woke, opened my eyes, raised my head: There with his face bright*  
*And exquisite like the full moon, he was standing upright.*

*Was it my lucky star, was I blessed with divine power?*  
*In my field of vision, Jupiter ascended tonight.*
He looked like a Muslim, but was wearing pagan garments;
From his enchanting face—I saw clearly—came streaming light.

By the time I had opened and closed my eyes, he vanished:
He was—I divined—a heavenly angel or a sprite.

Mihri shall never die: She found the elixir of life,
She saw Alexander beaming in the dark of the night.

A remarkable woman poet was Leylâ Hanım (d. 1847). Her marriage lasted one week. Many of her own love poems were presumably addressed to women. By the standards of her day, she led a liberated life. Some of her daring verses scandalized the moralists of the period.

Drink all you want in the rose-garden. Who cares what they say!
Better enjoy life to the hilt. Who cares what the say!

Could it be that my cruel lover sees my tears as dewdrops?
Like a blooming rose, s/he is all smiles. Who cares what they say!

I am your lover and your loyal slave, my beautiful—
And shall remain so till Doomsday. Who cares what they say . . .

I see my rival is chasing you—Come lie beside me.
You say No? Well, then, so much for you. Who cares what they say.

Leylâ, indulge in pleasure with your lovely, moon-faced friend;
Make sure you pass all your days in joy. Who cares what they say!

After completing its function of heralding change, and once established in its genre and confident in its intellectual orientation, Divan poetry remained recalcitrant to internal change. It was only after several centuries of sclerotic continuity
that, suffering from tired blood, *Divan* verse introduced various formal and substantive changes. A significant innovation was undertaken by Nedim (d. 1730), the poet of the so-called Tulip Age, who lived *la dolce vita* and wrote of Sardanapalian pleasures. He dropped the abstractions and some of the hackneyed clichés of his predecessors in favor of depictions of physical beauty (aesthetic, human, and topographical), made an attempt to “democratize” conventional verse by increasing its appeal through greater intelligibility, and dispensed with the masochistic and misogynistic implications of the *Divan* poetry of the previous centuries, replacing them with the joys of love and living.

**Nedim**

18th Century

Song

*Come, let’s grant joy to this heart of ours that founders in distress:*

*Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.*

*Look, at the quay, a six-oared boat is waiting in readiness—*

*Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.*

*Let’s laugh and play, let’s enjoy the world to the hilt while we may*

*Drink nectar at the fountain which was unveiled the other day,*

*And watch the gargyle spatter the elixir of life away—*

*Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.*

*First, for a while, let’s take a stroll around the pond in leisure,*

*And gaze in marvel at that palace of heavenly pleasure;*

*Now and then, let’s sing songs or recite poems for good measure—*

*Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.*

*Get your mother’s leave, say it’s for holy prayers this Friday:*

*Out of time’s tormenting clutches let you and I steal a day,*

*And slinking through the secret roads and alleys down to the quay,*

*Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.*
Just you and I, and a singer with exquisite airs—and yet
Another: with your kind permission, Nedim, the mad poet.
Let’s forget our boon companions today, my joyful coquette—
Let’s go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Şeyh Galib (d. 1799), the last of the great romantic mystics also made an important renovation by getting away from the clichés and the frozen conceits and making original metaphors a new vehicle of artistic expression in his masterwork Hüsn ü Aşk (Beauty and Love), an allegorical work of passionate mysticism. Galib, who served as a sheikh, i.e., Mevlevi leader, in Istanbul, was profoundly influenced by Rumi’s spirituality and poetics—and emphatically acknowledged his impact. Among Şeyh Galib’s masterful verses is a superb onomatopoeic invitation to whirling:

Edvar-ı çarha uy, mevlevi ol:
Seyran edersin, devran edersin.

The couplet reproduces perfectly the rhythmic pattern of whirling. It is rife with mystic connotations. Edvar-ı çarh means the Mevlevi style of whirling as well as the revolving arches of the sky, the wheels of fortune, or firmament. Seyran is the reference to a “pleasure trip,” but also signifies a dream, gazing at a lovely sight, and contemplation. Devran refers to whirling, to transcendence of time, the wheels of fortune, and blissful life. Combining these various implications, Şeyh Galib’s couplet could be translated as:

Join the heavenly circles, become a Mevlevi:
You can whirl and dream and gaze and turn and revel.

Although the classical tradition continued until the early part of the twentieth century, after Şeyh Galib it produced few figures or works of significance.
My darling with the rosy face—at one glance—
You turned my heart’s mirror into a wine glass,
Passing on to me your joy and nonchalance . . .
Here’s my heart, for you to ignore or to grace:

May the home of my heart be your drinking place.

Such a flame has the candle of the spirit
That the dome of the skies cannot contain it;
Not even Mount Sinai saw from its summit
The lightning bolts that my chest nurtures within it:

My bosom is up in flames thanks to your grace.

Over the apex, the royal falcon flies
Ignoring the hunt of the bird of paradise;
Nesting in your hair is a joy it denies.
Show mercy, O king, who rides the horse of the skies:

To which your generous hand gives sustenance.

In a new realm where my life has come upon,
Each dewdrop looms as enormous as the sun
And no barrier can block the sunbeams, none.
Where I arrive might be close at hand or gone:

There, your absence is the same as your embrace.
TIMELESS TALES
FOLKTALES, SECOND ONLY TO POETRY, have been alive as a constant genre in Turkish literature. A great many traditional Turkish tales were, and still are, introduced with this tekerleme (a formulaic jingle with numerous variants):

A long, long time ago,
when the sieve was inside the straw,
when the donkey was the town crier
and the camel was the barber . . .
Once there was; once there wasn’t.
God’s creatures were as plentiful as grains and
talking too much was a sin . . .

In these lilting overtures, one finds the spirit and some of the essential features of the story: the vivid imagination, irreconcilable paradoxes, rhythmic structure (with built-in syllabic meters and internal rhymes), a comic sense bordering on the absurd, a sense of the mutability of the world, the aesthetic urge to avoid loquaciousness, the continuing presence of the past, and the predilection of the narrative to maintain freedom from time and place.

In Anatolia’s culture, oral literature has played a vibrant role since the earliest times. Aesop came from Phrygia, whose capital, Gordion, stood on a site not far from Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey. Homer was probably born and reared near present-day Izmir and wandered up and down the Aegean coast amassing the tales and legends that came to be enshrined in his Iliad and Odyssey.

Several millennia of the narrative arts have bequeathed to Asia Minor a dazzling treasury—creation myths, Babylonian stories, The Epic of Gilgamesh, Hittite tales, Biblical lore, Greek and Roman myths, Armenian and Byzantine anecdotes. The peninsula’s mythical and historical ages nurtured dramatic accounts of deities, kings, heroes, and lovers. Pagan cults, ancient faiths, the Greek pantheon, Judaism, Roman religions, Christianity, Islam, mystical sects, and diverse spiritual movements left behind an inexhaustible body of legends and
moralistic stories that survived throughout the centuries in their original forms or in many modified versions. Anatolia’s narrative art is a testament to the Turkish passion for stories about heroism, love, and honor.

As the Turks embraced Islam and its civilization and founded the Selçuk state (mid-eleventh century) and then the Ottoman state (in the closing years of the thirteenth century), they developed a passion for the rich written and oral literature of the Arabs and Persians. Having brought their indigenous narratives in their horizontal move from Central Asia to Asia Minor, they acquired the vertical heritage of the earlier millennia of Anatolian cultures, cults, and epic imagination as well as the Islamic narrative tradition in its Arabo-Persian context. The resulting synthesis was to yield a vast reservoir of stories. It would also give impetus to the creation of countless new tales down through the ages, for all ages.

The synthesis was significantly enriched by the lore of Islamic mysticism. Romantic and didactic mesnevis (long narratives composed in rhymed couplets) compelled the attention of the elite poets. Perhaps the most profoundly influential masterpiece of the genre was the Mesnevi written in Persian by the prominent thirteenth-century Sufi thinker Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi. Referred to as the “Koran of Mysticism” and the “Inner Truth of the Koran,” this massive work of close to 26,000 couplets comprises a wealth of mystico-moralistic tales, fables, and stories of wisdom.

Ottoman elite poets produced—often with the inspiration or story lines they took from The Thousand and One Nights, Kalila wa Dimna, Firdawsi’s Shahnamah, Attar’s Mantiq at-Tayr, Nizami’s Khamsa (Five Narratives), and many others—impressive mesnevis including Leyla vü Mecnun (Leylâ and Mejmûn) by Fuzuli (d. 1556) and Hüsn ü Aşk (Beauty and Love) by Şeyh Galib (d. 1799), both allegories of mystical love; Hikâyat-i Deli Birader (Mad Brother’s Anecdotes), a garland of humorous and salacious stories, by Gazali (d. 1535); and Şevkengiz, a funny debate between a ladies’ man and a pederast, by Vehbi (d. 1809).
From the urban-establishment writers came some remarkable works that incorporate stories from the oral tradition, principally the *Seyahatname*, the massive travelogue and cultural commentary by Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682) and the fascinating *Muhayyelât* (Imaginary Lives) by Aziz Efendi (d. 1798), a collection of three unrelated novellas that amalgamate fantastic tales, novelistic depictions of Istanbul life, preternatural occurrences, mystical components, and selections from the repertoires of Ottoman professional storytellers.

But Ottoman oral creativity flourished less in written works than on its own *terra firma*. In the rural areas, it was, along with poetry, music, and dance, a focal performing art. It enchanted everyone from seven to seventy, as the saying goes, at home or at gatherings in villages and small towns. In Istanbul and other major cities, particularly after the mid-sixteenth century, it held audiences captive in coffeehouses—it was a natural expression of the common people, of the man in the street, of the lumpenproletariat who had little else for diversion or entertainment, of the men and women who kept their cultural norms and values alive in giving free rein to their imaginative resources. The leading figures of Ottoman history never ceased to fire the people’s imagination. Mehmed the Conqueror, Prince Cem, Selim the Grim, Süleyman the Magnificent, Selim the Sot, İbrahim the Mad, Hürrem Sultan (née Roxelana), and Empresses Kösem and Nakşidil (née Aimée) became mythic names, synonymous with the empire’s triumphs and defeats, glories and treacheries. A testament to the popularity of storytelling is the crowded vocabulary identifying the various genres within oral narrative (*kıssa*, *hikâye*, *rivayet*, *masal*, *fıkra*, *letaif*, *destan*, *efsane*, *esatir*, *menkıbe*, *mesel*, and so forth).

The art of the tale was predominantly a continuation of the tradition that the Turkish communities had brought with them from their Asian centuries. Their shamans had, from the outset, relied on mesmerizing verses and instructive tales in shaping the spiritual life of the tribes. Tales were then talismans and thaumaturgical potions. During the process of conversion to Islam, missionaries and proselytizers used the legends and the historical accounts of the new faith to good advantage.
Storytelling was nurtured also by children’s tales told by mothers. In coffeehouses, where the art of storytelling flourished, the Meddahs were male professional comics. Their performances offered humorous stories and a broad range of imitations and impersonations. Whereas the Karagöz repertoire (notwithstanding its colorful comedic representations of the life of the common people in an urban setting) was relatively fixed in its content, the Meddah stories held infinite possibilities of improvisation and originality.

In a society where the rate of literacy remained below ten percent until the mid-1920s, oral narratives played a major role in cultural transmission—hence the vast corpus of narrative material and the preponderance and success of the short-story genre in recent decades.

Turkish tales are nothing if they are not fanciful. Most of them have leaps of the imagination into the realm of phantasmagoria. Even in realistic and moralistic stories, there is usually an element of whimsy. Bizarre transformations abound. There are abrupt turns of events, inexplicable changes of identity.

The supreme figure of Turkish tales was, and remains, Nasreddin Hoca, a wit and raconteur who lived presumably in the thirteenth century. A culmination of the earlier tradition, he became the wellspring of the succeeding centuries of folk humor and satire. Popular all over the Middle East, the Balkans, North Africa, and many parts of Asia, he disproves the assumption that one nation’s laughter is often another nation’s bafflement or boredom. He is Aesop, the Shakespearean clown, Till Eulenspiegel, Mark Twain, and Will Rogers all rolled into one. His humor incorporates subtle irony and black comedy, whimsical observations about human foibles and outrageous pranks, self-satire and bantering with God, twists of practical logic, and the outlandishly absurd. But his universal appeal is based always on ridentem dicere verum.

There are, of course, other figures of comic wisdom: the Ottoman centuries reveled in the humor of Bekri Mustafa, İncili Çavuş, and a host of other comedic characters including
those from the Ottoman minorities. With their irreverence and nonchalance, the Bektaşı dervishes generated a huge number of quips and anecdotes that have come down through the ages. But Nasreddin Hoca is the humorist par excellence. His universality has been recognized in Europe and America as well. Since the nineteenth century, the Hoca tales have been translated into the world’s major languages.

Perhaps Nasreddin Hoca’s most telling sight gag is the best metaphor for the openness, the accessibility, of national humor, although initially it might seem forbidding: His tomb in the Central Anatolian town of Akşehir originally had walls surrounding it and an iron gate with a huge padlock. In time, the walls came down, but the iron gate with the padlock still stands.

Today, conversations and some types of popular writing in Turkey (and elsewhere) sparkle with Hoca gags or punch lines. Remarkably, the lore has grown by leaps and bounds through the centuries, because much new material has been ascribed or adapted to him by the public imagination.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Western narrative traditions have penetrated Turkey at an ever-quickening pace. La Fontaine is a prime example: Şinasi (d. 1871), a poet-playwright and a pioneer of Ottoman enlightenment, adapted some of La Fontaine’s fables into Turkish verse and composed a few of his own in a similar vein. A century later, two great figures, Orhan Veli Kanık and Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, offered their splendid translations of the Fables in separate books. Likewise, feverish translation activity has contributed to the Turkish synthesis the best of the narrative literature of Europe and America: the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Perrault, and others in the field of children’s tales, and Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais, and others for adults. The list is long and the influences run deep.

Turkish stories—traditional and contemporary—range from simple parables to elaborate stories of quest, from spare narratives to tekerleme (imaginative verbal devices that go beyond jingles), from the heroic deeds of a Turkish Robin Hood
to the bizarre doings of jinns and fairies. There are drolleries, cock-and-bull stories, old wives’ tales, but also artful stories of psychological insight and spiritual profundity. The versatility is striking: picaresque, picturesque, humoresque, burlesque.

The diversity of tales is quite impressive. Some have elaborate story lines and many layers of meaning; some are so streamlined as to seem puristic. A goodly number possess outright or subtle political criticism, whereas a few are straight love stories. The action varies from cliff-hangers to the tame. Fatalism alternates with a defiant, almost revolutionary, spirit. Many belong to the pure *masal* (tale) genre told for pleasure while some are *mesel* (parables with a moral). Here are dragons, giants, witches, villains, weird creatures, but also innocent children, lovable characters, romantic lovers, guardian angels. Many tales strike the reader as complete in themselves, commanding quintessential power, but some might well be fragments of an epic or parts of a cycle. The demands on the listener’s or reader’s mind may be like the suspense of an Agatha Christie thriller, but often they can require you to suspend belief. The vision can change from perfect clarity to *trompe l’oeil*.

Virtually all tales provide their stimulation through two functions, moral and morale. In this sense, they constitute a strategy for living. For common people oppressed by poverty and other deprivations, they are a diversion, an entertainment to be sure. *Keloğlan* tales are compelling examples: the everyboy, who will grow up to be Everyman, proves time and again that the meek—although they might not soon inherit the earth—will endure, sometimes prevail, and at times triumph.

Folktales in the Turkish experience, as elsewhere, are notable not only for their ways of overcoming a weakness or frustration, bringing about the fulfillment of dreams and wishes, and even achieving the impossible, but also for serving as a continuing critique of and a challenge to entrenched authority, especially against unjust rule. They are not merely a type of *refoulement*, but a form of resistance against tyranny, inequality, or any iniquity. Because most of them possess freedom from time and place, they function in terms of eternal and universal validity.
But because they are narrated at a specific moment and locale and couched in the vocabulary of a particular culture, they have as their targets the symbols of an identifiable society (sultan or vizier, religious judge or feudal lord).

Folktales hold a special place in Turkey’s culture and mass communication. Their transcription came much later than comparable work in the West, and took place on a much more limited basis. Consequently, the oral tradition has continued well into our times without becoming frozen on the printed page: it remains alive with new versions and adaptations as well as completely new oral narratives. Even today, despite the intrusions of radio and television, storytelling is alive in many parts of rural Turkey.

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**Nasreddin Hoca**

The thirteenth century was fertile: the Turks of Anatolia proved impressively creative in many genres from the decorative arts to music. In satire, too. A Nasreddin Hoca emerged—wit, raconteur, master of humor. Nasreddin Hoca anecdotes were popular as folk humor, but also in terms of their mystical implications. UNESCO declared 1996–97 “The International Nasreddin Hoca Year.”

One of his tales of wisdom is about justice delayed:

One day, the Hoca is walking in the bazaar. A thug comes over and slaps him as hard as he can. People run over and apprehend the roughneck. They all go before the judge who sentences the thug to pay the Hoca one gold coin in damages. The man says: “Your honor, I haven’t got a gold coin on me. Allow me to go home and get it.” The judge agrees. The Hoca is skeptical. But the judge tells him to sit in the rear of the courtroom and wait for the gold coin. The Hoca doubts if the roughneck will ever show up, but he sits and waits. A couple of hours later, he walks over to the judge: “Your honor,” he says, “I’ve a lot of things to do. I can’t wait any longer.” The judge insists: “He’ll bring the gold coin. Sit down and wait.” Another couple of hours pass—no sight of the thug—the Hoca just can’t wait any longer. He slowly gets up, walks over to the judge, slaps him as hard as he can, and says: “When he comes, you get the gold coin.”
OCCIDENTAL ORIENTATION
Europe stood in awe of the Ottomans who crushed many states and conquered vast territories, going, as patriotic Turks will proudly point out, “all the way to the gates of Vienna.”

The Ottoman Turks, proud of their faith and conquests, felt superior to the West until decline set in. From the seventeenth century onward, there were defeats at the hands of European powers, deterioration of morale and official institutions, and eventually the armed rebellions of the empire’s non-Muslim minorities. The Ottoman ruling class gradually became impressed with Europe’s growing strength and technological achievements. The Renaissance had wielded no influence on the Turks. The printing press was introduced to Turkey in the third decade of the eighteenth century, nearly 275 years behind Europe, and the first newspaper in Turkish came out in 1831. The political and ideological impact of the French Revolution was felt decades later as the Industrial Revolution and its effects eluded the Turks for an even longer time.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the shrinking Ottoman Empire had started to turn to the West for ideas and institutions. After a series of limited innovations in the military, administrative, educational, and technical fields from the eighteenth century on, the Ottoman elite plunged into an extensive transformation usually referred to as “Westernization.” In 1839, the Tanzimat (Reforms) Period was ushered in: legal, administrative, and cultural changes were introduced in quick succession. Literature was both a concomitant and a major catalyst. The conservative religious establishment waged all-out war against Westernization. More cautious reformers recommended a synthesis of Eastern culture and Western technology: *Ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente frux.* But progressive intellectuals pressed for extensive changes patterned after European models. The decline of the Ottoman Empire reached a critical point by the middle of the nineteenth century. Younger Turkish intellectuals started seeking the empire’s salvation in technological development, political reform, and cultural progress fashioned after European prototypes.
New genres, adopted from Europe, gained ascendancy: fiction, drama for the legitimate stage, journalistic writing, the critical essay, and others. Translations and adaptations accelerated the Europeanization of Turkish literature. Young poets came into contact with European aesthetic theories and values. While *aruz* was not abandoned, Turkish poets experimented with forms, rhythms, and styles. A reaction began to set in against excessive use of words of Arabic and Persian origin.

Although these ventures and the new genres curtailed the supremacy of verse, poetry was to retain much of its hold over Turkish intellectual life. Particularly at times of social upheaval, it often played a considerably wider and more effective role than many other media.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poets were the principal champions of fundamental rights and freedoms—the conveyors of the concepts of nationalism, modernization, social and political reforms.

Poetry acquired a social awareness and a political function in the hands of some poets who endeavored to gain independence from external political domination. Ziya Pasha (1829–1880), Şinasi (1826–1871), and Namik Kemal (1840–1888) emerged as champions of nationalism. Recaizade Ekrem (1847–1914) and Abdullah Hâmit Tarhan (1852–1937) echoed the French romantics. The latter, a prolific poet and author of numerous verse dramas, gained stature as a ceaseless innovator. His poetry, which covered a wide range of topics, had a philosophic bent as well as dramatic impact.

The nineteenth-century men of letters inherited the classical and the folk traditions, but turned their attention to the literary tastes and movements of the West—particularly of France and, to a lesser extent, England.

The poetry of the Tanzimat Period and its aftermath had the imperative of revamping its forms, style, and content. It also assumed the task of giving voice to civil disobedience. Its practitioners, despite censorship, often acted as provocateurs and agitators for reform and social innovation, as propagators in rebellion against tyranny.
Poetry became a standard-bearer for such concepts as justice, nation, reform, sovereignty, modernization, freedom, progress, and rights. Şinasi challenged the sultan’s absolutism by recognizing to Grand Vizier Reşit Pasha a type of constitutional authority. Praising Reşit Pasha as a new type of leader, “Is it any wonder that you are called the apostle of civilization,” he referred to the grand vizier as “the president of the virtuous people.” Şinasi assigned a new kind of legislative authority to him: “Your law admonishes the sultan about his limits.” Tanzimat poetry also introduced critical views of the Islamic world, as in an excerpt from Ziya Pasha’s famous lament:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In the land of the infidel, I have seen cities and mansions,} \\
\text{In the dominions of Islam, ruin and devastation.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I have seen countless fools condescend to Plato} \\
\text{Within the Sublime Porte, that home of divagation.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A traveler on this earth to which we’re all condemned,} \\
\text{I have seen governments and their houses of assassination.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

Ziya Pasha produced a long satiric poem, many parts of which were committed to memory by his contemporaries and are still widely quoted among the Turks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Those who embezzle millions are ensconced in glory} \\
\text{Those who filch pennies are condemned to hard labor.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{How could a uniform make a base fellow noble?} \\
\text{Put a gold-lined saddle on him, the ass is still an ass.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pardon is the privilege of the holders of high office;} \\
\text{Is the penal code used only against the meek?} \\
\end{align*}
\]
The fiction, drama, and journalistic writing of these literary figures were less a substitute for poetry than an extension of it. Their articles and novels were read with greater interest and their plays made a stronger impact because they were, first and foremost, famous poets.

The socially engaged poets of the era launched a consciously utilitarian view of poetry. They fulminated against some of the entrenched Oriental traditions and the repressive Ottoman society. Because of poems of protest or criticism, many poets were penalized and sent into exile.

Tanzimat brought into Turkish poetry a brave new substance—an explicitly formulated political content. Patriotic poets, particularly Namık Kemal, lashed out against the sultan and his oppressive regime. His poems were richly rhetorical pleas for freedom and justice.

From the kaside (ode) To the Fatherland

We saw the rulers of the age, their edicts of futility,
And we retired from office, with honor and with dignity.

From service to their fellow men, true men will never rest,
The brave of heart will not withhold their help from the oppressed.

A nation may be humbled, and yet not lose its worth,
A jewel is still precious, though trampled in the earth.

There is a core of fortitude, the jewel of the heart,
Which tyranny cannot crush, might cannot tear apart.

How you bewitch us, liberty, for whom so long we strove,
We who are freed from slavery are prisoners of your love.
Beloved hope of days to come, how warm your presence is,
And how it frees our troubled world from all its miseries!

Yours is the era that begins, impose your mastery,
And may God bring fulfillment to all that you decree.

The stealthy dogs of despotism across your homelands creep,
Awake, O wounded lion, from your nefarious sleep!

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

The idea of sacrifice, valued highly by the Divan poets when done for the loved one, now assumed the form of sacrifice pro patria:

Let fate heap upon me all its torture and pain
I’m a coward if ever I flinch from serving my nation.

The preceding and the following lines by Namık Kemal are typical of the new sense of mission that emerged at the time:

Let the cannons burst forth and fire and brimstone spread
May Heaven’s gates fling open to each dying comrade
What is there in life that we should shun falling dead?

— — —

Our greatest joy is to become martyrs in strife
Ottomans find glory in sacrificing life.

In another poem, Namık Kemal reiterated the themes:

A soldier’s proudest medal is his wound
And death the highest rank a man can find
It’s all the same beneath or on the ground
March heroes march and fight to save this land.
Namık Kemal, having established his fearlessness, also gave vent to his fury against the oppressors:

*Who cares if the despot holds an exalted place*
*We shall still root out cruelty and injustice.*

The great debate in Turkish poetry from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present has centered around the poet’s freedom to follow the dictates of his heart and art, as contrasted with his duty to serve his society.

Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha, who often collaborated for introducing new political and aesthetic concepts, sometimes came into conflict, especially over the extent of literary changes to be effected. Their friend Şinasi observed: “Ziya and Kemal were both in accord and opposition / Like two forces present in the flash of lightning.”

Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan (1852–1937), often characterized as “the greatest poet of the Tanzimat era,” expanded the horizons of Turkish poetry thanks to his erudition in universal culture. He had an excellent private education, formal schooling at the American college (Robert College) in Istanbul, lived for a while in Tehran where his father was the Ottoman ambassador, then became a career diplomat and served in diverse posts—Paris, Poti (Caucasus), Golos (Greece), Bombay, The Hague, Brussels. His poetry dealt with themes of love and nature, death and metaphysics. His verses displayed mastery of lyric formulation and philosophical learning of the East and West. In his *œuvre* the principle of art for art’s sake triumphed.

Tevfik Fikret (1867–1915), a prominent poet in later decades, combined in his poetry both the concept of art for art’s sake and the function of spokesman for protest and civil disobedience. He propagated a novel view of man and society. Standing squarely against the traditional orthodox and mystic conception of man as a vassal to God, he regarded man as having an existence independent of God. Tevfik Fikret placed his faith in reason over dogma, in inquiry over unquestioning acquiescence, in science and technology. He oscillated between romantic agony dominated by despair and an acute social conscience.
He defended the proposition that right is far stronger than might and that the people’s rights will ultimately prevail:

*If tyranny has artillery, cannonballs and fortresses*

*Right has an unyielding arm and an unflinching face.*

In poems that were often memorized and circulated clandestinely, Tevfik Fikret lambasted the oppressors:

*One day they will chop off the heads that do injustice . . .*

*We have seen all sorts of injustice . . . Is this the law?*

*We founder in the worst misery . . . Is this the state?*

*The state or the law, we have had more than enough,*

*Enough of this diabolical oppression and ignorance.*

His assaults on malfeasance and profiteering were equally vehement:

*Eat, gentlemen, eat, this feast of greed is yours,*

*Eat till you are fed and stuffed and burst inside out.*

At the end of the nineteenth century, when an assassination attempt on the life of Sultan Abdülhamid failed because the sultan’s carriage arrived on the spot a minute or two after the planted bomb exploded, Tevfik Fikret in his poem entitled “A Moment’s Delay” referred to the would-be assassin as “the glorious hunter” and bemoaned the brief delay:

*The villain who takes pleasure in trampling a nation*

*Owes to a moment of delay all his jubilation.*

Fikret was a foe not only of the sultan and his henchmen but also of religious faith and of senseless combat and strife:

*Faith craves martyrs, heaven wants victims*

*Blood, blood everywhere, all the time.*

Tevfik Fikret bemoaned the sad plight of the declining Ottoman state. In a famous poem entitled “Farewell to Haluk”
he reminded his son (Haluk), who was about to depart for graduate studies in Scotland, about the empire’s erstwhile glory as well as its ailments:

Remember when we walked past Topkapı,
And in a square somewhere along our path
We saw a plane tree . . . A giant, lifting high
And wide its branches, its trunk magnificent,
Proud and unbowed. Perhaps six hundred years,
Or longer, it had lived its carefree life:
Spreading its boughs so far, rising so high,
That all around the city roofs, the domes
Seemed to prostrate themselves in frozen awe.
It is the story that our legends tell,
We see it in the distance, wherever we look.
But this majestic tree, measuring itself
Against the sky, is now completely bare—
Not one green leaf or new bud on its branches.
It is withering! That deep wound across its trunk,
Was it the blow of a treacherous ax that fell there,
The poison of an angry bolt of lightning?
Proud plane tree, what fire is burning in your heart?
What sombre worms are gnawing at your roots?
What hands will reach to bind your wound and heal it?
Who will provide the remedy you need?
Does the black venom that corrodes your strength
Drip from the ravens circling at your head?
Unhappy motherland, tell us, we ask you,
What evil deeds have caused your suffering?
(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

In the so-called Constitutional Period, which started after 1876 when the first Ottoman constitution went into effect (and was abrogated in a few months), Eşref (1847–1912), the most biting and exciting satirist of the time, struck hard at the sultan and his entourage:
O my sultan, this country nowadays is a tree
Its branches get the ax sooner or later.
What do you care if our homeland is lost,
But at this rate you may have no people left to torture.

In a different poem, Eşref stated in no uncertain terms:

You are the most vicious of the world’s sultans.

Elsewhere he satirized the Sublime Porte, the seat of Ottoman power:

Everyone’s honor and honesty belong to you, my sultan,
So there is no need for either one in your court.

Anatolian poets, too, bemoaned the social and economic conditions and leveled strong criticisms at the government. In the nineteenth century, Serdari wrote:

The tax collector rips through the village,
His whip in his hand, he tramples on the poor.

His contemporary Ruhsatî complained:

There is no justice left, cruelty is all.

Seyrani raised his voice against the exploitation of the poor people by the merchants:

Alas, poor people’s backs are bent,
We are left to the mercy of commerce.

But, occasional outbursts of the rebellious spirit in folk poetry aside, it was during the Tanzimat and Constitutional Period that, for the first time, dissent and outright criticism in poetry for the sake of social and political change became systematic. Unlike in the pre-mid-nineteenth-century eras, the poets did not only lament social conditions but also advocated revolutionary or evolutionary change to remove them. It is small wonder that the leading poet-rebels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who asked for nationhood,
constitutional government, basic freedoms, and fundamental rights, were persecuted or banished.

Under Sultan Abdülhamid’s suppression, most Turkish poets retreated into a fantasy world of innocent, picturesque beauty where, in a mood of meek sentimentality and lackadaisical affection, they attempted to forge the aesthetics of the simple, the pure, and the delectable. Their lyric transformation of reality abounded in new rhythms and imaginative metaphors expressed by dint of a predominantly Arabic-Persian vocabulary and an appreciably relaxed aruz. A French-oriented group of poets referred to as Servet-i Fünun, after the literary magazine they published, became prominent on the literary scene.

The Servet-i Fünun members, enamored of the romantic spirit, represented new directions for the formal and the conceptual process of Turkish poetry. They introduced numerous innovations, yet failed to reach a wide audience because of their use of arcane vocabulary studded with words derived from Persian and Arabic.

During the same period, Divan poetry was continued by a few minor poets. Folk poetry, however, maintained much of its vigor and exerted considerable influence on many younger poets striving to create a pervasive national consciousness and purify the Turkish language by eliminating Arabic and Persian loanwords. Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), social philosopher and poet, wrote poems expounding the ideals and aspirations of Turkish nationalism. Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944) and Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı (1869–1949) used folk meters and forms as well as an unadorned colloquial language in their poems.

The short-lived Fecr-i Ati (Dawn of Freedom) movement, which stressed both individualistic aesthetics and literature for society’s sake, contributed in some measure toward the creation of a poetry that Turks could claim as their own.

It is interesting to note that in the first two decades of the twentieth century—a critical phase when the Ottoman state was in its death throes—three rival and occasionally embattled ideologies were publicized by and publicly fought among poets. Tevfik Fikret championed social and governmental reforms, including secularism and Westernization; Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (1873–1936) propagated the Islamic faith as a panacea for the
decline of the Ottoman Empire; Ziya Gökalp and Mehmet Emin Yurdakul called for national unity based on the mystique of Turkism and a homogeneous terra firma, a movement that held sway from the early 1910s to about the establishment of the Republic in 1923 and beyond. The ideology of this so-called “Millî Edebiyat” (National Literature) benefited from the prodigious talent of Ömer Seyfettin (1884–1920), who produced well-made short stories steeped in a patriotic spirit, some of them poignant and many remarkable for their satiric streak. If he had not died at age thirty-six, he would probably have achieved world-class virtuosity in the genre of short fiction.

Mehmet Âkif Ersoy, a master of heroic diction, devoted much of his verse to the dogma, passion, and *summum bonum* of Islam. His nationalism has a strong Islamic content, evident in the lyrics he wrote for the Turkish national anthem still sung today. Âkif’s elegy “For the Fallen at Gallipoli” is a celebrated expression of the values he upheld:

_Soldier, for these hallowed lands, now on this land you lie dead._
 Your forebears may well lean from Heaven to kiss your forehead.
_How mighty you are, you safeguard our True Faith with your blood;_ Your glory is shared by the braves of the Prophet of God.\(^1\)

_Who could dig the grave that will not be too narrow for you?_  
_If we should bury you in history, you would break through._  
_That book cannot hold your epochs with all their rampages:_  
_You could only be contained by everlasting ages._  
_If I could set up the Kaaba at the head of your pit_  
_And carve on it the inspiration that stirs my spirit;_  
_If I could seize the firmament with all the stars within,_  
_And then lay it as a pall over your still bleeding coffin;_  
_If I could hitch spring clouds as ceiling for your open tomb,_  
_Hang the Pleiades’ seven lamps in your mausoleum,_  
_As you lie drenched in your own blood under the chandelier;_  
_If I could drag the moonlight out of night into your bier_  

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\(^1\)The original refers to Bedr, a place near Medina where Muslims won a battle in A.D. 624 led by the Prophet.
To stand guard by you as custodian until Doomsday;
If I could fill your chandelier with dawn’s eternal ray,
And wrap your wound at dusk with the sunset’s silken glory—
I still cannot say I have done something for your memory.

This pious poet advocated the revival of Islam and had the vision of uniting all Muslims in an Islamic superstate. Yet, he made a critical assessment of the backwardness of the Islamic world and proposed a conscientious type of Westernization:

I have spent years wandering in the East,
And I’ve seen much—not merely idled past!
Arabs, Persians and Tartars, I have seen
All the components of the Muslim world.
I’ve looked into the souls of little men,
And scrutinized great men’s philosophies.
Then, too, what caused the Japanese ascent?
What was their secret? This I wished to learn.
These many journeys, this far-reaching search
Led to a single article of faith.
It’s this—

Do not go far for such a quest,
The secret of your progress lies in you.
A nation’s rise comes from within itself,
To imitate does not ensure success.
Absorb the art, the science of the West,
And speed your efforts to achieve those ends,
For without them one can no longer live,
For art and science have no native land.
But bear in mind the warning that I give:
When reaching through the eras of reform,
Let your essential nature be your guide—
There’s no hope of salvation otherwise.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)
Servet-i Fünun poets, with the singular exception of Tevfik Fikret, who occasionally embraced social causes, preferred subjectivity to such an extent that they were criticized for taking refuge in an ivory tower. Many of them seemed unable to eschew exaggerated emotions, bloated imagery, and overblown language. On the whole, they succeeded in capturing a rather pleasing melodiousness and rhythmic effect even if some of their onomatopoeia seemed strained or superficial. Cenap Şahabettin (1871–1934) was a romantic poet who reveled in lyricism. Committed to formal flexibilities, these poets overcame the rigid styles of most of their predecessors by frequent use of enjambment. Having perfected their use of the sonnet and terza rima, they paved the way for many twentieth-century poets to feel more comfortable about freedom from time-honored stanzaic forms.

The Turkish venture into the realm of European-type fiction started in the 1870s. In the early decades, there was lack of clarity about the basic terms—short story or novella or novel? The pioneering works of fiction came from Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844–1912), Emin Nihat (d. ca. 1875), and Şemsettin Sami (1850–1904). Of these, Ahmet Mithat, remarkably prolific with scores of novels and collections of short stories he wrote or translated, popularized fiction. Emin Nihat, who died young, produced a single work, Müsameretname, a mélange of Boccaccio-like stories, mainly about love and adventure. Şemsettin Sami is generally credited as the author of the first Turkish novel dealing with the need for girls’ schooling and with the problems of arranged marriages.

The prominent poet Namık Kemal produced two novels: İntibah (Vigilance) which cautioned virtuous people about dissolute living and wicked deeds perpetrated against them, and his second work of fiction, Cezmi, which shows better writing skill, was the first Turkish historical novel. In his only novel, Mizancı Murat (1854–1917), a respected intellectual and historian, gave voice to his critical views of sociopolitical problems and offered the idea of Islamic unity as a panacea. Promising short stories came from Samipaşazade Sezai (1859–1936) whose novel Sergüzeş (1888) about human bondage introduced the techniques of realism in a firm manner. From Nabizade Nâzım (1862–1893) came the first novella of a
Turkish village which heralded naturalism. He also wrote perhaps the earliest specimen of psychological fiction depicting a case of pathological jealousy (*Zehra*, published posthumously in 1894).

Recaizade Ekrem (1847–1914), a leading poet and littérateur, who also emerged as an important theoretician of aesthetics and a major critic, produced late in his career (1896) a satirical novel entitled *Araba Sevdasi* (Love for Surrey), introducing as its protagonist an Ottoman dandy caught in the web of family troubles. This novel successfully caricatured the excesses of Europeanization.

The Ottoman syndrome of East–West in the search for European type of reform was perhaps best delineated by Ahmet Mithat Efendi who assumed for himself the mission of educating the public by dint of literary works. His fiction and essays strove to preserve the best of Islamic values in the Westernizing endeavor of the Ottomans. His 1876 novel about the Europeanized protagonist Felatun Bey and the virtuous traditionalist Rakım Efendi cautioned modernizers who risked losing their authentic identity.

Ahmet Mithat and most of the late nineteenth-century novelists maintained a utilitarian stance about the function of fiction—mainly to educate readers, to sensitize them concerning the status and rights of women, to create a better social system.

When the ideal of “art for art’s sake” gained strength with the establishment of the *Servet-i Fünun* group, the turn of the century witnessed the appearance of the first truly refined Turkish novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) by Halit Ziya (Uşaklıgil). This well-constructed novel depicts the life and the tribulations of a prosperous Istanbul family. Its narrative technique is gripping, its story line strong, with characters well delineated and dialogue vivid. First serialized in a daily newspaper, it was published in book form in 1900. Arguably *Aşk-ı Memnu* could vie with some of Europe’s best novels of the time. Halit Ziya authored several other major works, *Mai ve Siyah* (The Blue and the Black, 1897), *Kırık Hayatlär* (Broken Lives, 1924), and others, mostly about human suffering.
A year after Aşk-ı Memnu, another major talent Mahmet Rauf (1874–1931) published a psychological tour de force entitled Eylül (September, 1901).

Thus, the start of the twentieth century augured well for the Turkish novel, which was destined to take strides toward impressive diversity and workmanship in the ensuing era eventually culminating in the Nobel Prize.

For the rising star of fiction, numerous late Ottoman authors—principally Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864–1944), Refik Halit Karay (1888–1965), Halide Edib Adıvar (1889–1974), and Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889–1956) produced easily readable works whose characters were identifiable and dialogues in the simple vernacular. Güntekin’s Çalikuşu (The Wren, 1922), about a young woman who works in the rural areas as a school teacher, became a sensation and remained a best-seller for many decades.

Güntekin and the others dominated the fiction of the early decades of the Republic as well.

The period from 1859–1923 marked the emergence and vigorous evolution of dramatic writing in Turkish. İbrahim Şinasi, poet, author, and translator, wrote the first Turkish play, Şair Evlenmesi (The Wedding of a Poet; 1860). A few earlier texts are probably not original plays, but translations or adaptations from the French. A play which looks plausible as an original, Vakaayi-i Acibe ve Havadis-i Kefşger Ahmed (The Strange Adventures of Ahmed the Cobbler), presumably written in the first half of the nineteenth century by an unidentified author, lacks unassailable authenticity. Şinasi’s play, which was commissioned by the imperial court, is thoroughly Turkish in style, characterizations, dialogue, and dramatic devices. Nüvit Özdoğru, a well-known man of the theater and translator,

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3 This play was discovered by Fahir İz at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna in 1956. İz published the text under the title Papuççu Ahmed’in Garip Maceraları (İstanbul: Yenilik, 1961).
summarized the basic features of Şair Evlenmesi in the following words:

A one-act farce, it ridicules the custom of arranged marriages. This was a very advanced idea for the Turkey of that period. The play also reveals the corruption of some Muslim priests who did business by accepting bribes and suggests that people should not blindly follow the priests’ teachings. The characters, more types than real persons, spoke in the vernacular of the day. With its broad humor and swift development of theme, the play is not altogether removed from Karagöz or Ortaoyunu. The form, diction, and the satirical content of the play set the pattern for other playwrights to follow.4

With his six plays, Namık Kemal spurred interest in the legitimate stage and dramatic writing. His Vatan yahut Silistre (Fatherland or Silistria) was a patriotic play based on an actual event. When it was premiered on 1 April 1873, it aroused enthusiasm and nationalistic excitement. His other plays ranged from an episode from early Turkic history, to the suffering caused by forced marriages, to rebellion against tyranny, to a tragedy in an Indian palace, to vignettes of moral turpitude.

After the pioneering work of Şinasi, Ahmet Vefik Pasha and Âli Bey offered Molière adaptations; Ali Haydar and Şemseddin Sami dramatized myths and legends; and Ahmet Mithat Efendi, following in the footsteps of Şinasi, turned out many plays exposing the folly of antiquated social mores.

The playwrights were acutely aware of their functions of educating the public, introducing progressive ideas, criticizing social and political institutions, and satirizing the types who

were responsible for backwardness—for example, the religious fanatic, the bureaucrat, and the rabid conservative.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, were marked by censorship and suppression of works considered dangerous to the sultan and his regime. Plays dealing with revolutionary ideas such as strikes, overthrow of government, uprisings, and similar themes were banned. Mere references to such terms as freedom, anarchy, dynamite, constitution, or equality could lead to the prosecution of authors and directors.

Under this censorship, innocuous light comedies flourished. Popular taste, too, was a major factor. Molière dominated the scene of comedy in nineteenth-century Turkey. Most of his plays were translated or adapted, and served as models for scores of new plays by Turkish writers. Molière’s principal characters found their counterparts in authentic Ottoman types. The misers, the misanthropes, and the hypochondriacs—Molière’s anti-heroes—became the butt of Turkish satire. The comedy of manners and satirical plays exposing foibles and frailties reached popularity which was to become pervasive and perennial. Light comedies were characterized by slapstick, clowning, mal entendu, horseplay, practical jokes, sight gags, fleecing, infidelity, dialects and accents.5

The earliest specimens of European-style tragedy written by Turkish playwrights made their appearance in the 1860s. The evolution of the genre was to remain under the influence of Racine, Corneille, Shakespeare, and others. Greek tragedy seems to have wielded very little, if any, influence during the last decades of the Ottoman state. But Elizabethan and French tragedy offered nineteenth-century Ottoman playwrights effective models which were assiduously studied and, in some cases, partially plagiarized.

Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan, one of the dominant figures of Turkish poetry and literary Europeanization, owes much of his fame to the plays he wrote between 1872 and 1918. His

early plays were melodramas steeped in sentimentality. Of his twelve tragedies, ten are in classical or syllabic verse, either in full or in part. Rhymes and the metric structure give the diction of these plays a forced and contrived quality. The plots are based on intrigue, impossible loves, heroism—all depicted in romantic terms, and often set in places and periods unrelated to the Turkish experience, *e.g.*, Assyrian, Arab, Mongolian, Greek, Macedonian, etc.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were action packed for Ottoman Turkey—domestic strife, independence struggles, limited wars, emergence of a new constitutional regime, party politics, World War I, Dardanelles campaign, occupations, national liberation. In culture, the period was one of quest, ideological discords, Europeanization versus Islamic traditions. Literature mirrored all these events, served as the voice of conflicting ideas and ventures.

The Second Constitutional Period, inaugurated in 1908, ushered in freedoms which nurtured literary explorations. While the *Servet-i Fünun* movement stood on its laurels, the *Fecr-i Ati* group introduced new aesthetic principles based mainly on individualism and introspection. The members revealed Parnassian, Symbolist, and Impressionist influences.

Other notable groups included the *Nev Yunaniler* (Neo-Graecians) poets and novelists, principally Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who incorporated into their work many themes and aesthetic values from the Greek and to a lesser extent, Roman traditions. Emerging as an alternative and in opposition to the *Nev Yunaniler*, another group embraced the heritage of the entire Mediterranean basin and sought to create a synthesis of the West and the East. They called themselves *Nayiler*, literally reed-flute players, figuratively virtuosos of music. Making melodiousness a prime creative asset, they stressed the ideal of “inner harmony” through Yahya Kemal’s influence.
The closing decades of the Ottoman state witnessed an abundance of translations and adaptations from Europe. This was also the heyday of polemics and criticism. With great energy the stage was set for the revolutions that the young Republic of Turkey would launch.
REPUBLIC AND RENASCENCE
When the Ottoman state collapsed after nearly 625 years and gave way to the Turkish Republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk devoted his prodigious energies to the creation of a homogeneous nation-state dedicated to modernization in all walks of life, vowing to raise Turkey to the level of contemporary civilization (meaning the West) and higher. In image, in aspiration, in identification, the official and cultural establishment became largely Europeanized. Education was made secular, and reforms were undertaken to divest the country of its Muslim orientation. The legal system adapted the Swiss Civil Code, the Italian Penal Code, and German Commercial Law. Perhaps the most difficult of all reforms, the Language Revolution, was undertaken with lightning speed in 1928, and since then it has achieved a scope of success unparalleled in the modern world. The Arabic script, considered sacrosanct as Koranic orthography and used by the Turks for a millennium, was replaced by the Latin alphabet. This procrustean reform sought to increase literacy, to facilitate the study of European languages, and to cut off the younger generations from the legacy of the Ottoman past. Atatürk also launched a “pure Turkish” movement to rid the language of Arabic and Persian loanwords and to replace them with revivals from old Turkish vocabulary and provincial patois as well as neologisms. Significantly, reforms and all, the single common denominator of Turkish identification has been the language. It has provided for social cohesion, cultural continuity, and national allegiance.

Although many of these sweeping reforms did not have a strong impact in the rural areas until the latter part of the twentieth century, in the urban centers drastic changes took place: political system, religious faith, national ideology, educational institutions and methods, intellectual orientation, daily life, script and language—all underwent transformation.
All stages of modern Turkish history (reforms under Atatürk, 1923–1938; consolidation under İnönü, 1938–1950; democracy under Menderes, 1950–1960; junta, coalitions, caretaker cabinets, parliamentary governments since 1960) have been marked by the thrust of literary modernization.

Today’s Turkey is homogeneous in population (more than ninety-nine percent Muslim) and integral in political and administrative structure—yet diversified, full of inner tensions, a battleground of traditionalists vs. revolutionaries, of fundamentalists vs. secularists. In its reorientation, Turkey seems to have traded the impact of Islamic civilization for the influences of Western civilization—at least in the urban areas. During its vita nuova, Turkish culture has become European-influenced, but not European as such. It is no longer predominantly Islamic, but certainly has little kinship with the Judeo-Graeco-Christian world despite the concepts, forms, and values it has adopted from that tradition. It has become a new amalgam of traditions—ancient Turkic, Anatolian, Selçuk, Ottoman, Islamic, Arabic, Persian, European, American—a bridge between two continents, like the two dramatic bridges in Istanbul that now link Europe and Asia. This synthesis, its culture and literature, are all enchorial, an original creation of modern Turkey. Whatever its strengths and weaknesses might be, there is no other synthesis like it.

Literature was also caught in the maelstrom of reforms. Turkish literature is vibrant with ideologies and the feverish search for values old and new, for styles and tastes, for elements of traditional national culture which may be valid enough to revive and significant borrowings from the West as well as other traditions.

In 1923, the influential social thinker Ziya Gökalp wrote: “We belong to the Turkish nation, the Islamic community, and Western civilization. . . . Our literature must direct itself to the
people and, at the same time, to the West.” His summation of Turkish identity was, by and large, correct in terms of historical realities and the burgeoning impetus for Westernization. His counsel for a people’s literature exploring the literary norms and values of the West proved inspiring and prophetic. The literature of the Turkish Republic has achieved Gökalp’s dual objective, but thanks to its versatility, it has functioned, with impressive accomplishments, in other spheres as well.

Revolution, innovation, and Westernization were the driving forces of the Turkish nation since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the transformation of sociopolitical structure, economic life, and culture, the men and women of letters have served not only as eloquent advocates of progress, but also as catalysts, precursors, pioneers—and creators of brave new ideas of innovation. Today, as in the past thousand years, Turkish literature seems to bear testimony to Carlyle’s dictum—“The history of a nation’s poetry is the essence of its history: political, scientific, religious”—and to Gustave E. von Grunebaum’s observation that “literature has always been the art of the Muslim world, masterpieces of painting and architecture notwithstanding.”

Poetry, or literature in general, has been the quintessence of Turkish culture until modern times and a most faithful mirror of socioeconomic realities in Turkey since the inauguration of the Republic. Virtually all of the salient aspects of Turkish life, politics, and culture have found their direct or indirect expression in poetry, fiction, and drama, as well as in critical and scholarly writing. The themes and concerns have included nationalism, social justice, search for modernity, Westernization, revival of folk culture, economic and technological progress, human dignity, mysticism, pluralistic society, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic ideals, hero-cult, popular will, Atatürkism, proletarianism, Turanism, Marxist-Leninist
ideology, revival of Islamism, humanism—in fact, all aspects and components of contemporary culture.

The function of literature, however, has not been confined to that of a mirror held to society and to intellectual life. The basic genres have not only embodied ideas and ideologies, values and verities, beliefs and aspirations, but have also served as vehicles of criticism, protest, opposition, and resistance. Literature in Turkey, especially until the last two decades of the twentieth century, has striven to achieve self-renewal in aesthetic terms, to give voice to cultural and socioeconomic innovation, to provide impetus to progressive or revolutionary change, and to serve the cause of propaganda fide.

The literary tastes of the early years of the Republic were dominated by numerous revered poets who had emerged in the twilight of the Ottoman Empire. These prominent figures included Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan (1852–1937), who, according to E. J. W. Gibb, inaugurated “the true Modern School of Turkish poetry, and whose elegiac, philosophical and metaphysical poems and stentorian verse tragedies fired the imagination of the Ottoman elite.” Mehmet Emin Yurdakul intoned a mystique of Turkish nationalism: “I am a Turk: my faith and my race are mighty.” Ahmet Haşim (1887–1933), under the influence of French symbolists, combined a striking fiery imagery with melancholy sonal effects to create his lyrics of spiritual exile (“We ignore the generation that has no sense of melancholy”), articulated a view that summed up a fundamental aspect of classical poetry, and adumbrated the credo of the neo-surrealists of the 1950s and 1960s: “The poet’s language is constructed not for the purpose of being understood but to be heard; it is an intermediary language between music and words, yet closer to music than to words.” Many of his poems are replete with striking images and metaphors, as in “The Fountain”:
Evening is gathering once again.

My darling laughs at her old place
Who shuns the daylight and at night
Above the fountain shows her face.

Girdled by moonlight, now, she stands,
The sky above her secret veil—
The stars are roses in her hands.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

In the early part of the Republican era, poetry served primarily as a vehicle for the propagation of nationalism. Younger poets branded Divan forms and meters as anathema. Native verse forms and syllabic meters gained popularity. Intense efforts were undertaken toward a systematic purification of the language. The group Beş Hececiler (Five Syllabist Poets)—Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel (1898–1973), who was equally adept at aruz; Orhan Seyfi Orhon (1890–1972); Enis Behiç Koryürek (1893–1949); Halit Fahri Ozansoy (1891–1971); and Yusuf Ziya Ortaç (1895–1967)—produced simple, unadorned poems celebrating love, the beauties of nature, and the glories of the Turkish nation. Many poets shied away from chauvinism and evolved individualistic worldviews and styles.

Neoclassicism gained considerable popularity under the aegis of Yahya Kemal Beyathli (1884–1958). A supreme craftsman, Beyathli was the much-acclaimed neoclassicist who produced, in the conventional forms and meters, meticulous lyrics of love, Ottoman grandeur, and the beauties of Istanbul in poems memorable for their refined language and melodiousness. His “Death of the Epicures” is a testament to spiritual tranquillity and to the aesthetic life:
In the garden of the poet’s\(^1\) tomb there’s a rose, they say,
Day in day out it blooms anew, its color is blood-choked;
A nightingale weeps all night, they say, till the break of day:
In its tunes, the dreams of the city of love\(^2\) are evoked.

Death for an epicure is the springtime of calm and peace;
For years his soul smolders like incense burning everywhere
While his tomb lies and endures under the cool cypresses—
Each dawn a rose blooms and each night a nightingale sings there.

Yahya Kemal Beyatlı attained fame for his poems about the metaphysics
of life and death. One of his most famous poems deals metaphorically with death
and its aftermath:

\begin{verse}
Silent Ship
\begin{flushleft}
If the day has arrived at last to weigh anchor from time,
A ship departs from this harbor toward an unknown clime.

As if it has no passengers, silently it makes way;
No hand nor handkerchief is waved as it sails away.

This journey is distress for those left behind on the quay,
Their tearful eyes scan the black horizons day after day.

Desperate hearts: This will neither be the last ship to go
Nor the final bereavement of a life filled with sorrow.
\end{flushleft}
\end{verse}

\(^1\)The poet referred to is Hafiz, a major Persian poet of the fourteenth century.
\(^2\)A reference to the Persian city of Shiraz.
In this world, the beloved and the lover wait in vain

Not knowing that the loved ones will never come back again.

Those who sailed away are surely happy with their sojourn:

Years went by since that voyage, yet not one soul will return.

Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963), one of Turkey’s leading poets, famous in his native land and internationally, lived the life of a romantic revolutionary. As a teenager he witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and lived through the Anatolian upheaval leading to the emergence of the Turkish Republic, which he later saw as an anti-imperialist struggle and a class uprising. In 1921, at age nineteen, he went to the Soviet Union to study. He stayed there four years, sharing the revolutionary enthusiasm, acquiring ideological orientation, and assimilating literary influences—most notably Mayakovski’s verse. After his return to Turkey in 1925, he became a living legend. He published rhythmic, resonant poems of love and justice and sometimes read them before mesmerized crowds in streets and public squares. Theatergoers were eager to see his plays, which were avant-garde in the 1930s not only by Turkish but by European standards as well. According to what might be an apocryphal story, he once openly defied Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk), founder of the Turkish Republic. He was a resounding voice of social criticism in the Kemalist age when few dared to say anything unfavorable. He was in and out of prisons on various charges between 1928 and 1933, and finally in 1938 he was sentenced—on what seems, in retrospect, like unsubstantiated charges—to twenty-five years in jail. After having served about thirteen years, he was pardoned in 1950. He fled to the Soviet Union in 1951, and spent the last twelve years of his life writing
poetry and doing propaganda stints in East European countries, Cuba, France, Italy and elsewhere until his death in Moscow in 1963.

His artistic life was equally revolutionary: in strictly aesthetic terms, he introduced or consolidated many new concepts and techniques whose influence became decisive on modern Turkish poetry. Among these innovations were free verse, ideological focus, “broken” lines, organic form, and functional metaphors and images. Nazım Hikmet’s poetry created a new blend of lyrical, dramatic, and rhetorical elements. His art was at once utilitarian and poetically motivated. In his best poems he seemed to have interfused Lorca’s spirit with Mayakovski’s craft. Nazım Hikmet was truly Turkish and remarkably universal, a romantic and a rationalist. His vast popularity in Turkey and elsewhere is a testament to a passionate man who cared and dared in everything he did in life and art.

Out of despair and wrath against injustice and exploitation, Nazım Hikmet always offered poetic statements of faith and affirmation, confident “that we’ll see beautiful days / we’ll see / sunny / days.” It is regrettable that simplistic rhetoric rears its head in parts of his massive output which, at its best, features the lyric and dramatic depictions of the human predicament without reducing it to an economic plight.

The earlier poems, which launched free verse in Turkey, put an effusive lyricism at the service of Marxist ideals and made a synthesis of youthful enthusiasm for the machine age, the mystique of socialist paradise on earth, the rhetoric of journalistic verse, ruthless political satire, and the lyrical outpourings of an incorrigible romantic soul. The later poems, written in and out of prison by an idealist whose spirit never gets broken, are often battle cries, but they occasionally betray self-pity and self-dramatization. By 1941, Nazım Hikmet was angry and vengeful: “Our cause / will be fulfilled / alas! /
drenched with blood. / And our victory shall be pulled out / like a nail / without mercy.” In a poem he wrote in 1931, he described himself as “I, who am an ordinary proletarian poet, / with a Marxist-Leninist conscience.”

Nazım Hikmet’s masterpiece, Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı, came out in 1936. It represents the culmination of the best aspects of the poet’s art and is remarkably free of his weaknesses. The epic is a lyrical and dramatic account of the uprisings of Şeyh Bedreddin and his followers, including a young revolutionary named Börklüce Mustafa, who in the early fifteenth century founded a religious sect advocating community ownership, social and judicial equality, and pacifism. Nazım Hikmet tells how the Ottoman armies, under the command of Royal Prince Murad, crushed the uprisings, killed Börklüce Mustafa, and later hanged Şeyh Bedreddin. This work is a perfect synthesis of substance and form, of diction and drama, of fact and metaphor. Bedreddin and Mustafa are treated as tragic heroes whose ideals are thwarted by a cruel death. Nazım Hikmet’s ideological concerns are, fortunately for the poem, woven into the action and lyric formulation. An elegiac tone, fully attuned to the historical narrative, precludes the intrusion of the polemics and propaganda which had deleterious effects on Nazım’s other major poems. The epic is perhaps the best long poem written in Turkish in the twentieth century.

*From: The Epic of Şeyh Bedreddin*

*It was hot.*

*The clouds were loaded.*

*The first drop, like a sweet word, was about to fall.*

*Suddenly,*

*as if pouring from the rocks*

*raining down from the sky*

*sprouting out of the soil*
like the ultimate creation of this earth,
Bedreddin’s warriors confronted the Royal Heir’s army.
They were wearing seamless white robes,
their heads were bare
feet bare, swords bare.

It was a ruthless battle.

Turkish peasants from Aydin
Greek sailors from Chios
Jewish artisans
Börklüce Mustafa’s ten thousand heretical comrades
tore into the forest of enemies like ten thousand axes.
The ranks with red and green banners,
emblazoned shields and bronze helmets
were shattered to pieces
but as the day sank into evening in the torrential rain
the ten thousand were but two thousand.

To sing their songs in unison,
to drag the nets together out of the water,
to work the iron together like lace
to be able to plow the land together
and to eat the honey-filled figs together
to be able to say
“Together in everything
together everywhere
except the lover’s face”
the ten thousand gave their eight thousand . . .

They were defeated.

The victors wiped the blood off their swords
   on the seamless white robes
   of the vanquished.
And the earth they had tilled together, with their brotherly hands
like a song sung together
was trampled
   under the hooves of horses bred in the Edirne\(^3\) Palace.

*   *   *

It’s drizzling,

fearful,

whispering
like a talk of treason.

Drizzling,
like the patter of the white bare feet of
renegades on damp dark earth.

Drizzling.

In the marketplace of Serez,\(^4\)
across from a coppersmith’s shop,
my Bedreddin is hanging from a tree.

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\(^3\)Edirne: Adrianopolis, the Ottoman capital of the time.
\(^4\)Serez: A small town in present-day Greece.
Drizzling.

Late on a starless night,
and getting soaked in the rain
swinging from a leafless branch
is the stark-naked body of my sheikh.

Drizzling.

The market of Serez is mute,
the market of Serez is blind.
In the air hovers the accursed sorrow of not speaking, not seeing
and the market of Serez has covered its face with its hand.
It’s drizzling.

At his best, Nazım Hikmet has been compared by Turkish and non-Turkish men of letters to such figures as Lorca, Aragon, Esenin, Mayakovski, Neruda, and Artaud. No other Turkish poet has been translated into more languages nor enjoyed greater acclaim in so many countries. Tristan Tzara, who translated some of Nazım Hikmet’s poems into French, paid the following tribute: “The life Nazım led engulfs the experiences of a large segment of mankind. His poetry exalts the aspirations of the Turkish people as well as articulates the common ideals of all nations in humanistic terms.”

His most prolific translators into English, Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, have identified him as “the first and greatest modern Turkish poet.” He has earned substantial praise from American and British poets: Denise Levertov affirms “Nazım Hikmet’s poetry, as well as all I have ever heard and read about his life, has always filled me with joy, hope, and new determination towards poetry and struggle”; David Ignatow, “He writes our most private thoughts with a zest and love that makes us treasure them in ourselves”; Paul Zweig, “Hikmet is
one of the few important political poets of this century”; and W. S. Merwin, “Hikmet is clearly a figure of great energy and talent.”

Nazım Hikmet’s innovations, although they struck a responsive chord in poetic tastes throughout his life and after his death, by no means established a monopoly. Most of his contemporaries pursued different courses: Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel combined neoclassicism with urbanized versions of folk verse; Ahmet Muhip Diranas, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, and Ahmet Kutsi Tecer specialized in simple lyrics of genteel sensibilities expressed in tidy stanzaic forms and the traditional syllabic meters.

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar (1901–1962) followed in the steps of Beyatlı, about whom he produced a sophisticated critical study, distilled some of Beyatlı’s aesthetics into crystalline poems written in syllabic verse.

Fear
I have the fear of all the things that end,
I am the Blue Eagle who drags the dawn
Along in his iron beak . . .
And life is caught
Within my claws like dangling emeralds
And deathlessness along my lovely swoop
Now bites the thirsty antelope of time.

Ahmet Muhip Diranas (1908–1980), one of Turkey’s best lyric poets, wrote all of his poems in the traditional syllabic meters. His agility in molding his lucid ideas and tender sentiments into these meters is most impressive. So is his ability to rhyme; of all living Turkish poets, Diranas seems to command the greatest resourcefulness and the subtlest ingenuity in finding rhymes.
Two Solitary Trees

Two trees by an odd creek that flows alone
Stand young strong full-grown;
They have something to say, they do, and yet,
Dead or alive, they always keep quiet.

After sunset, under the stars, see the way
The trees sway,
Whatever they have to hold back or declare,
Dead or alive, it is all laid bare.

By the creek two desolate trees stand
Pegged onto the ground;
They have something to say, they do, and yet,
Dead or alive, they have said it—or not.

Necip Fazıl Kı sakürek (1905–1983), who started out as a poet of romantic agony and spent the latter part of his career as a confirmed Islamic fundamentalist, made an impact with his polished verses which expressed human anguish as a literary conceit. His major poem entitled “Anguish” stands as a tantalizing poetic experience in the soul’s vicissitudes, as evinced by this excerpt:

Month after month I roamed broken, aghast:
My soul was a cauldron that my mind drained;
With the madmen’s town one horizon past,
My brain’s fantasies were bridled and chained.
Why do all things in the distance dwindle?
In eyeless dreams who gives me piercing sight?
Why the dance of time in the globe’s spindle?
I crave wisdom to see my life’s twilight.

Thoughts burn as vitriol in the wound’s grail
Clinging like leeches to the brain’s membranes,
Hail, most majestic of agonies, hail,
Magic log that blooms as it sears and pains.

Asaf Hâlet Çelebi (1907–1958) introduced his own iconoclasm in surrealistic poems that gave the impression of somnambulistic writing with intimations of erudition. “A poem,” he declared, “is nothing but a long word made up of syllables joined together. Syllables by themselves have no meaning. It is therefore futile to struggle with meaning in a poem. . . . Poetry creates an abstract world using concrete materials—just like life itself.”

These theories and movements continued to exert varying degrees of influence on the literature of the later decades, but the themes and the tenor of Nazım Hikmet’s verse probably wielded the widest impact. Effective voices have been raised among poets, dramatists, fiction writers, essayists, and journalists against the established order and its iniquities, oppression of the proletariat, and national humiliation suffered at imperialist hands. The poetry of social realism concentrates on the creation of a just and equitable society. It is often more romantic and utopian than rhetorical, with sensual strains, tender sentiments, flowing rhythms, but occasionally given to invective and vituperation.
One of Turkey’s earliest progenitors of free verse was Ercüment Behzad Lâv (1903–1984). Ahmet Oktay (b. 1933), an astute critic, defined Lâv’s aesthetic strategies as “surface modernism”—an observation which has considerable validity in view of the fact that Lâv was virtually an innovator for innovation’s sake. There are few affirmations in what he wrote, little that made other poets appealing for those seeking pleasure, and certainly none of the easy communicability of the ideological rhetoric that turned some of his contemporaries into heroes. One tends to concur with the brilliant scholar-critic Orhan Burian (1914–1953), who observed in the late 1940s that Lâv is “committed to the cause of creating a new type of poetry out of half-baked ideas and hidden sound structures.” “There is a dryness in his poems,” Burian continued. “His short poems which give voice to momentary emotions are more attractive.”

Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı (1910–1956), an accomplished master of syllabic verse, expressed simple sentiments distilled into exquisite, yet sometimes excruciating lines. One of his best poems, “After Death,” is a chilling lyric of shattered faith in life and in life after death:

With many hopes about death we perished,
But the charm was broken in a vacuum.
Our song of love we cannot help exhume,
A view of the sky, tuft of twigs, bird’s plume;
Living was a habit we had cherished.

No news comes from the world now or ever;
No one misses us, no soul cares to know,
The darkness of our night is endless, so
We might just as well do without a window:
Our image has faded from the river.
One of modern Turkey’s most popular poets, Cahit Külebi (1917–1997), has as the hallmarks of his art a sensuous, sentimental involvement in human experiences, an admiration for ecological beauty, an infatuation with life’s simple joys, and a lucid style that revels in the colors and rhythms of the Turkish vernacular.

A Tiny Spring

I am a tiny spring
On a forsaken mountain
My waters will never cease
I shall keep flowing
Under the starlight on and on.

Travelers don’t hear my voice
As they go by night and day.
From this parched land and burning hearts
This thirst will never go away.
All our longing will forever stay.

There are times when animals come near
And drink their fill of my waters.
What do beasts know of this flavor.
Still, their eyes are full of glitters.
All my days go by this way.

Sometimes a seed falls into my waters.
Hold it, my neighboring soil, embrace it!
O seed, powerful seed, sprout at once,
Let your roots strike deep into the earth
To grace it.

I’m a tiny spring, what do I care?
I shall never despair.

A frontal thrust for modernization took place in the early 1940s when Orhan Veli Kanık (1914–1950), Oktay Rifat (1914–1988), and Melih Cevdet Anday (1915–2002) launched their “Poetic Realism” movement. Their urge for literary upheaval was revolutionary, as expressed in a joint manifesto of 1941 that called for “altering the whole structure from the foundation up... dumping overboard everything that traditional literature has taught us.” The movement did away with rigid conventional forms and meters, reduced rhyme to a bare minimum, avoided stock metaphors, stentorian effects, specious embellishments. It championed the idea and the ideal of “the little man” as its hero, the ordinary citizen who asserted his political will with the advent of democracy. Kanık’s “Epitaph I” is precisely this type of celebration:

He suffered from nothing in the world
The way he suffered from his corns;
He didn’t even feel so badly
About having been created ugly.
Though he wouldn’t utter the Lord’s name
Unless his shoe pinched,
He couldn’t be considered a sinner either.

It’s a pity Süleyman Efendi had to die.

The Garip (Strange) Group, as the Kanık–Rifat–Anday triad is referred to, endeavored to write not only about the common man, but also for him. In order to communicate with him, they employed the rhythms and idioms of colloquial speech,
including slang. With their movement (later dubbed “The First New” movement), the domination of free verse, introduced in the 1920s by Nazım Hikmet, became complete. They proclaimed with pride: “Every moment in the history of literature imposed a new limitation. It has become our duty to expand the frontiers to their outer limits, better still, to liberate poetry from its restrictions.” Many of Kanık’s poems are frequently quoted by Turks, a favorite one being the three-line poem entitled “For Our Homeland”:

*All the things we did for this land of ours!*

*Some of us died;*

*Some of us gave speeches.*

Orhan Veli Kanık presided over this demise of strict stanzaic forms and stood squarely against artifice, hackneyed metaphors, and a variety of clichés and literary embellishments which had rendered much of Turkish poetry sterile. His poems dealt with everyday life expressed in direct terms. While the use of free verse had been established earlier, it was Orhan Veli who made *vers libre* and the French modernists relevant to contemporary Turkish poetry. Orhan Veli’s iconoclasm paved the way for a poetry steeped in the vernacular and stripped of adornments. By liberating his contemporaries from the stultifying weight of the past, he made them conscious of the life and values of Everyman. Any and all topics could be treated poetically and poets were free to use all the expressive resources of the Turkish language.

Orhan Veli’s first book, *Garip*, which included the work of his best friends Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday, was also his most controversial and influential. The manifesto with which it began was influenced, according to Oktay Rifat, by André Breton’s *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, and marked a turning point in the modernization of Turkish poetry. It declared:
The literary taste on which the new poetry will base itself is no longer the taste of a minority class. People in the world today acquire their right to life after a sustained struggle. Like everything else, poetry is one of their rights and must be attuned to their tastes. This does not signify that an attempt should be made to express the aspirations of the masses by means of the literary conventions of the past. The question is not to make a defense of class interests, but merely to explore the people’s tastes, to determine them, and to make them reign supreme over art.

We can arrive at a new appreciation by new ways and means. Squeezing certain theories into familiar old molds cannot be a new artistic thrust forward. We must alter the whole structure from the foundation up. In order to rescue ourselves from the stifling effects of the literatures which have dictated and shaped our tastes and judgments for too many years, we must dump overboard everything that those literatures have taught us. We wish it were possible to dump even language itself, because it threatens our creative efforts by forcing its vocabulary on us when we write poetry.

There are no stentorian effects in Orhan Veli’s verse, no rhetoric, no bloated images. In most of his poems he strikes a vital chord by offering the simple truth, and he is usually so sincere as to seem almost sentimental. He never wrote a complex line nor a single perplexing metaphor. His verse was a revolt of a purist against facile meters, predetermined form and rhythm, pompous diction. Style, in his hands, became a vehicle for the natural sounds of colloquial Turkish.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed:
At first there is a gentle breeze
And the leaves on the trees
Softly sway;
Out there, far away,
The bells of water-carriers unceasingly ring;
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed;
Then suddenly birds fly by,
Flocks of birds, high up, with a hue and cry,
While the nets are drawn in the fishing grounds
And a woman’s feet begin to dabble in the water.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
The Grand Bazaar’s serene and cool,
An uproar at the hub of the Market,
Mosque yards are full of pigeons.
While hammers bang and clang at the docks
Spring winds bear the smell of sweat;
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed;
Still giddy from the revelries of the past,
A seaside mansion with dingy boathouses is fast asleep.
Amid the din and drone of southern winds, reposed,
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.
I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

A pretty girl walks by on the sidewalk:

Four-letter words, whistles and songs, rude remarks;

Something falls out of her hand—

It’s a rose, I guess.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

A bird flutters round your skirt;

On your brow, is there sweat? Or not? I know.

Are your lips wet? Or not? I know.

A silver moon rises beyond the pine trees:

I can sense it all in your heart’s throbbing.

I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed.

—Orhan Veli Kanık

(d. 1950)

In a poetic career that spanned half a century until his death in 1988, Orhan Veli’s friend Oktay Rifat also stood in the vanguard of modern Turkish poetry—first as an audacious, almost obstreperous rebel, then as an eclectic transformer of styles and language, writing from a self-enforced privacy, and finally, as a reclusive elder statesman creating a unique synthesis. One could say that these three stages in his writing corresponded roughly to movements elsewhere in world literature—to the socialist surrealism of the 1930s and 40s, followed by obscurantism in which Oktay Rifat seemed to evoke echoes of the French poets Apollinaire, Supervielle, Aragon, Éluard, Soupault and Prévert, and ending with what one can only call “pure poetry.”

Oktay Rifat’s poetry is, in fact, unique—the result of a very personal development. It defies critical analysis in terms of literary schools or influences. Although in the early phase of
his career he seemed to belong to an emerging school, he stood squarely against any school that confined a poet’s aesthetic taste. In 1941 when he became a member of Garip, he insisted that the text of the manifesto include the following statement:

*The idea of literary schools represents an interruption or pause in the flow of time. It is contrary to velocity and action. The only movement that is harmonious with the flow of life and does not thwart the concept of dialectics is the “no-school movement.”*

Although most of his output from the mid-1960s onward was either spontaneously or consciously universal, Rifat occasionally returned to Ottoman history. In a goodly number of poems, he evokes Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire in masterful terms. Remarkably he utilizes for most of these the sonnet form and some light rhymes. The synthesis becomes more encompassing—there are fascinating returns to roots, not the least of which is that his surprising turns of phrase and paradoxical concepts have their parallels in the imagination of his predecessors. One is reminded of a famous poem by the Anatolian mystic Yunus Emre (d. ca. 1321) which has such lines as “I climbed to the branches of a plum tree, / And I helped myself to the grapes up there / I snatched one of the wings of a sparrow / And loaded it onto forty ox-carts / The fish climbed the poplar tree / To gobble the pickles of tar up there.” A folk saying goes as follows: “The water buffalo built its nest on a willow branch.” Sometimes Rifat echoed this verbal imagination.

“I am,” wrote Melih Cevdet Anday, the third member of the Garip triumvirate, in an early poem, “the poet of happy days.” This was the tongue-in-cheek, sardonic opening line of a poem entitled “Yalan” (Lies) which laments that life’s cruelties
make it impossible for a poet to bring beauty and good tidings to his people. From his first appearance in 1936 on the Turkish literary scene until his death in 2002, Anday felt this ironic frustration, oscillating between the poetry of commitment to social causes and pure poetry. His earliest poems were simple romantic sentimental lyrics. From the early 1940s until the late 1950s, he wrote for and about the oppressed man in the street, protesting social injustice.

After their innovations of the 1950s ground to a halt, both Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday abandoned their earlier insistence on simplicity, the vernacular, concrete depiction, epigrammatic statement, and so on, which had been the hallmark of the Garip Group. Oktay Rifat took up a fertile type of neo-surrealism, proclaiming that “poetry tells or explains nothing, because beauty explains nothing.” He produced subtle abstract poems, some of which are notable for intellectual architectonics, mostly devoid of social or political engagement. Anday’s work moved toward lucid philosophical inquiry: his new aesthetic formula was, in his own words, “thought or essences serving as a context for arriving at beauty.” His long poems of the 1960s and 1970s (Kolları Bağlı Odysseus [Odysseus Bound], “Troya Önünde Atlar” [Horses at the Trojan Gates, also published as Horses before Troy], Göçebe Denizin Üstünde [On the Nomad Sea]) sought a synthesis of universal culture, and endeavored to construct superstructures of ideas, myths, and legends. Although he never abandoned his humanism, his affirmation of life, and his lucid diction, everything else about his poetry—substance, style, syntax—changed radically. His final break with his past came with the 1962 publication of Kolları Bağlı Odysseus, a long poem consisting of four parts, which might well be Anday’s *magnum opus*. Here his preoccupation is not with social causes, but with modern man’s philosophical predicaments. Here Anday avoids a stark-naked
style and explores expressive resources precisely attuned to the complexities of human existence. Deviating from his concept of man as a cog in the unjust and heartless wheel of society, he adopts *homo sapiens* as his hero. Claiming Odysseus as his aggrandized Everyman and leaving Homer alone until the fourth and last part, Anday creates a modern universal mythology. This cerebral work, one of the few excellent long Turkish poems written in the twentieth or any other century and certainly a landmark in Turkish philosophical poetry, shows a piercing mind.

In the late 1950s a strong reaction set in against Poetic Realism. Literature of commitment came under fire in some circles. This is reflected in “Poetry Lesson” by Salâh Birsel (1919–1999):

*Take “Love for Mankind” as your topic*

*And free verse as prosody.*

*Relevant or not,*

*Whenever it occurs to you,*

*Insert the word “hunger”*

*At a convenient spot.*

*Near the end of the poem*

*Rhyme “strife” with “the right to good life.”*

*There—that’s the way to become a Great Poet.*

Behçet Necatigil (1916–1979) was Turkey’s foremost intellectual poet who enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for his subtle, indefatigably inventive poems. Necatigil severed himself from sentimental romanticism which was the umbilical cord of all of his predecessors and most of his contemporaries. He carried depersonalization further than any Turkish poet and
banished all subjective intrusions, value judgments, didacticism, and moralizing from his poetry. Necatigil makes poetry itself reign supreme. He regarded all things and all phenomena as being possible or at least plausible. This granted him the freedom to look beyond the physical state and enabled him to discover distant and seemingly paradoxical relationships among objects, actions, emotions, and concepts.

This brand of poetry is not allied with surrealism, because Necatigil never strayed from the plane of consciousness. Nor is it akin to symbolism, for he used no symbols with traceable referents. Nor is it “poetry of abstraction” à la Paul Valéry or Wallace Stevens, because it does not distill essences nor does it recognize abstraction as the supreme reality. The term “obscurantist” does not apply, either: for all his opaque references and unidentified insights, Necatigil made no effort to forge the aesthetics of the obscure. One could call Necatigil’s poetry “Cubism” and his creative approach “extraspection.” Necatigil consciously explored external reality, disintegrated it, and then—out of the disjointed ingredients—recreated a new synthesis. His art derived its creative energy from transforming visions and revisions of reality.

Necatigil is among the few independent poets who refused to be pigeonholed. Uncompromising in his aesthetic views, he stands virtually alone. His poetry has a shape and a voice unlike anyone else’s. No other Turkish poet is so thoroughly original or so staunchly individualistic.

He may well be to Turkish poetry what Wallace Stevens has been to American poetry, although there is virtually no resemblance between them in terms of style or substance. It is futile to look for influences when analyzing the basic features of Necatigil’s art. He may have found a few themes and devices in the stark abstractions of post-World War II German poetry, but these are all subtle and elusive, as is his entire poetic approach.
Necatigil’s “intellectual complexity” is a functional creative process which starts with visual and conceptual concentration on an object or phenomenon, places it into a web of distant relationships, distills from it the ultimate abstractions and expresses it in terms and idioms which stretch the resources of the language to its outer limits. No single poetic voice in modern Turkey is as spare and esoteric as that of Necatigil or as precise in expressing a vision or a speculation. Although he was the modern poet par excellence, his creative strategy, based as it was on the proposition that language is the supreme intellect, tended to reaffirm the aesthetic values of classical Ottoman poetry, about which Necatigil was fully knowledgeable. Verbal richness, subtle imagery, assonances, visions, and abstractions—the ultimate values of Turkey’s bygone poetic tradition—find their ultramodern vita nuova in Necatigil’s work. His poetry reconstructs the external world, as well as the world of imagination, through the prospects of language. He proves, by means of his explorations, that poetry can re-create our inner and outer life.

In the mid-twentieth century, an energetic new movement emerged often identified as İkinci Yeni, “The Second New.” İlhan Berk (1918–2008), perhaps Turkey’s most daring and durable poetic innovator, who acted as spokesman for the movement, especially at the outset, pontificated: “Art is for innovation’s sake.” İlhan Berk’s aesthetics has occasionally striven to forge a synthesis of Oriental tradition and Western modernity. In his Şenlikname (The Festival Book, 1972), for instance, he conveys through visual evocations, old miniatures, engravings, and subtle sonorities the vista of Ottoman life and art; yet the poetic vision, throughout the book, is that of a modern man, neutral rather than conditioned by his culture, in a sense more European than Turkish. Berk has been the most protean of Turkey’s modern poets. In the 1930s he launched his career
with smooth, melli fluous lyrics, but in the 1940s he became socially engaged and produced many excellent verses stark in their realism. By the mid-1950s he had published Köroğlu, one of modern Turkey’s best adaptations of folk themes. Soon afterward he was in the vanguard of “obscurantism” of which he gave several notoriously extreme specimens.

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, Berk had often exposed his art to the impact of contemporary French poetry. In the mid-1960s, he announced his resounding departure from European influences and embraced the norms and values of Turkish classical poetry. Âşıkane embodies the last group of Berk’s French-oriented sonnets and his first collection of verses with a classical flavor. The lyrics in the latter category are in the form and spirit of the gazel, which was the most popular verse form in Islamic Middle Eastern literatures.

Later Berk’s aesthetics strove to forge a synthesis of visual art and sound effects, of spatial and temporal realities, of history and man’s higher consciousness. On a different level, it created admixtures of the past and the present, and cultural fusions of Oriental tradition with Western modernity. One of his best-known poems idealizes love:

**Love**

*When you were here we never knew such a thing as evil*

*Life had neither mishaps nor these dark griefs*

*Without you they put hope on the line of gloom*

*Without you they scratched out our happiness*

*For a long time now the sea doesn’t look lovely from the window*

*For a long time now we lack human life because you’re gone.*

*Come lead us into new ages.*
The forms and values of classical poetry, too, were kept alive by a group of highly accomplished formalists who clustered mainly around the monthly *Hisar*, which ceased publication in 1980 after thirty years. Among the daring, and quite impressive, explorations into Turkey’s own literary heritage have been those undertaken by Turgut Uyar (1927–1985), Attila İlhan (1925–2005), and Hilmi Yavuz (b. 1936); the latter remains in the forefront of modern innovators who absorbed and revitalized many of the salient features of classical aesthetics, Islamic culture and beliefs, and traditional Turkish values.

*From: The dig*

poems must be dug into: you supposed
i saw the manuscript
with its crimson rubrics
buried by those delicate exiles
you found heart-broken papers
their sorrow frozen, leathern their ashes
and suddenly,
as their pain touched your pain

(Translated by Walter G. Andrews)

Although these three major figures are highly individualistic and their works drastically different from one another, they have all acknowledged the need for coming to terms with the viable and the valuable aspects of the Ottoman-Turkish elite poetry. They have used, not its stringent forms and prosody, but its processes of abstracting and its metaphorical techniques.

Much of Turgut Uyar’s output has conveyed a sense of discontent, if not disgust, with humanity and a firm conviction in man’s inherent evil which Uyar seems to blame—in poetic
rather than moral terms—for the past vicissitudes of human history and for its present tragic state. Human society, according to the basic philosophical premise of his work, is bent on destroying itself: it inflicts conflagrations upon itself and rejoices in the ashes. Yet miraculously it arises, phoenix-like, out of those ashes to perpetuate its existence, albeit in near chaos and in banishment from immortality. Aesthetically, Uyar has a sharp aptitude for recognizing bad habits in creative efforts—in particular, his own.

Quiet reflection alternates with eruptions of anger and nausea; moves on to nightmarish abstract depictions; then resolves into an ontological probe where Uyar forges a masterful fusion of the concrete and abstract elements of reality.

At its best, Uyar’s poetry is a well-wrought blend of senses and action with ingenious metaphor. In “Terziler Geldiler” (And Came the Tailors), which is arguably one of the best poems of his entire career, Uyar achieves a summation of creation and its attendant anarchy: life’s warp and woof constantly restoring itself and disintegrating unto death. It is a theme of Herculean dimensions, and Uyar does justice to it by eliciting meaningful abstract formulations out of imaginative juxtaposition of images, allusions, and philosophic lunges into the diverse aspects of reality. Death became dominant in Uyar’s poetry as a concomitant of his pessimism. He was preoccupied with death as the inescapable end and therefore as an end in itself: in “Övgü, Ölüye” (In Praise of the Dead) he evoked death’s sundry aspects by dint of perhaps the most striking delineation of a corpse in all of Turkish literature.

Turgut Uyar’s line “on the shore of all possibilities” summed up the autistic aspect of this new esoteric poetry, which was marked by such wild thrusts of imagination and distortion of language that some critics denounced it as “word salad.” “Vanish,” by Edip Cansever (1928–1986), is one of the prime examples:
I reiterate your face is a laughter
Glance and an armada of life marches into light
A flower that hails from subterranean regions
An eagle gone stark-naked
Now pink is pursued by three persons
Upward along your shoulders
Drive them insane in your hair
Carnation multiple
Carnation shrinking shrunk

Most beauty arises in your most secret places
Lovely as animals suddenly born
Glance and I deliver a poem to the world
A poem is made red round wide
Widest reddest on planes oppressed
A secret is now pursued by three persons
Inward along your eyes
Drive them insane in my lines
Carnation divided
Carnation multiplied multiple

Know your hands in circles of hope
Hands are gazed at holding the void in balance
An extension from hope to man
A plane muddled known only to sight
Love is close while forging day out of night
Now love is chased
By three international persons
Drive them insane in infinity
A tea has many a name
A table many a round
. . . . . . . . . .
Ornaments rotten animals ramcrosed
They all compel us to stare
Now a radiance is arrested
By three white-clad persons
Drive them insane in the void
A window too narrow
A window vanishing vanished . . .

Attilâ İlhan, Turkey’s most successful neo-romantic poet, also a major novelist and essayist, attempted to recapture the milieu and the moods prevailing during the slow death of the Ottoman Empire. Known also as a creator of imaginative and touching love poems, he introduced a vigorous new style.

**Ancient Sea Folk**

Fifteen men on a dead man’s chest
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!  

pebbles chant an odd song there and the sea shepherds
drive their herds into the high seas
while on the mussels’ iris harlot blues crouch
in the boundless western time’s green galleons

5From Robert Lewis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*.  

- 148 -
unforgettable and emerald and sighted
blood-drenched slab by slab
you hear the ancient sea folk in harbor taverns
those kinky sea people if you listen
spanish songs and italian wine
and godlike you create curses
from fifteen meridian to twenty you create universal curses
atop the mainmast
you god of blasphemy and tumult and of my enigma
you god of lost treasures
you shall not look behind nor spit at the wind
unless black flags are hoisted on the admiral’s mast
no honest breeze shall spark your corsair’s eyes
unless you chew on the rain or on tobacco

I never forgot the mediterranean
I plunged into flames and wept voraciously
the joy of creating
and being created flared tremulously in the sky
and prayers burst open like titanic sails
then lo and behold three crescents arose at once
barbarossa⁶ songs released like hawks from their arms
cyclone-sized barefoot mariners of the algerian skipper
who arrested the caravans of ships
and held the straits of messina and septe and all others
there is no god but God

⁶“Barbarossa” Hayreddin Pasha: Admiral of the Ottoman fleet in the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (sixteenth century).
arrested and set all the vessels on fire
fire’s joyous and memorable dominion
stirs in constellations and beacons isthmus by isthmus
then bound for rome in legion with hannibal
the phoenicians carried the alphabet and glass long ago
dragons breathed fire and the avatars of the sea monsters
and the ghost of a genoese galley slave haunted a rhodes castle
his feet shackled
a dagger stuck in his back
while latin songs poured forth
from the vessels of antonius

you unexpected unforgettable unbearable and deep
and magnified
as roguish as a cabin boy or a sailor’s mustache
the wind uncontained in its rose and in its own dimensions
the centuries-old buccaneer fate of yours
tattooed on your arms and infinitely on your chest
green and speckled
angel-faced mermaids and unctuous dolphins
you sense from the world what the children sense
while time keeps aging you remain a child
you are the ancient sea cemetery of pirates and sailors
the graveyard of barbarossa songs
with your mighty waves you are the ocean
the starry multitudes of the plankton and the skate
you are god and bear gods in your kingdom
the master skippers who tyrannize the currents and eddies
cruise north-northeast and some cruise westward

there once was captain joy whom we buried in the iceberg sea
an andersen and a kidd
a salih a burak and a memi

together exploding our laughter as cannons in salvo
at a giants’ carnival

swayed and scattered we had died

then the fish garths near the shores and archipelagos
being so ancient and stately as to defy memory
forsaking all the stars to recognize the north star at one glance

italian fishermen with beards dripping with salt
then as in purgatory raveled and fibrous
to disembark sahara-parched at a port where foxes spit copper
and to come aboard truculent in a deluge of wine
blessed be thy name

whenever we cruise toward the south pole
from tierra del fuego
from the flameland

This type of self-serving aestheticism represents a “supreme fiction” at its best and sterile confusion at its worst. A leading critic, Rauf Mutluay, deplored its egocentricity and narcissism as “the individualistic crisis and this deaf solitude of our poetry.” The language is usually lavish, the poetic vision full of inscapes and instresses, ambiguity strives to present itself as virtuosity, metaphors are often strikingly original, but sometimes run amuck. Euphuistic and elliptical writing is a frequent fault committed by the practitioners of abstract verse.

7Salih, Burak, Memi: Ottoman naval heroes.
The best specimens, however, have an architectonic splendor, rich imagination, and human affirmation.

In obscurantism, the critic Memet Fuat found the malaise of the age, calling it “the critique of the time we live in—the poems of individuals who are oppressed, depressed, and shoved into nothingness.” As a principle of the new aesthetics, the poet Edip Cansever called for the “death of the poetic line,” whose integrity had been accepted as a fundamental artistic value for generations of Turkish poets: “The function of the poetic line is finished.” Extending this statement to the self-imposed isolation of the obscurantists, Mutluay speculated that “perhaps the function of poetry is finished.” Cansever’s poetic vision is afflicted with that modern malaise which divines man’s obsolescence and focuses its energies on pain and grief in the face of his unheroic existence. Cansever occasionally expresses this mal du siècle in simple lyric lines, i.e., “our hearts are a dilapidated monastery” or “it is a poet’s face that bleeds from loneliness / a face as elongated as days without women.” However, he often prefers the unusual but meticulous metaphor, which characterized the better work of Turkey’s so-called “The Second New” movement—a school with which Cansever had been affiliated from the beginning.

Cemal Süreya (1931–1990), a major figure of “The Second New” started out in the mid-twentieth century with bold innovations, wild thrusts of imagination, and distortions of language. In time, he would move away from the esoteric to the lucid.

\begin{quote}
Rose

Seated at the core of the rose I weep \\
As I die in the street each night \\
Ahead and beyond all unmindful \\
Pang upon pang of dark diminution \\
Of eyes upheld blissful with life.
\end{quote}
Your hands are in my caress into dusk
Hands forever white forever white
Cast into my soul icicles of fright
A train stays at the station for a short while
A man who sometimes can’t find the station that’s me.

On my face I rub the rose
Fallen forlorn over the pavement
And cut my body limb by limb
Bloodgush doomsday madmusic
On the horn a gypsy is reborn.

Cemal Süreya’s eloquent lines, written in 1966, embody the revolutionary experience, the disorientation as well as the optimism and the stirring search of the “New Turkey”:

We are the novices of new life
All our knowledge is transformed
Our poetry, our love all over again
Maybe we are living the last bad days
Maybe we shall live the first good days too
There is something bitter in this air
Between the past and the future
Between suffering and joy
Between anger and forgiveness.

Ece Ayhan (1931–2002), a confirmed maverick from his emergence in the 1950s onward, was a member of “The Second New.” He championed anlamsız şiir (meaningless or absurd poetry). The best of this brave new poetry had as its hallmarks vivid imagination, an enchanting musical structure, and an intellectual complexity that dazzled with its audacious metaphors.
Most of “The Second New” poets marched toward clarity. But Ece Ayhan chose arcanum. Every element of his poems became esoteric, oblique, indecipherable. In syntactical difficulties and inaccessible allusions, few poets came close to the challenges posed by Ayhan. Readers and critics have racked their brains to make sense of the surface problems as well as the unfathomable secrets.

One of Ayhan’s intriguing books is his *Orthodoxies*, where underneath the ambiguities, there are subtle and often sly symbols, most of which deal with minority cultures—“the nigger in the photograph,” “the secret Jew,” “Ipecacuanha the Emetic,” Mistrayim, Armenians, the Greek and Russian Orthodox.

Many degrees of separation lend Ayhan’s poetry its fascination and sardonic fury. There is much clash of cultures and sects here, but the tragic core is constituted by homosexual culture, declared anathema by hypocritical public mores.

In sharp contrast to urban elite littérateurs, village poets, standing *media vitae* serve their rural communities by providing enlightenment as well as live entertainment. The minstrel tradition, with its stanzaic forms and simple prosody, is alive and well. Particularly since the 1950s, many prominent folk poets have moved to, or made occasional appearances in, the urban areas. Âşık Veysel (1894–1973), a blind minstrel, produced the most poignant specimens of the oral tradition.

*I walk on a road long and narrow:

Night and day, on and on I go.

Where am I heading? I don’t know:

Night and day, on and on I go.*

---

8Ece Ayhan, *Ortodoksluklar* (Istanbul: De, 1968); *The Blind Cat Black; and, Orthodoxies*, Murat Nemet-Nejat, tr. (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1997).
Even in sleep I must forge ahead:
No rest for the weary, no warm bed;
Fate has doomed me to the roads I dread.
Night and day, on and on I go.

Who can tell why my life went awry?
Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I cry.
Craving a caravanserai,
Night and day, on and on I go.

Âşık Veysel

The Turkish minstrel is referred to as âşık—meaning both “lover” and “folk poet.” Popular belief is that the poet is a man of love: Love of beauty, of God, of nature, of the nation, of justice, of humanity. Âşık Veysel uttered the eloquence of love. “Love and passion and the loved one are all in me” was his declaration of all-embracing love. Like his mystic predecessors, he proclaimed: “God’s existence is imbedded in Man.”

He expressed his profound devotion to his country in the following two memorable lines:

You are closer to me than myself.
I would have no life if you did not exist.

This Turkish Muslim folk poet was a humanist with boundless religious tolerance and an ecumenical vision:

The Koran and the Bible are God’s grace
Which is what all four holy books embrace;
To scorn and segregate this or that race
Would be the darkest blemish on one’s face.

He made a plea for universal brotherhood and unity: “Come, brother, let us unite in harmony. / Let us love each other like brothers, heart to heart.”
The concern for world affairs was an absorption of many Turkish poets. Their motivation was ideological or humanistic; nonetheless, they commented on international events with telling effect. They poured out elegiac poems for John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Ho Chi Minh, and Salvador Allende, along with indictments of the war in Vietnam, celebrations of man’s conquest of the moon, and moving accounts of the tragedies of Algeria, Cyprus, Palestine, and elsewhere.

The most encompassing poetic achievement of contemporary Turkey belongs to Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca (b. 1914), the winner of the Award of the International Poetry Forum (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and the Yugoslav Golden Wreath (Struga), previously won by W. H. Auden, Pablo Neruda, and Eugenio Montale, and later by Allen Ginsburg, et al. His range is bewilderingly broad: metaphysical poetry, children’s verse, cycles about the space age and the quest for the moon, epics of the conquest of Istanbul and of the War of Independence, aphoristic quatrains, neo-mysticism, poetry of social protest, travel impressions, books on the national liberation struggles of several countries, and humorous anecdotes in verse. Dağlarca has published only poetry—more than a hundred collections in all. “In the course of a prestigious career,” wrote Yaşar Nabi Nayır, a prominent critic, “which started in 1933, Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca has tried every form of poetry, achieving equally impressive success in the epic genre, in lyric and inspirational verse, in satire, and in the poetry of social criticism. Since he has contributed to Turkish literature a unique sensibility, new concepts of substance and form, and an inimitable style, his versatility and originality have been matched by few Turkish literary figures, past or present.” Dağlarca’s tender lyric voice finds its testaments in countless long and short poems:
Sparkle

Clearly death is not a loss.
Regardless the brooks
Will flow.

With faith
Weeds will turn green and roses will grow.
Clearly death is not a loss.

Dağlarca’s protest poetry, however, can often be described as a verbis ad verbera.

Beating

How about it, let’s join our hands.
You hit twice, and I’ll belt two.
Has he stolen
Or sucked the nation’s blood and sweat?
You belt four, and I’ll strike four more.

Twenty sent abroad to buy ships, thirty to select tea . . .
Did the Foreign Minister get a cut,
While our hairless children starve in adobe villages,
And our baby dolls sell their pure flesh night after night?
You hit seven times, and I’ll belt seven more.

How about it, eh, let’s join hands.
Has he sold a plate of beans, eight cents’ worth for two dollars eighty,
Or did he shake his camel’s head at your petition to squeeze 500 out of you?
Elected to Congress did he invest in his own future, trample on progress?
You belt nine, and I’ll belt nine more.
In Turkish poetics the quatrain holds a significant and time-honored place both as a stanzaic unit and an independent verse. In classical poetry its dominance was second only to the couplet, and most of the prominent poets produced—in the tradition of Omar Khayyam—an impressive body of *rubais*, four-line epigammatmic verses (a a b a). The Turks also evolved the four-line *tuyuğ*, also in the a a b a rhyme pattern, but composed in a special quantitative meter and usually confined to philosophical comments. In folk poetry the quatrain was—and still is—the essential stanzaic unit, and among its most memorable achievements are the enchorial *manis*, quatrains by anonymous poets, written in syllabic meters.

With the advent of modernism, many structural changes, including the complete breakdown of stanzaic forms, came about. Consequently, very few of the leading modern poets have used the quatrain. One major exception is Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca (b. 1914). In most of his multitudinous poems since the outset of his career, Dağlarca has used the quatrain in all its aspects—rhymed, unrhymed, scanned and free, intact and fragmented.

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**Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca**

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**The Faithless**

When quiet
They have no tongues
When talking
They have no mouths

---

**God and I**

He
Is the poet of his job
I am the God
Of mine

---

**Cats**

The widow’s
Cat
Is warmer
Than the bride’s cat

---

**Soft**

The mouth
Of a hungry man
Makes the bread
Come alive
In *Toprak Ana* (Mother Earth), Dağlarca gave poetic expression to the same tragic deprivations, as in the poem entitled “Village without Rain”:

I’m hungry, black earth, hungry, hear me.

With the black ox I’m hungry tonight.

He thinks, and thinking feeds him,

I think, and thinking makes my hunger grow.

I’m hungry, black earth, hungry, hear me.

One can’t hide it when he’s hungry.

*The wind sleeps on the hills of gluttony*

*In the sleep of bird and beast.*

*When the fat stars glide,*

*Darkness gets fed.*

*The wind sleeps on the hills of gluttony.*

*One can’t sleep it off when he’s hungry.*

*Hunger is black on our faces, hunger is hoary.*

*Meadows and hills hunger.*

*Rain falls no more and the crops are scorched.*

*How did we anger the skies far and wide?*

*Hunger is black on our faces, hunger is hoary.*

*One can’t live on it when he’s hungry.*

Arguably modern Turkish poetry, with its notable diversity, has replicated and emulated the typology of verse in the contemporary world. It has run the gamut from rigid formality to completely free verse, from surrealism to neoclassicism, from cubism to socialist realism, from symbolism to concrete
(or found) poetry. A minuscule anthology of brief excerpts and epigrammatic poems could serve as a testament to such versatility:

nebuchadnezzar turned into idols
the lovely women strolling the hanging gardens
having embraced the timeless gardens
I have kept those women to myself

Asaf Hâlet Çelebi (1907–1958)

Let me visit you at your home,
Make me coffee;
Out of a freshly filled pitcher
Pour me water—
That’s all I want

Ziya Osman Saba (1910–1957)

Say Istanbul and towers come to mind
If I do a painting of one, the other one grumbles.
The Maiden’s Tower ought to know that’s the way the cookie crumbles:
She should marry the Galata Tower and have lots of kids.

Bedri Rahmi Eyuboğlu (1913–1975)

If stars catch sight of your beauty in me
They will fall into my inmost sea one by one
And sunlight will engulf me in such splendor
You will come to me . . .

Celâl Silay (1914–1974)

No, my lovely one,
no, my antelope-eyed,
no, my heart’s conqueror.
There’s one thing possible and lovely right now:
to love you up in flames.

A. Kadir (1917–1985)
So the headlines of daily papers should read:
Beam like a rose, laugh like a rose, be a rose.

Ceyhun Atuf Kansu (1919–1978)

Crows are the choicest flowers
Of my eyes

Sabahattin Kudret Aksal (1920–1993)

I know they cannot survive in the sun
Or in the aura of love
Injustice
Fear
Hunger

Necati Cumalı (1921–2001)

All colors gathered dirt at the same speed
They gave the first prize to white.

Özdemir Asaf (1923–1981)

Does one wait for lovely days to enjoy them
Waiting itself is lovely too

Arif Damar (b. 1925)

I had said: I want to live living,
And yet now on this roof willy-nilly
My feet and my rhymes are fettered,
My days pass with such lame feet of verse,
Don’t think I’m bragging if I say so myself,
My life is the loveliest poem.

Can Yücel (1926–1999)

And so on, with all those majestic rulers—
The glorious Ottoman Empire,
On whose realm the sun never set for 624 years,
Kept the whole world petrified:
It was a legend, it died.

Nüzhet Erman (1926–1996)

Like a file rasping such a wind blows
Thorns glow but not the flower
The travesty of an epoch strokes its tarred surface
In its warmth blood freezes it doesn’t get lukewarm
True existence straightens up on elbows
The enemy sleeps water doesn’t.

Metin Eloğlu (1927–1985)

The weary faces of fathers on their faces,
The mad fury of mothers on their faces;
and on their foreheads love’s ineradicable seal,

—My son, my wounded father.

Özdemir İnçe (b. 1936)

Glittering seas noiseless poems closing doors
Are carrying the meteors to you
The first arrow tested on the wrong target
Mumbles deliriously about you

Sezai Karakoç (b. 1933)

Drowning its passion every night in cloudy booze,
It fails to fly over the ramparts of Byzantium;
Groping through the darkness that grows dense in its heart,
It aspires to be like the poets in whose lines deer wander about.

Cevat Çapan (b. 1933)

We are the tired warriors worn down by defeat after defeat
Too timid or ashamed to enjoy a drink
Someone gathers all the suns, keeps people waiting for them
It’s not the fear of shivering but warming up
We are the tired warriors, so many lovers frighten us off
Gülten Akın (b. 1933)

“A dungeon for dreams and ideas!”
That must be
the biggest dream and idea of tyrants.
Ferit Edgü (b. 1936)

Every child is the clock tower of a town
in which aerialists swing toward death
the terrible tower of the death hours
one foot toward his mother the other toward death.
Kemal Özer (b. 1935)

Poetry is fire’s messenger,
the arsonist.
It is the bird perched on the volcano.
Ülkü Tamer (b. 1937)

Poet you too took the path of your ancestors
I fear your weight cannot carry those countless calamities
Cahit Zarifoğlu (1940–1987)

Only the tears of others
will remain from this love
and as you know it is always others who are witness
to death and life
Melisa Gürpınar (b. 1941)

Suffering is the slow horse that trots back the distance it rode
Life’s hidden and ill-omened birdlime.
It makes us taste unexpected joys
And lends color to a bird’s wings,
Ripping the night open, weaving the day
It shows what simply doesn’t exist as existing.

Metin Altıok (1941–1993)

My homeland is dragging me down and now I am like a house
whose plaster has fallen off
It’s about to collapse, useless, ugly
Love me, guard the warmth of the kiss where your hair
comes together
Prepare your hands to stay in my palms for years on end.

Ataol Behramoğlu (b. 1942)

What we craft is a great song. Each melody has lasted
a hundred years. Its end is a tale. What we
graft is a great song if only it could last
long after us . . .

Sennur Sezer (b. 1943)

White angels swim through its waters
human destiny, a scattered torso
now the world’s suns and the moon’s daybreak winds are
growing pale
wilting at the soaring grove
and the moon glides with its silver rowboat into the roots
of trees

Gülseli İnal (b. 1947)

the swans too are bound to darken
if death is narration
some days our bourgeois necks will lose
their passion for stout ropes anyway

Murathan Mungan (b. 1955)
no one catches sight
of the wild ducks in the deltas
or the way they fall off the backs
of the female ducks

no one knows
but no one!
that those red ants
piercing right through the sand hills
are lovers in great suffering

Adnan Özer (b. 1957)

The abundance of poetry in the Turkish Republic is such that it is virtually impossible to do justice to it in a concise history. By its eighty-fifth year, the Republic had witnessed the publication of tens of thousands of poems in periodicals and many thousands of poetry books by hundreds of poets. Even major anthologies often fail to deal judiciously with the full range of the country’s enormous poetic output. In the present brief history, one can only regret the omission of innumerable names, among them such masters of syllabic meters as Ahmet Kutsi Tecer, Orhan Seyfi Orhon, Ömer Bedrettin Uşaklı, Mustafa Seyit Sütüven, Halit Fahri Ozansoy, Ümit Yaşar Oğuzcan, neoclassicists Mehmet Çınarlı, Bekir Sıtkı Erdoğan, and Faruk Nafız Çamlibel (a virtuoso equally adept at *aruz* prosody and syllabic meters); Behçet Kemal Çağlar, an exuberant patriotic poet; and effective users of free verse, *e.g.*, Orhan Murat Arıburnu, Cengiz Bektaş, Ahmet Necdet, Ebubekir Eroğlu, Şükran Kurdañkul, Güven Turan, Tahsin Sarac, Refik Durbaş, Küçük İskender, Lâle Müldür, Ali Püsküllüoğlu, Turgay Gönenç, Ahmet Erhan, Tarlık Günersel, and scores of others. Such riches certainly makes poetry aficionados happy, but frustrates anthologists and literary historians.
The early novels of the Republic depicted the disintegration of Ottoman society, ferocious political enmities, and the immoral lives of some religious sects, as well as the conflicts between urban intellectuals and poverty-stricken peasants—as in the novels of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974). Turkey’s major woman intellectual and advocate of women’s rights, Halide Edib Adıvar (1882–1964), produced sagas of the War of Independence, psychological novels, and panoramas of city life. Her novelistic art culminated in Sinekli Bakkal (1936), which she originally published in English under the title of The Clown and His Daughter.

The harsh realities of Anatolia found fertile ground in the literature of engagement after World War II. Sabahattin Ali (1907–1948) was a pioneer of forceful fiction about the peasant’s trials and tribulations. Two books, both published in 1950, Bizim Köy (Our Village; A Village in Anatolia) by Mahmut Makal (b. 1930) and Toprak Ana by Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca (b. 1914), exerted a shattering impact on political and intellectual circles by dramatically exposing conditions in villages. The first, available in English translation, is a series of vignettes written by Makal, a teenage peasant who became a village teacher after graduating from one of the controversial Institutes for Village Teachers. The book reveals the abject poverty of the Anatolian village:

Quite apart from the trouble of earning the wretched stuff, it’s difficult even to make bread here in any edible form. . . . The women rise at night, knead the dough, and while their husbands are still in bed—that is to say, before dawn—they bake enough for the day. If they get up a bit late, they get no end of a beating from their husbands, and everyone calls them “slatterns”. . . . If you
want to know what the torments of Hell are like, I’d say it’s baking bread in this village.

Not five per cent of the women in our village wear shoes. All the rest go barefoot. Even in winter they do the same, in the snow and the mud and the wet. The girls all go barefoot. . . . And in summer these same feet go off to the cornfields to plough, all cracked and cut with stones.⁹

In the mid-1950s a brave new genre emerged—the “Village Novel,” which reached its apogee with Yaşar Kemal’s İnce Memed (translated into English under the title Memed, My Hawk). Yaşar Kemal (b. 1923), the most famous twentieth-century Turkish novelist at home and abroad had been frequently mentioned, not only in Turkey but also in the world press and literary circles, as a strong candidate for the Nobel Prize. His impressive corpus of fiction, written in a virtually poetic style, ranks as one of the truly stirring achievements in the history of Turkish literature.

Dealing with the merciless reality of poverty, village literature portrays the peasant threatened by natural disaster and man’s inhumanity. The drama is enacted in terms of economic and psychological deprivation, blood feuds, stagnation and starvation, droughts, the tyranny of the gendarmes and petty officials, and exploitation at the hands of landowners and politicos. The lythe style records local dialects with an almost flawless accuracy. A pessimistic tone pervades much of village literature: its delineations are bleak even when occasional flashes of humor or a glimmer of hope or descriptions of

nature’s beauty appear. A great strength of the genre has been its freedom from the rhetoric that marred much of the poetry of social protest. When presenting deprived men and women pitted against hostile forces, the best practitioners offered an affirmation of the human spirit. Their works are often testaments to the dauntless determination of the peasant to survive and to resist—sometimes through rebellion—the forces of oppression.

An accomplished novelist, Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar (1888–1963) enjoys fame for nostalgic and sometimes satiric depictions of high-class life in old Istanbul.

Peyami Safa (1899–1961), one of Turkey’s most prolific authors, dealt with social problems, cultural tensions, and psychic crises in his many highly readable novels.

Fiction about the urban poor shared some of the strengths of the Village Novel—engrossing plot, effective narration, realistic dialogue—and suffered from some of the comparable flaws—lack of subtlety and psychological depth. The leading figure of fiction depicting the tribulations of working-class people was Orhan Kemal (1914–1970). Necati Cumalı (1921–2001), a prolific poet and playwright, wrote tellingly about poverty-sticken individuals in rural and coastal areas. Osman Cemal Kaygılı (1890–1945) penned poignant stories of the lumpenproletariat and the gypsies.

The short-story writer Sait Faik (1906–1954) is admired for his meditative, rambling romantic fiction, full of intriguing insights into the human soul, capturing the pathos and the bathos of urban life in a style unique for its poetic, yet colloquial, flair.

Sait Faik’s career, which spanned barely twenty-five years from about 1929 to 1954, yielded an output that displays a considerable variety of themes and techniques although virtually all of his stories have certain similarities—his unmistakable style, the focal importance of the narrator, the preoccupation
with social outcasts and marginal groups, and an unflattering ear for colloquial speech. His stories, in their range of feeling and creative strategies, can be likened to many disparate works by some of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors outside Turkey. Occasionally one finds plots worthy of a de Maupassant, moods reminiscent of a Chekhov, and sometimes the lucidity of a Maugham, although none of these writers—not even some of the French writers he presumably read during his stay in Grenoble—seems to have had any direct influence on him. In some stories, the Turkish writer gives us a blend of fantasy and concrete fact, and the interplay of different levels of reality in the Faulknerian manner. In others, one finds a structural clarity and a crispness of language typical of Hemingway. Sait Faik’s later stories occasionally read like Donald Barthelme’s early work, sharing the same eerie sensations of a foray into the realms of fantasy.

Cevat Şakir (1886–1973), who adopted the pen name Halikarnas Balıkçısı (The Fisherman of Halicarnassus), a polyglot who also wrote in English, produced gripping novels about common people, especially fishermen, on the Aegean coast.

An awakening of interest in Ottoman history, after several decades of neglect, gave rise to a massive semidocumentary novel by Kemal Tahir (1910–1973), Devlet Ana (Mother State), a saga of the emergence of the Ottoman state in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922), as in the previous decades, inspired numerous major novels—Yorgun Savaşçı (The Tired Warrior) by Kemal Tahir, Kalpaklılar (Men in Fur Caps) and Doludizgin (Full Gallop) by Samim Kocagöz, and Kutsal İsyan (The Sacred Uprising), in eight volumes, by Hasan İzzettin Dinamo.

Attilâ İlhan produced a two-volume portrayal (à la Dos Passos’s U.S.A.) entitled Kurtlar Sofrası (A Feast for Wolves) of the crises of Turkish society following World War II.
The best social realists in the second half of the twentieth century included Fakir Baykurt, Çetin Altan, Dursun Akçam, Talip Apaydın, Tarık Dursun K., Vedat Türkali, Kemal Bilbaşar, Mehmet Seyda, and Zeyyat Selimoğlu. Highly imaginative fiction came from Nahit Sırrı Örik, who wrote compellingly about the late Ottoman period, as did Hıfți Topuz, a writer of semidocumentary fiction. A major figure is Peride Celal, whose work evolved from popular novels to sophisticated psychological fiction and an epic treatment of democracy beset by conflicts. Sevim Burak was a successful practitioner of Faulknerian narrative techniques. A multitalented author, Zülfü Livaneli has to his credit many diverse novels some of which have enjoyed considerable success in Turkey as did their translations abroad. The short-story scene that was dominated in the mid-twentieth century by such figures as Sait Faik, Memduh Şevket Esendal, and Nezihe Meryiç, later by Tomris Uyar and Sevgi Soysal, now flourishes, thanks to the work of Cemil Kavukçu, Hasan Ali Toptaş, and others.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Turkish fiction enjoyed a remarkable development into maturity and expanded its typology. Its growth and diversity are difficult to trace in such a concise history. All that can be done in such a study is to cite the names of the most successful fiction writers and pay lip service to some of the movements, titles, and characteristics. The major writers who emerged in the late 1960s include Leylâ Erbil, an imaginative storyteller; Oğuz Atay, who made a very strong impact with his Tutunamayanlar (The Maladjusted); Yusuf Atılgan, a maverick writer about psychological misfits; İhsan Oktay Anar, who brought stimulating dimensions to historical episodes; Ayşe Kulin, who is the author of several exciting best-sellers, some based on the life experiences of her family members; Tahsin Yücel, one of the most accomplished and versatile novelists ever to write in
the Turkish language; Feyyaz Kayacan, who crafted engrossing nightmarish stories of World War II; Abbas Sayar, who wrote a *succès d’estime* about an old horse; Osman Necmi Gürmen, who produced notable novels about modern Turkish society as well as Ottoman events; Gülten Dayıoğlu and Mustafa Ruhi Şirin, two of the many accomplished writers of children’s fiction; Öner Yağcı, who effectively depicted the aftermath of a military coup; Feride Çiçekoğlu, who is well known for fanciful fiction; Demir Özlü and Burhan Günel, who enjoy a loyal following for their craftsmanlike narratives. Nedim Gürsel’s novels about Ottoman history and modern Turkey win hosannas not only in his homeland but also in Europe and elsewhere.

Among contemporary masters of fiction are such highly successful authors as Ayla Kutlu, İnci Aral, Erendiz Atasü, Pınar Kür, Alev Alatlı. The field of fiction is often dominated by powerful novels that come from Murathan Mungan, Selim İleri, Mehmet Eroğlu, and Ahmet Altan.

Turkish-style magical realism is quite strong thanks to the remarkable novels of Latife Tekin, Nazlı Eray, Buket Uzuner, and Aslı Erdoğan, who have been translated into several major languages, especially English.

Satirical fiction is still dominated by Aziz Nesin (1916–1995), Turkey’s best satirist ever. In scores of books, Nesin provided a strong indictment of the oppression and brutalization of the common man. His hero is the man in the street beleaguered by the inimical forces of modern life. He lambastes bureaucracy and exposes economic inequities in stories that effectively combine local color and universal verities.

Seldom in the course of Turkish literature has there been a gentler and more effective satirist of hypocrisy, sham, and a whole range of foibles than Haldun Taner (1915–1986), who always wrote with empathy and compassion, always out of a powerful faith in the perfectibility of the human being.
Interestingly, Nesin, Turkey’s supreme satirist, who was born a year later than Taner, held very little optimism that the human personality will improve, but believed that a new ideological structuring could redeem society. In Taner one finds virtually no confidence in a better social order, although he affirms, through his satiric strategies, the potential for individual excellence.

In sharp contrast to realist fiction, a group of authors, some well versed in English and French, produced stream-of-consciousness fiction heavily influenced by Joyce and Faulkner as well as by the French *nouveau roman*. Their works depict psychological crises in lyrical, and sometimes turgid, styles. Some of them offer tragicomic scenes of modern life by means of a decomposed language. The principal themes of modern fiction all over the world also characterize the Turkish *nouvelle vague*: dehumanization, moral disintegration, absurdity, lack of heroism, ennui, futility, hypocrisy. The protagonists are often abstractions of psychic turmoil, and phenomena are presented in terms of transmogrification. The leading authors of this mode of fiction—Feyyaz Kayacan (1919–1993), Bilge Karasu (1930–1995), Orhan Duru (b. 1933)—have served to expand the scope of psychic experiences in Turkish literature and, while forcing the language to the breaking point, enriched expressive resources and rhythmic formulations.

Oktay Akbal (b. 1923) shared with this group a Kafkaesque sense of reality and utter despair although he departed from them in his use of a simple staccato—almost pointillistic—style. But both the *nouveau roman* writers and Akbal charted the phantasmagoria of man’s tormented soul and his alienation from nature and society.

Since the 1980s the art of the novel has taken giant strides thanks in part to the growing corpus of Yaşar Kemal and to the impressive work of Adalet Ağaoğlu (b. 1929), Tahsin Yücel (b. 1933), Vüs’at O. Bener (1922–2005), Erhan Bener (1929–
2007), Attilâ İlhan (1925–2005), et al. Elif Şafak (b. 1971) enjoys wide fame internationally thanks to her provocative novels that interfuse traditional values and innovative features. The first decade of the twenty-first century has started to enjoy what could be characterized as “the post-post-modern” fiction of numerous younger writers, e.g., Tuna Kiremitçi, Müge İplikçi, Perihan Mağden, Cezmi Ersöz, Şebnem İyigüzel, Sema Kaygusuz as well as Ahmet Ümit who is gaining wide recognition as a master of suspense thrillers, a rare genre in Turkey.

In Turkey and abroad, Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952) has emerged as a compelling precursor of new dimensions in the Turkish novelistic art. His major works have been successfully translated into nearly fifty languages, the English versions attracting wide attention and winning a number of major international awards. Pamuk’s meteoric rise culminated in his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006. Significantly this first Nobel Prize won by a Turk in any field went to a literary figure since literature remains the premier cultural genre among Turks. Pamuk himself asserted that the prize was principally awarded to Turkish language and literature. Although some intellectuals acknowledge this to be a fact, many claimed that it was in recognition of Pamuk’s creative work which had been rewarded in spite of the fact that the Nobel Prize committee was essentially anti-Turkish and as a result of the damaging remarks he had made about incidents in Ottoman history and contemporary life. His formula for success has been postmodernism plus some Turkish exoticism. He has been likened to several giants of modern literature. Such kinships tend to provide a fairly easy passage to fame abroad. The risk involved, however, is that similarities may not sustain the inherent value of the œuvre for long—unless the writer from the other culture finds a voice uniquely his own, explores new forms, and creates a synthesis beyond a pat formula based on what is in fashion.
Critics enamored of identifying models and influences have discovered affinities between Pamuk and Borges, Calvino, and Eco, whose works he has probably devoured. A voracious reader, he has stated that, “especially from age sixteen to twenty-five, I read like mad and aspired to resemble the authors I admired most.” On another occasion, he observed: “If we must use Western criteria, for me the novel of the Western world is the creative work of Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Faulkner, and Nabokov—not Hemingway and Steinbeck, who have long been idolized in our country for their simplicity of style and language.”

All of the above notwithstanding, it would not be incorrect to assert that Pamuk is at present proceeding away from “influences” toward an authentic, original novelistic art—toward a new synthesis as evinced by his first post-Nobel novel, *Masumiyet Müzesi* (The Museum of Innocence, 2008). His first novel, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* (Cevdet Bey and His Sons, 1982) was a Buddenbrooks type of work in three volumes that traced a family’s life over three generations as well as the process of Turkish modernization from the early twentieth century onward. *Sessiz Ev* (Quiet House, 1983) made a skillful fusion of modern and traditional novelistic techniques utilizing five major characters who narrate the story through their stream of consciousness. These two works remain untranslated into English although both have fascinating features. *The White Castle*, published in English translation in 1990, is a tour de force about the intriguing interaction between a Venetian and an Ottoman look-alike who symbolize diverse aspects of the cultural tensions of East and West.

*The Black Book* of 1994 was hailed as a masterwork, especially in Europe and the United States and solidified Pamuk’s reputation. It masterfully depicted the mysteries of Istanbul and evoked the traditional values of Sufism. *The New Life* (English translation published in 1997) is a travel novel
woven in a poetic style, that deals with imagination gone awry, youthful despair, republican idealism thwarted.

The success of *My Name is Red*, published in English translation in 2001, a powerful novel about miniature painters in the Ottoman capital in 1591, and of Snow (2004), Pamuk’s most patently political work, led to his Nobel Prize. His *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2005), a beguilingly evocative description of his beloved and sorrowful city enhanced his international prestige. His latest *Masumiyet Müzesi* (published in September 2008: translation to follow perhaps under the title of “The Museum of Innocence”) is avowedly a novel of love, marriage, friendship, sexuality, family life, and happiness. Pamuk will probably crown the novel’s success by opening a museum by the same name in Istanbul.

A most remarkable development in the Turkish arts has been the explosion of theatrical activity and the strides made in dramatic writing. Very few cities in the world have a broader spectrum of plays or superior performances presented than Istanbul. In 1960, Istanbul audiences had a choice of fewer than ten plays on a given day, but more than thirty by the end of the decade; the increase in Ankara in the same period was from five to about twenty. In the second half of the twentieth century there was an amazing diversity of foreign plays including *Hamlet* (four separate productions), *My Fair Lady, Marat / Sade, South Pacific, Antigone*, French vaudevilles, *The Caretaker, The Odd Couple, Tobacco Road, The Diary of a Madman, Mother Courage, The Miser, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Fiddler on the Roof, The Physicists*, and *Oh Dad, Poor Dad*. Not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of the quality of production and performance the Turkish theater fared well: many observers, comparing Turkish versions to their European, British, and American originals or counterparts, testified that Turkish theaters often did just as well and sometimes better.
Turkish playwrights have turned out a wide repertoire, including village plays, tragedies in the grand manner, “boulevard” comedies, vaudevilles, poetic dramas, musical dramas and comedies, Brechtian “epic” theater, Albee-like black comedy, modern versions of the traditional shadow plays, social and political satire, well-made family melodramas, and dramatizations of mythological themes and legends.

The spectrum of dramatic literature by Turkish playwrights also became impressively broad: from well-made family melodramas to Brechtian works like Sermet Çağan’s Ayak Bacak Fabrikası (The Orthopedic Factory) and Haldun Taner’s Keşanlı Ali Destanı (The Ballad of Ali of Keshan); from light comedies to Güngör Dilmen’s scathing drama of innocent people brutalized by capitalism and imperialism; from striking village plays by Cahit Atay and Necati Cumalı to an Albee-like black comedy by Melih Cevdet Anday; from Aziz Nesin’s modernized version of Karagöz, the traditional shadow play, to Refik Erduran’s Shakespearean tragedy about Justinian the Great; from a musical drama by Turgut Özakman and Bülent Arel depicting city youth to A. Turan Oflazoğlu’s towering tragedy in verse about the Ottoman Sultan İbrahim the Mad; from Orhan Kemal’s prison drama to Orhan Asena’s dramatizations of history and legends.

A remarkable talent emerged in the closing decades of the twentieth century, Memet Baydur (1951–2001), who was a most imaginative innovator bringing new visions and vitality to playwriting. His premature death deprived the Turkish theater of stimulating works that might have found their way into many theatrical capitals abroad as well.

The foremost pioneer of the study of the history of modern Turkish theater, Metin And, devised an encompassing typology in his books entitled A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey and 50 Yılın Türk Tiyatrosu (The
Turkish Theater of the Past 50 Years): plays about idealistic heroes, social reformers, political leaders battling against corruption, political tyranny and social injustice; plays depending largely on character portrayal; plays on dreams, memory and psychoanalytical themes; plays depicting women’s and artists’ problems; plays about the eternal triangle and marital problems in general; plays on social injustice, bureaucracy, urban-rural conflicts; detective plays, murder mysteries, suspense-thrillers; family dramas, including those about the generation gap; verse melodramas; village dramas and plays about life in shantytowns; plays about the previous civilizations of Anatolia; plays about the maladjusted; dramas dealing with abstract concepts and hypothetical situations; light comedies and vaudevilles; satires of traditional values and current life; the play-within-a-play; modernizations of shadow plays and comedia dell’arte; plotless plays; dramas based on folk legends and Turkish history; expressionistic plays; sentimental dramas; epic theater; cabaret theater; plays based on Greek tragedy; theater of the absurd and musical drama.\textsuperscript{10}

Another major scholar-critic, Seyda Şener, has observed the following about aspects of Turkish playwriting:

\begin{quote}
The most conspicuous achievement of contemporary Turkish dramatic writing and production has been the conscious effort to create original native drama by making use of the formal and stylistic elements of traditional spectacular plays in a way to satisfy modern taste and contemporary intellectual needs. The main challenge to such an attempt is to preserve critical
\end{quote}

sensitivity and to discriminate between the easy attraction of the spectacular and the pleasure of witnessing the true combination of form and content.\textsuperscript{11}

From the middle of the twentieth century onward, according to Dikmen Gürün, a notable theater critic, “the [Turkish] playwrights’ quest was focused on the issues of rural migration, feudal social order and life in the slums . . . [T]he system was questioned in all its aspects. In later years, influenced by the current political theater in Europe, the Turkish playwrights began to deal with the issue in a similar form and content. They employed the episodic form of epic and merged it with the traditional Turkish norms.”\textsuperscript{12}

Theater in Turkey, all its shortcomings and weaknesses aside, can still legitimately boast remarkable achievements which have enabled it to move far ahead of theater not only in all developing countries, but also in many advanced countries that have a longer theatrical tradition and substantially greater resources. The record of Turkish dramatic arts is, by any objective criterion, impressive.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed strides taken in literary criticism when Nurullah Ataç (1898–1957) achieved renown as an impressionistic critic who reevaluated the tradition of classical poetry and spearheaded the values inherent in ventures of new poetry, especially “The First New” movement. An exciting and enduring contribution came from Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–1962), a prominent Turkish littérature and an eloquent exponent of a generation of intellectuals who made a synthesis of classical Turkish culture,

\textsuperscript{11}Sevda Şener, “Turkish Drama,” http://sanat.bilkent.edu.tr/interactive.m2.org/Theater/SSener.html.

\textsuperscript{12}Dikmen Gürün, “An Excursion in the Turkish Theater,” http://sanat.bilkent.edu.tr/ interactive.m2.org/ Theater/dikmen.html.
French literature, and modern artistic sensibilities. A first-rate poet and novelist as well as an inspiring professor of literature at Istanbul University, he wrote a monumental critical history of Turkish literature, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (History of Nineteenth-Century Turkish Literature, 1949), and a superb treatise on the famous neoclassical poet Yahya Kemal, published in 1962.

Among academic critics, Orhan Burian (1914–1953) held the promise of making a strong impact in evaluating especially modern Turkish poetry, but his life was cut short by his premature death.

Mehmet Kaplan (1915–1986) made astute analyses of poetry and short fiction of the period from the nineteenth century onward. He also produced numerous stimulating studies of early Turkish literature. One flaw in his work resulted from various lapses of judgment about many of his contemporaries, especially Nazım Hikmet and other socialist writers.


Fair-minded and stimulating critics are led by the most prolific reviewer of all time, Doğan Hızlan (b. 1937), who functions as the “conscience” of Turkish literature. In this group are Ahmet Oktay (b. 1933), Adnan Binyazar (b. 1934),
Adnan Özyalçın (b. 1934), and many others including such other perceptive writers as Orhan Koçak (b. 1948), Feridun Andaç (b. 1954), Semih Gümüş (b. 1956), Füsun Akatlı (b. 1944). Cem Erciyes, Ömer Türkeş, Cemil Meriç (1916–1987), and Nermi Uygur (1925–2005) were influential essayists. Beşir Ayvazoğlu (b. 1952) is leaving his imprint with his competent evaluations of traditional literature. Among leading cultural and literary commentators, Hasan Bülent Kahraman has gained a place of importance.

Berna Moran (1921–1993), a scholar of English literature, produced several major books about literary theories and their applicability to Turkish literature, which have become guidebooks for critics in the succeeding decades. Jale Parla (b. 1945), who earned a doctorate in comparative literature at Harvard University, stands as perhaps the most important Turkish academic critic of fiction, especially on the strength of her major work entitled Don Kişot’tan Bugüne Roman (The Novel from Don Quixote to Our Day).

Dilek Doltaş (b. 1945), Yıldız Ecevit (b. 1946), Sibel Irzik (b. 1958), Nurdan Gürbilek (b. 1956), and Nüket Esen (b. 1949) are among accomplished academic critics.

Enis Batur (b. 1952), who also enjoys fame as a poet and publisher, possesses one of the most interesting literary minds of his generation and in many respects stands as the ideal symbol of and spokesman for the cultural synthesis that modern Turkey has been striving to create.

A salutary observation about literary criticism is that it has never been more evenhanded or objective, never as free from ideological bias or polemics. It benefits from Turkey’s widest freedom heretofore for writers. It is probably more refined than ever and will most likely take impressive strides if its practitioners rely less on the literary theories that abound in the Western world and create some of its own that will serve more
effectively in evaluating the *sui generis* identity and authentic aesthetic values.

* * *

The past millennium of Turkish literature could justifiably be characterized as many-splendored. Its oral tradition in verse and narration as well as its written legacy in all genres stand as a testament to the nation’s imagination and creativity. In a thousand years, it stretched from inner Asia to the Caucasus, the Middle East, Balkans, and points beyond. It embraced influences from the East and West, from the North and South. Consequently it created its own synthesis, which came to include the aesthetic strategies of Europe and the Americas. Its explorations and diversity of accomplishments are admirable. Its universal work was “certified” by the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the novelist Orhan Pamuk in 2006.

The second millennium of this time-honored and vigorous literature will probably be marked with countless impressive achievements.
**Beacon**

Jutting far into the high seas, the promontory,
Cherished as the lazulite and silver night, smolders.
A terrestrial love starts in the dark
While the beacon shines
Despite destiny on the boulders.

Clouds fuse in crepuscular dimensions,
From distant harbors fogs descend,
And sadness stirs in the darkness of fate;
Blazing and blinking, the beacon inquires:
Where in life do you stand, where in love do you stand?

If the heart cringes in the starlight,
Memories might recede and recoil.
Time may tread on without the soul’s cargo
As the beacon has stood for ages
With patience on this same soil.

It witnessed sea battles and ancient pirates,
Caught the wind asleep and the waves in flight,
As blue and black as a single eye,
And vacant as the vast seas;
Ill-fated fishermen struggled in its sight.
In your hair a cool air smells of salt and death.
On your face a cyclone’s tastes linger.
You stand weary and forlorn,
Suddenly flickering, quivering with joy:
Something, perhaps life, is now longer.

Dolorous as the widows’ indomitable desires,
Upon its prowess the gargantuan night lies.
Insane, taciturn, and awake,
It craves from disaster the charity of end-all;
It is wise.

Our drunken vessels roll and sway.
The sleep of buried hurricanes is stirred,
Rocks stretch far like pelagic graves,
From the sea to heaven
The sailor’s curse is heard.

Time vanishes and life abandons time;
From the galaxies descend no bulletins.
Heavy and tired with an ill omen,
When all men are thought to have ceased,
The beacon grins.

Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca
Afterword

THE FUTURE OF TURKISH LITERATURE
It is a truism that poetry dominated Turkish literature for nearly a thousand years. In the latter part of the twentieth century it was eclipsed by fiction which established its hegemony in the present age.

Orhan Pamuk’s winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006 certainly played a major role in this phenomenon although it would not be incorrect to assert that the novel genre might have become ascendant even without Pamuk’s singular achievement.

Prior to the inroads made by Europeanization into Turkish culture around the mid-nineteenth century, elite poets (and intellectuals in general) had spurned prose as being easy, as inferior to verse. By the same token, oral folk poetry had held sway in the rural areas although it could rightfully boast of fascinating creativity in tales and narratives.

Now, in the early twenty-first century, Turkish verse seems to be suffering from sclerosis or tired blood. Gone are the paragons and legendary masters. In the past, many of those luminaries stood as acclaimed cultural heroes. Today, the few revered figures are in their eighties or nineties. Although some younger practitioners manage to gain recognition, many of the emerging poetic talents of the 1980s have since channeled their creative energies into fiction. Numerous major publishers have been forced to terminate or suspend the publication of poetry books and anthologies. Sales of such books are now paltry. The reading public, once enamored of poetry in books and magazines, seems to have abandoned its passion. In this sense, Turkey is experiencing the decline that played havoc with the popularity and prestige of poetry in the English-speaking world, in Europe, and in Latin America several decades earlier.

Not that the poetic output is of a lesser caliber than before. Simply put, poetic creativity is overshadowed by the novel’s current power. What compounds the problem is that most of
the successful Turkish verses are abstruse, obscurantist, and inaccessible—too demanding at a time when the public revels in the Internet’s easy appeal.

A similar downturn is observed in dramatic writing when compared with the plays that achieved impressive success in the latter part of the twentieth century. Even the major playwrights of that period, those who are still alive, have stopped writing plays or they appear to have become less virtuosic. New talents that might have been expected to write for the theater are concentrating on more lucrative TV series or films. There looms the peril of the live stage giving way to the screen. Yet the theaters (run by the state, major or small municipalities, independents, and universities) continue to stimulate extensive theatrical activity. Although the current scene is dominated by revivals, non-Turkish classics, and translations of modern European and American hits, its vitality is such that high-quality native playwriting is bound to have a resurgence.

Literary criticism seems likely to enjoy its golden age in the coming decades. Creative writing had, for a millennium, produced a huge corpus including masterworks in many genres without the benefit of critical guidance. Scholarship and literary history, too, had lagged notwithstanding some rare exceptions. The essay form has become extraordinarily successful since the late nineteenth century, and holds the promise of remaining so in the foreseeable future.

Now, Turkish criticism seems to be on the eve of estimable achievements. With great élan, scholars, academic critics, and professional reviewers are beginning to produce refined evaluations of modern works as well as Turkey’s long literary heritage. This will probably include excellent histories of Turkish culture and literature.

Novels and short stories in Turkey can be ranked as world-class. The modernist Yaşar Kemal, a Nobel Prize contender for
decades, is esteemed as a master of fiction. The Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, a postmodernist par excellence, continues to enjoy international popularity.

The diversity of creativity in the genre of fiction in Turkey is astounding. So is the virtuosity. From stark realism to stream of consciousness, from historical adventure to magical realism, from psychological suspense to sweeping sagas, Turkish authors have squeezed in half a century virtually the entire experience of European–American–Latin American fiction. Theirs is a remarkable achievement, because while emulating that monumental legacy they have been able to avoid imitation and to endow their works with an authentic Turkish personality.

In the early part of the third millennium, the literature of the Turkish Republic can justifiably boast of a prodigious creative energy and some impressive success in many genres. It has yet to reach the threshold of greatness. It is faced with some impediments: these could be summed up as cultural convulsion (cataclysmic changes in sociopolitical institutions, faith, and technology); language crisis (a vast transformation, broader than the language reform undertaken by any other nation—vocabulary that consisted of seventy-five percent Arabic, Persian, and French words in 1920 increased its ratio of native words to eighty percent and reduced borrowings to only twenty percent by 1970, and the language functioning at the turn of the twenty-first century has about one hundred thousand dictionary entries); critical gap (despite some fine critical writing, Turkish literature still operates, by and large, without the guidance of coherent aesthetic theories and systematic critical analysis); traditional lacunae (the noticeable absence of philosophy, of the norms of tragedy, of psychological analysis in depth); and excessive imitation of models, movements, and major works that have evolved in the West.
The dynamism, quality, purpose, diversity, and impact of modern Turkish literature seem impressive. There is a fertile versatility at work. Turkish literature has never been more varied or more inclusive. Following many decades of conscious experimentation, questing for new values, acquisition of deeper literary and human insights, and stronger expertise in blending form and content, Turkish authors are creating an authentic synthesis of national and universal elements.

In the early phase of its second millennium, Turkish literature stands as both bold and new, mature and youthful. It is a unique synthesis nurtured by a nation’s vivid imagination. It confidently looks forward to its future as a powerful dimension of world literature.
The Flower of Darkness

I set foot on the soil of this world
as if I was making love to a sleeping woman
The hot bees of my eyes kept landing
on the bushes of silence and flying off again
All for nothing their feet were covered with flowerdust

I am unrelenting pain the trees are deaf
Dawn’s distilled steel is no comfort for me
All for nothing day arrives its lances
cannot hoodwink me I have read
the fable of land and sea
the simple tale of birth and death

I found the Flower of Darkness in the forest
like the blindman’s armband with three dots
The sea’s desolate banner is all for nothing
The bird that carries the vision to its nest
The moon’s padlock over the sky all for nothing

Melih Cevdet Anday
SUGGESTED READING
The list below contains books in English relating to Turkish literature (translations, anthologies, histories, critical studies) published in North America, England, and Turkey from 1854 onward. It is not a complete or exhaustive list: numerous titles not available in libraries or for sale have not been included. (Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, who wrote his entire corpus in Persian, is not included in this list.)

The list demonstrates that, whereas fewer than fifteen books were published in English in the first fifty years of the twentieth century, the first decade of the twenty-first century will probably see the publication of over eighty titles.


1884 *The Turkish Jester; or, the Pleasantries of Cogia Nasr Eddin Efendi*, George Barrow, tr. (Ipswich, England: W. Webber).


1901 *Turkish Fairy Tales and Folk Tales*, Ignácz Kúnos, comp. (London: A. H. Bullen).
1901 *Turkish Literature: Comprising Fables, Belles-Lettres and Sacred Traditions*, Epiphanius Wilson, tr. (London: Colonial).


1933 *The Turkish Theatre*, Nicholas N. Martinovitch (New York: Theatre Arts).


1950 *Portrait of a Turkish Family*, İrfan Orga (New York: Macmillan).


1967 *Selected Poems*, Nazım Hikmet; Taner Baybars, tr. (London: Cape).


1973 *They Burn the Thistles*, Yaşar Kemal; Margaret E. Platon, tr. (London: Collins Harvill).


1975 *Karagöz: Turkish Shadow Theatre*, Medin And (Istanbul: Dost).


1976 *The Drum Beats Nightly: The Development of the Turkish Drama As a Vehicle for Social and Political Comment in the Post-Revolutionary Period 1924 to the Present*, Bruce Robson (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies).


1976 *Modern Turkish Drama: An Anthology of Plays in Translation*, Talat S. Halman, ed. (Minneapolis,
Minnesota: Bibliotheca Islamica).

1977 *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin and Other Poems*, Nazım Hikmet; Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, trs. (New York: Persea).


1977 *The Turkish Shadow Theater and the Puppet Collection of the L. A. Mayer Memorial Foundation*, Andreas Tietze (Berlin: Mann).


1978 *An Anthology of Modern Turkish Short Stories*, Fahir İz, ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bibliotheca Islamica).


1982–1985 *Türk Şiveleri Lügâtı (Divanü Lügâti’t Türk)*, Kâşgarlı Mahmud; Robert Dankoff and James Kelly,trs. (Duxbury, Massachusetts: Harvard University Printing Office).


1985 *Rubaiyat*, Nazım Hikmet; Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk,trs. (Providence, Rhode Island: Copper Beech).


1987 The Birds Have Also Gone, Yaşar Kemal; Thilda Kemal, tr. (London: Collins Harvill).


1987 The Wandering Fool: Sufi Poems of a Thirteenth-Century Turkish Dervish, Yunus Emre; Edouard Roditi and Güzin Dino, trs. (San Francisco: Cadmus Editions).


1988 The Tales of Nasrettin Hoca, told by Aziz Nesin; retold in English by Talat S. Halman (Istanbul: Dost).


1988 Twenty Stories by Turkish Women Writers, Nilüfer Mizanoğlu Reddy, tr. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies and the Turkish Ministry of Culture).


1989 *Rubaiyat*, Nazım Hikmet; Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, trs. (New York: Persea).


1993 *Awakened Dreams: Raji’s Journeys with the Mirror Dede*, Ahmet Hilmi; Refik Algan and Camille Helminski, trs. (Putney, Vermont: Threshold).


1993 *Short Dramas from Contemporary Turkish Literature*, Suat Karantay, tr. (Istanbul: Bosphorus University Press).


1994 *Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court: Medieval Inheritance and the Need for Change*, Kemal Silay (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies).

1994 *Night*, Bilge Karasu; G ün e l i G ü n and Bilge Karasu, trs. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press).

1994 *Poems of Nazım Hikmet*, Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, trs. (New York: Persea; revised and expanded, 2002).

1994 *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance*, Victoria Rowe Holbrook (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press).

1996 *An Anthology of Turkish Literature*, Kemal Silay, ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies).


1997 *A Blind Cat Black; and, Orthodoxies*, Ece Ayhan; Murat Nemet-Nejat, tr. (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon).

1997 *Just for the Hell of It: 111 Poems*, Orhan Veli Kanık; Talat S. Halman, tr. (İstanbul: Multilingual Yabancı D il).


1999 Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art, Eugene Lyons Hébert and Barry Tharaud, trs, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press).

2000 Mediterranean Waltz, Buket Uzuner; Pelin Arıner, tr. (Istanbul: Remzi).

2000 The Other Side of the Mountain, Erendiz Atasü; Elizabeth Maslen and Erendiz Atasü, trs. (London: Milet).


2001 My Name Is Red, Orhan Pamuk; Erdağ Göknar, tr. (London: Faber and Faber).

2001 *A Summer Full of Love*, Füruzan; Damian Croft, tr. (London: Milet).


2002 *Death in Troy*, Bilge Karasu; Aron Aji, tr. (San Francisco: City Lights).

2002 *Human Landscapes from My Country*, Nazım Hikmet; Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, trs. (New York: Persea).


2002 *The Sound of Fishsteps*, Buket Uzuner; Pelin Thornhill Arıner, tr. (Istanbul: Remzi).


2003 *Naked Yula: Stories*, İlyas Halil (Holladay, Utah: Southmoor).


2004 *Snow*, Orhan Pamuk; Maureen Freely, tr. (London: Faber and Faber).


2004 *An Unprecedented Communal Rite in the Court of Nur Baba*, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu; İşiler Kür, tr. (Istanbul: Epsilon).


2005– *Journal of Turkish Literature* (The only English-language scholarly journal devoted in its entirety to Turkish literature), published annually, Talat S. Halman, ed. ( Ankara: Bilkent University Center for Turkish Literature).


2006 *Bliss*, Zülfü Livaneli; Çiğdem Aksoy, tr. (New York: St. Martin’s).


2006 *A Leaf about To Fall: Selected Poems*, İlhan Berk; George Messo, tr. (Cambridge: Salt).

2006 *Orpheus*, Nazlı Eray; Robert Finn, tr. (Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin).

2006 *Tales From the Taurus*, Osman Şahin; Jean Carpenter Efe, ed. (Istanbul: Bosphorus University Press).


2008 *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk: The Writer and His Novels*, Michael McGaha (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press).


2008 *İbrahim the Mad and Other Plays: An Anthology of Modern Turkish Drama*, Vol. 1; Talat S. Halman and Jayne L. Warner, eds. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press).
2008 The Idle Years: My Father's House – The Idle Years, Orhan Kemal; Cengiz Lugal, tr. (London and Chester Springs, Pennsylvania: Peter Owen).


2008 Summer’s End, Adalet Ağaoğlu; Figen Bingül, tr. (Jersey City, New Jersey: Talisman).

2008 The Turkish Blue: Selected Poems, Cahit Külebi; Vicki Tuncer and Baran Tuncer, trs. (Ankara: Bilgi).
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES
Talat S. Halman is a critic, scholar, and a leading translator of Turkish literature into English. His books in English include *Contemporary Turkish Literature*, *Modern Turkish Drama*, *Süleyman the Magnificent Poet*, three volumes on Yunus Emre, *Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes* (with Metin And), *A Brave New Quest: 100 Modern Turkish Poems*, *Shadows of Love* (his original poems in English), *A Last Lullaby* (his English/Turkish poems), *Living Poets of Turkey*, *Turkish Legends and Folk Poems*, and many books featuring modern Turkish poets (Dağlarca, Kank, Anday). He was the editor of *A Dot on the Map: Selected Stories and Poems* and *Sleeping in the Forest: Stories and Poems* by Sait Faik. His book, *Nightingales and Pleasure Gardens: Turkish Love Poems*, was named one of the ten best university press books of 2005 by *ForeWord Reviews*.

Among Halman’s books in Turkish are twelve collections of his own poetry (including *Ümit Harmanı*, his collected poems published in 2008), a massive volume of the poetry of ancient civilizations, the complete sonnets of Shakespeare, the poetry of ancient Anatolia and the Near East, Eskimo poems, ancient Egyptian poetry, the *rubais* of Rumi, the quatrains of Baba Tahir Uryan, two anthologies of modern American poetry, and books of the selected poems of Wallace Stevens and Langston Hughes. Halman was William Faulkner’s first Turkish translator; he also translated Mark Twain and Eugene O’Neill.

Halman has published nearly three thousand articles, essays, and reviews in English and in Turkish. He has served as a columnist for the Turkish dailies *Milliyet*, *Aksam*, and *Cumhuriyet*. Many of his English articles on Turkish literature have been collected in *Rapture and Revolution: Essays on Turkish Literature* (2007). Selections from Halman’s Turkish articles and essays have been collected in two volumes, *Doğrusu* (1999) and *Çiçek Dürbünü* (2008). His English reviews of
works of Turkish literature have been collected in *The Turkish Muse: Views and Reviews, 1960s–1990s*. Some of his books have been translated into French, Hebrew, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, and Japanese. For his work as a translator he won Columbia University’s Thornton Wilder Prize.

His translations of Robinson Jeffers’ *Medea*, Jerome Kilty’s *Dear Liar* (a play adaptation of the correspondence of George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell), Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*, and Neil Simon’s *Lost in Yonkers* were produced in Turkey. *Dear Liar* and *The Iceman Cometh* won best translation awards. Halman is the coeditor (with Jayne L. Warner) of *An Anthology of Modern Turkish Drama*: Vol. 1, *İbrahim the Mad and Other Plays*; Vol. 2, *I, Anatolia and Other Plays*.

Talat Halman served as Turkey’s first Minister of Culture and later as its Ambassador for Cultural Affairs. He was a member of the UNESCO Executive Board. Between 1953 and 1997, he was on the faculties of Columbia University, Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania, and New York University (where he was also chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures). In 1998, he founded the Department of Turkish Literature at Bilkent University, Ankara, and has since been its chairman. He also serves as Bilkent’s dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Letters. He is currently serving as president of the Turkish National Committee for UNICEF and editor in chief of the *Journal of Turkish Literature*. He was also the general editor for a four-volume history of Turkish literature published in Turkish.

Halman’s honors and awards include many literary prizes, two honorary doctorates, a Rockefeller Fellowship in the Humanities, the Distinguished Service Award of the Turkish Academy of Sciences, the UNESCO Medal, and Knight Grand Cross (GBE), the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, conferred on him by Queen Elizabeth II.
JAYNE L. WARNER is director of research at the Institute for Aegean Prehistory in Greenwich, Connecticut. She holds a B.A. in classics, an M.A. in ancient history and, from Bryn Mawr College, a Ph.D. in Near Eastern and Anatolian archaeology. Her publications include *Elmalı-Karataş II: The Early Bronze Age Village of Karataş*. Warner has served as assistant editor of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and executive director of the Poetry Society of America (New York). She has also served as director of the American Turkish Society (New York) and director of the New York Office of the Board of Trustees of Robert College of Istanbul. She was the editor of *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halman*, *The Turkish Muse: Views and Reviews, 1960s–1990s*, and *Rapture and Revolution: Essays on Turkish Literature*. Warner served as associate editor of *Sleeping in the Forest: Stories and Poems* by Sait Faik, *Nightingales and Pleasure Gardens: Turkish Love Poems*, and *A Brave New Quest: 100 Modern Turkish Poems*. 