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Introduction

Sidney Wade, Guest Editor

At this critical moment in U.S. and world history, it is more important than ever that American ears hear and understand the voices of other cultures. The Turkish cultural experience is unique in the world in that, as well as having developed its own rich and multi-hued literary tradition, it has served for centuries as the literal and figurative bridge between East and West. This culture has thrived on its own terms under the shadow of the bridge and been influenced by its bright exigencies, and the literature that has emerged from this constantly variable equation has much to teach us, who are more than ever critically involved in the affairs of the larger world.

The American reader may be familiar with the work of Orhan Pamuk, whose name is often found in sentences that also contain the words “Nobel Prize,” but they will be less likely to have had the pleasure of encountering most of the others in this collection, such as Latife Tekin, one of Turkey’s most original prose stylists, or İlhan Berk and his deadpan postmodern poetic affect. The elegant lyricism of Enis Batur and Güven Turan deserve wider recognition in our world, as does the otherworldly and melancholic mythistorema (to borrow a coinage from Seferis) of Gülseli İnal. Bilge Karasu’s work is beginning to make inroads: his novel The Garden of Departed Cats, in Aron Aji’s excellent translation, won the ALTA National Translation Award for 2004.

The seminal critical pieces here come from some of Turkey’s most widely recognized literary authorities: Talât Halman is largely responsible for first introducing Turkish literature to American literary audiences, and Walter Andrews is one of our most well-respected Ottomanists. Saliha Paker’s fine and comprehensive overview and bibliography that begin this issue are the work of many years’ experience, and Erdağ Göknar, translator of Orhan Pamuk’s award-winning My Name is Red, has contributed a piece that intriguingly criss-crosses the borders of criticism and memoir.

My hope in presenting these works is that the reader’s appetite will be sufficiently whetted to encourage him or her to explore the wide variety of deliciously fascinating, aesthetically first-rate, and historically important works created by Turkey’s many fine literary artists. I am honored to have had the privilege of bringing together these vibrant voices from and about the Turkish literary experience and would like to thank Rainer Schulte for asking me to do it. I hope this collection brings the reader as much pleasure as it has given me in putting it together.

Reading Turkish Novelists and Poets in English Translation: 2000 – 2004

Saliha Paker

In History’s Mirror

In 1901, in his “special introduction” to *Turkish Literature*, 1 Epiphanius Wilson, A.M., wrote: “The Turk is fond of witnessing the exertions, the excitements and perturbations of others, while he himself remains indolent and imperturbable; hence his passion for story-telling and for the representations of the stage.” (p. v) Interestingly, the University Press of the Pacific (Honolulu, Hawaii) brought out a facsimile edition of this volume in 2002. Wilson’s anthology today is more than a curiosities piece for historians of translation and reception. It serves as a reminder that the critical interest of the receiving cultures in the mysteries of Turkish “soul” or “spirit” has not changed all that much over the past hundred years. A certain essentialism persists, although the more “orientalist” interest in the *character* of the Turk of the East has shifted to the more politically and sociologically fashionable concern in the cultural *identity*, but also the *soul* or *spirit* of “the Turks” as a nation somehow “divided” or “suspended” between East and West. But, of course, Wilson’s book also serves as a means for comparing striking differences, between the turn of the 20th century and that of the 21st, in who chose what and whom to be translated as both marketable and palatable in English. Looking back, modern-day readers, especially Turks, will be surprised by the differences they see in the mirror of translation history.

Wilson’s anthology covers 46 anonymous fables and a full-length late-19th-century Ottoman comedy of manners, all of which he translated himself. The play, compared with the work of Molière, is by a Mirza Feth-Ali Akhoud-Zaidé, now hardly mentioned in literary histories, but whom Wilson describes as “the most original native dramatist whose works have appeared in Constantinople.” (p. iv) Also included is a wide selection of Ottoman Divan poetry in Gibb’s translation, which must be contrasted with Walter G. Andrews’ anthology *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (translated with Mehmet Kalpakli and Nejaat Black) 2 by anyone interested in the striking difference in translation strategies and diction. Other pieces are “The Rose and the Nightingale” from the classical period, the prose “History of the Forty Vezirs” and a prose version of “The Counsels of Nabi Efendi” from the 15th and 17th centuries, respectively, and the anonymous, undated “The Ascension of Mahomet.” Implicit but telling is the fact that Wilson chose only drama from the late 19th century to represent the change and renewal that Turkish literature was undergoing in his lifetime as a result of rapidly growing contact with European literature. Drama must have excited Wilson, because it was linguistically more accessible and because it “vividly reproduced” life in Turkey.

At the turn of the 21st century, the “passion for story-telling” continues undiminished. It has recently been described in a survey article as an “acute need to narrate.” 3 One wonders whether it is pure coincidence that Margaret Atwood should comment in her recent review of Orhan Pamuk’s (1952–) *Snow*: “…instead of ‘I think, therefore I am,’ a Pamuk character might say ‘I am because I narrate.’” 4

The survey article also informs us that a record number of new works of Turkish fiction were published in the first seven months of 2004: a total of 150 works, 70 of which are first novels. This is a paradoxical state of affairs, considering serious complaints about high book prices, rival pirate book industries, and low circulation figures. What the article does not mention is that in line with the growing volume of fiction, one can also observe greater interest on the part of writers to be translated into English. The success of Orhan Pamuk’s fiction on the international market, awarded many prizes (but oddly, only a few in Turkey) since the 1990s, and most important, the Impac prize in 2003 for *My Name is Red* (also winning an award for Erdağ Göknar, the translator), has no doubt sharpened appetites for international recognition. Of course, Orhan Pamuk has been very fortunate in all his translators: Victoria R. Holbrook (*The White Castle*), Güneli Gün (*The Black Book* and *The New Life*), Erdağ Göknar (*My Name is Red*), and Maureen Freely (*Snow*), who have transcreated the author in English in varying discourses and kept him in the public eye with superbly timed translations of his successive works. More on Pamuk’s work follows below. At this point, we must remember Yashar Kemal (1922–),

*like a bridge, departing from myself
like a Turk, red, I am crying turkish red
– Lale Müldür (1991)*

(trans. by Murat Nemet-Nejat)
who made the first impressive breakthrough in the late 1960s, representing Turkish fiction on the world market from the late 1960s onward, because of the competence and diligence of his wife, the late Thilda Kemal, who translated 12 of his novels from 1962 to 1997.5 The latest of these novels to appear was Salman the Solitary,6 a widely reviewed semiautobiographical novel that is also a powerful character study of a “killer in the family.”

Elif Shafak
If Yashar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk are now the best-known and most widely read writers of Turkish fiction in English, Elif Shafak (1971–) is the new voice. A maverick narrator with an eye for the minutest detail, her Turkish prose seems to echo the symmetries, digressions, and cadences of traditional story-telling; her earlier prize-winning fiction, first published in 1994, is distinctly Sufi in theme and tone.

Elif Shafak has just made her debut on the international market with The Flea Palace (trans. Müge Göçek),7 her fourth novel in Turkish. The densely populated book, intended as a particular microcosmic view of Turkish urban society, is set in a bug-infested middle-class apartment building tormented by garbage and stench in contemporary Istanbul. Although in style and tone it is entirely different and the individual episodes are more interconnected and tightly structured, this book can be read in many ways as a heart-of-the-city counterpart of Latife Tekin’s (1957–) Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills (trans. Ruth Christie and Salihah Paker); Tekin’s episodic narrative is set exclusively in the shantytowns built overnight by migrant villagers in the 1960s and 1970s on the rubbish dumps around the city. That this garbage (and underlying graveyards) should serve in both books as a metaphor for the modern metropolis is telling in itself. It is also intriguing that their modern garbage mythology should have served both novelists well on their way to an international readership.

To appreciate Elif Shafak’s voice in translation, The Flea Palace must be read in the light of her latest novel, which she wrote in English, The Saint of Incipient Insanities.9 For, in a conceptual sense, the latter too may be considered a translation, the self-translation of a nomadic multilingual writer who now lives mostly in the United States and teaches women’s studies.

The Saint..., parts of which may also be read as a hilarious send-up of American campus feminism and therapy obsessions, focuses on a group of “foreign” graduate students in Boston, including an angst-ridden Turk, Ömer Özsipahiñoğlu,10 and his love affair with an even more angst-ridden American woman of numerous self-appellations. Names and naming emerge as a central concern linking up with the notion of identity in the gray area of the “in-between,” which, interestingly, is not restricted to the Turk (foreign) but includes the American (domestic). Implicit in all this is also a concern for (un)translatability — of proper names, for instance, such as the Turkish one above, obviously a torture for the American tongue, and the unforgettable Zarpandit (originally the name of an ancient Assyro-Babylonian pregnant goddess), of problematic “dots” in spelling, of pronunciations resulting in distortion — under assimilationist pressures on the identity of the “other” or those in the “in-between.”

In the moving finale of the book, the Bosphorus Bridge between the European and Asiatic coasts of Istanbul is appointed, not unexpectedly, as the dramatic witness to hazardous hybrid existences.

Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry11
In the poetry of Lale Müldür (1956–) too, and of Ece Ayhan (1931-2002), both spectacularly represented in Murat Nemet-Nejat’s anthology, Istanbul, ancient and modern, figures as a special site of multiple identities and hybrid guises. The “city of crossings and bridges and double crosses … the paradoxical nature of [which] is the obsessive reference point of 20th-century Turkish poetry” (p. 5) is foregrounded by Nemet-Nejat as a generous contributor to his conception of eda, the life-line of his selection, which is dominated by the poets of the Second New12 but which covers a much broader tradition, ranging from 1921 to 1997.

Eda is perhaps the most exciting literary translation project of 2004. A delectably partial selection of modern Turkish poets, some of whom, like Orhan Veli13 (1914–1950), Cemal Süreya (1931–1990), İlhan Berk14 (1918–), Ece Ayhan,15 Lale Müldür,16 Sami Baydar (1962–), and küçük İskender (1964–), have been substantially anthologized for the first time in translation, it combines critical essays with translated poems, the majority of both of which are by Nemet-Nejat, himself a poet-translator. The translations, some of which are transcreations of the originals, hence metapoems, reflect the critical license with which poet-translators operate.

Murat Nemet-Nejat, like Elif Shafak, is of a multilingual and multicultural background.17 Living in New York and involved in writing and translating poetry since his youth, he may also be described as an “intercultural agent” between the Turkish and American domains of poetry. Nemet-Nejat introduces his anthology as “the translation of a language,” (p. 4) which, we discover, is
the special language, the *eda* of modern Turkish poetry, the development of which is traced in the anthology. Titles of translation anthologies generally gloss over the fact of translation by omitting any reference to it, thereby reinforcing the illusion that the receiver will be reading the original. But in Murat Nemet-Nejat’s title, we are first confronted with a curious, simple-sounding foreign (“Turkish?” the anglophone reader would think) word, *Eda*, suggesting the presence of the language of origin of the poetry, hence hinting at the tension of difference between the original and what is assumed to be the translation in English. But *Eda* is doubly important because, as a concept, it also stands for the editor’s understanding of the poetics that underlie the selection and translation of the poems. Nemet-Nejat explains in “The Idea of a Book,” his introduction:

… from the creation of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s to the 1990s when Istanbul/Constantinople/Byzantium turned from a jewel-like city of contrasts of under a million into a city of twelve million — Turkey created a body of poetry unique in the 20th century, with its own poetics, world view, and idiosyncratic sensibility. What is more, these qualities are intimately related to the nature of Turkish as a language — its strengths and its defining limits. As historical changes occurred, the language in this poetry responded to them, flowered, changed but always remained a continuum, a psychic essence, a dialectic which is an arabesque. It is this silent melody of the mind — the cadence of its total allure — which this collection tries to translate. (p. 4)

This is a bold and confident claim and also a reminder that the anthology would read as a double translation: a body of poetry translated into English, but the original of which is also considered a translation — of a special language (Turkish) conceived as a vehicle of “psychic essence,” in other words, of *eda*. And it is the special focus on *eda* as the central, unifying theme that makes the anthology particularly intriguing and challenging. *Eda*, a word that originally means “tone/style” but which is interpreted by Nemet-Nejat in his essays as a term of multiple meanings, is not easy to define: each essay has a reference to and description of it that supplements the other. It is also Nemet-Nejat’s important contention that *eda* is organically connected with Turkish (not Persian) Sufism. It carries a mystical load, hence its rapport with Benjamin’s theory of translation. Nemet-Nejat interprets Walter Benjamin (in “The Task of the Translator”) as claiming “that what gives a language translatability is its distance from the host language. *Eda* is this distance.” (p. 4)

With its selection of poets, its claims and hypotheses, and last but not least, its intriguing combination of translation strategies, this anthology is bound to stir up discussion, not to say controversy, both in Turkey and abroad. Agree or disagree with the central argument, it is a jewel of a translation anthology for the poet, the lay reader and, of course, the translation scholar. It should also serve as an illuminating reference for serious reviewers of contemporary Turkish fiction who wish to pronounce on the modern Turkish psyche. In fact, it may well be argued that if the mysteries of the modern Turkish soul or spirit are to be sought anywhere, it is in poetry rather than in fiction.

**Bejan Matur and Nazım Hikmet**

Along with Murat Nemet-Nejat’s *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* and Kemal Silay’s *An Anthology of Turkish Literature*, individual selections from Turkish poets constitute a corpus of translations not to be ignored. The most recent of the individual collections is Bejan Matur’s (1968–) *In the Temple of a Patient God*, translated by Ruth Christie. It is a bilingual selection (the first in English) from four previous books by Matur, a highly distinctive, enigmatic, haunting voice echoing Southeastern Turkey, captured admirably by her translator. Bejan Matur is from a Kurdish Alevi family, whose poetry is one of the very finest and most profound in Turkish.

Maureen Freely writes in her introduction:

(Matur) talks of the way dead languages lurk inside living languages. Words never forget their spiritual histories…. She speaks of cutting her poems back and back, shaving them down to the bone until she has found the old word inside the new word, the Turkish poem that owes its haunting power to Kurdish. (p. 16)

In such a practice, Matur seems to be delving into the depths of contemporary Turkish to translate what, for her, is the old word, the mythos, which bears its own story. The significance of this beguiling notion of self-translation apparently embedded in the poet’s Turkish diction cannot be dismissed.

In 2002, three important volumes of English translations were published to commemorate the centennial of Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963), internationally the most widely translated of Turkish poets. The first full English biography, *Romantic Communist: The Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet* by Saime Göksu and Edward Timms, which also contains translations, had come out in 1998.
Translating Nazım Hikmet into English took root from the early 1970s in the United States, about twenty years after the first English translations appeared in Calcutta in 1952, translated by Asoke Ghosh, Nilüfer Reddy’s pseudonym, a year after the poet had fled from Istanbul to Moscow, evolving into a major translation project in the collaboration of Mutlu Konuk, professor of English, and Randy Blasing, poet. The full, unabridged translation of Human Landscapes from My Country, “an epic novel in verse,” and Poems of Nazım Hikmet, the revised and expanded version of the 1994 edition, are two outstanding products (both 2002) of their long-term project. A third volume of Nazım Hikmet in English, Beyond the Walls, translated by Ruth Christie, Richard McKane, and Talat S. Halman and published in England in 2002, can be said to complement the recent Nazım Hikmet corpus in English. It is understood from Ruth Christie’s preface that this volume was prepared to make Nazım Hikmet’s poetry more readily available for a British readership; it includes poems hitherto untranslated as well as retranslations. As a result, one of Nazım Hikmet’s masterpieces, for instance, “The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin,” now exists in three English versions: by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, by Larry Clark (in Sılay’s Anthology of Turkish Literature), and by Ruth Christie. Regardless of the question of which is better or the best, retranslations are facts of literary-cultural history, which generally (but not always) function as different interpretations of the original, thereby enriching critical understanding of it in their very diversity.

Bilge Karasu and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar

Compared with the quantity of poetry translated over the years in periodicals, special issues, websites, and in book form, translations of Turkish fiction definitely lag behind. But what few authors have been published so far represent, in the relatively short history of Turkish fiction, narratival voices and perspectives as distinct as Yashar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk. But one must also bear in mind that Karasu’s work, always metaphorical and seemingly distanced from the “realities” of Turkish society, belongs to a Turkish tradition too — one that was overshadowed by the dominant interest in, not to say obsession with, socialist realism from the 1950s to the 1980s — not just to that of Borges and Beckett, as claimed by Richard Howard.

The foremost representative of the Turkish modernist tradition is Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901–1962), poet, novelist, critic, and literary historian, whose influence on later generations has only belatedly been recognized. In Tanpınar’s novella “The Dreams of Abdullah Efendi,” for instance, tensions of bonding between Abdullah Efendi as the dreamer and the dreamt have close affinities with the relationship between the protagonist and his beloved “other” in the main narrative in Bilge Karasu’s The Garden of Departed Cats, and also with the relationship between the Ottoman scientist and his Florentine slave, his “twin,” in Orhan Pamuk’s The White Castle.

Tanpınar’s fiction revolves on a problematization of the modern Turkish identity as embracing rather than expelling the Ottoman within. The canonical position of The Time Regulation Institute, translated by Ender Gürol and recognized as a masterpiece of irony and satire on Turkish society translated from Empire to Republic, is now uncontested in Turkey. But in the 1960s, left-wing fiction, like Yashar Kemal’s, with its focus on the hardships and feudal relations of rural Anatolia, was mainstream and popular and considered politically far more important than Tanpınar’s sophisticated urban re-evaluations of tradition and modernity. Tanpınar’s works enjoyed a brief revival in the 1970s, but it was in the late 1990s that his work came to enjoy popularity, more and more, with the younger generations, after the publication of his works was taken up by a major publishing house and “rescued,” according

Translation Review
Thomas concludes that “[p]erhaps Mr. Pamuk, like Turkey, doesn’t quite translate into the West. What emerges into English is a skillful play of illusions…..” These comments stand out as a rare example of reviewing that takes translation seriously into account: the illusory and elusive aspects of translating (from Turkish and other languages) not just words but a certain consciousness that finds its unique expression in the indigenous language of the culture — what Murat Nemet-Nejat refers to in terms of *eda*. Thomas’s observation serves as an antidote to a great number of reviewers who seem to be omniscient about the authors they read in translation and the literary tradition(s) they belong to, not hesitating to pronounce authoritatively on them and the culture(s) they are deemed to represent.

John Updike, for instance, in a highly favorable review of Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*, points out affinities he observes between Pamuk’s novels and those by Mann, Woolf, Faulkner, Borges, Calvino, Joyce, and Kafka. Like *The White Castle* (translated by Victoria Holbrook), *My Name is Red* is set in the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. And similar to most of Pamuk’s previous works, it explores the realm of shifting identity, this time the artistic. As a result, *My Name is Red* can also be read as a compelling critique of the aesthetics of imitatio, the art of imitating Persian and European models.

Updike states that *My Name is Red* “uses the art of miniature illumination, much as Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* did music, to explore a nation’s soul.” He also quotes from the penultimate chapter of *My Name is Red*, where the murderer tells his fellow miniature painters to “sit yourselves down and do nothing but ape the Europeans century after century! Proudly sign your names to your imitation paintings.” Updike’s conclusion is that “Pamuk’s consciousness of Turkey’s fate of imitation and inauthenticity expresses itself in his characters’ frequent feelings of detachment from their real selves…..” (pp. 92, 94, my italics).

It is of course curious that Pamuk’s conscious probing of the general problematic of Ottoman artistic imitation should translate into “Turkey’s fate of imitation and inauthenticity,” in Updike’s words. Such discourse echoes a stereotypical and fundamentally essentialist statement by the orientalist E.J.W. Gibb, who wrote in 1911:

> In all literary matters the Ottoman Turks have shown themselves a singularly un inventive people, the two great schools, the old and the new, into which we may divide their literature, being closely modelled, the one after the classics of Persia, the other after those of modern Europe, and more especially of France.

**Orhan Pamuk**

D.M. Thomas, in his review of Orhan Pamuk’s *The New Life* (translated by Güneli Gün), comments on Turkey’s translatability:

> The cool urbanity of the translation may mask all that cannot be translated: the deeply ingrained Turkish consciousness of the novel. It is probably as hard to understand *The New Life* at that level as it would be for a Turk to experience truly the Dublin of Joyce’s *Ulysses* through a skillful translation. Of course, we can be aware of underlying national themes — like Turkey’s crisis of identity between East and West, the secular and the Islamic — but we can scarcely feel it in our bones as Turkish readers would.
It is intriguing that, about one hundred years after Gibb’s pronouncement, an astute Western literary critic should gloss over the complexity that Pamuk’s book examines: the nature of artistic creativity, which springs from a certain tension between the imitative and the innovative, between the sense of security in imitating conventional models and the passion and courage to seek out the new and experiment with it.

Overlooking such complexities seems to result in predictable labeling, embedded in statements of praise: that Orhan Pamuk, for instance, “has brilliantly captured the intricate spirit of a nation suspended perilously between east and west.” In this case, allowance has been made at least for some intricacy in the “nation’s spirit.” But why is the “nation suspended perilously”? Why not “poised in the ‘in-between,’” for instance, or “historically steeped in hybridity”?

The answer would seem to connect with Updike’s reading of Pamuk. For if the nation’s “fate” is seen as nothing but “imitation” in apposition with “inauthenticity,” then its identity has been and will remain in peril. Alternatively, however, one could also argue that “the nation” may be conceived as constantly engaged in translating itself from east into west, and also — with the incoming political and cultural feedback, especially from negotiations with the EU — from west into east: in short, a perpetually self-translation identity.

Life is a Caravanserai\HAS TWO DOORS//
I Came In One//I Went Out the Other

The bilateral movement conceived in such an identity that is conscious of cultural boundaries but willing to negotiate them with considerable ease would seem to find some metaphorical resonance in the “two doors” in Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s (1946–) title of a novel originally written in a German hybridized with Turkish: an intriguing case of self-translation. In turn translated (captivatingly) into English by Luise von Flotow, the book is feisty autobiographical fiction by a novelist, dramatist, and actor who was born and grew up in Turkey but has been living in Germany since her youth. Özdamar won the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann prize when first published in Germany in 1992. Her German is both nourished and subverted by literal translations from her mother tongue. In Mother Tongue, her first book in German, translated into English by Craig Thomas, Özdamar says: “We have no choice but to rebuild the tongue we have lost with the tongue we have found.” As observed by her editor, her “chronicle is an essentially subversive enterprise.” So is Life is a Caravanserai, which Juan Goytisolo has described as “A real social, moral and literary time-bomb. No Turkish writer — let alone a woman writer — has ever written anything of the kind before.”

Latife Tekin

In fact, Latife Tekin had written the Turkish of Dear Shameless Death (translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne) as early as 1983: a literary turning point in the modern narrative of migration from the village to the big city, of loss of home, loss of language. Although Özdamar’s Life is a Caravanserai definitely has a more down-to-earth, punching directness in a plain register that makes liberal use of obscenities, it bears a strong affinity with Dear Shameless Death, especially in terms of characters: headstrong girls who travel the difficult path from childhood and village into youth and the city; their large families; and powerful mothers.

Latife Tekin made her debut as a writer at about the same time as Orhan Pamuk: in the early 1980s, after the military coup. But she took an entirely different path and wrote about the displaced and dispossessed, the migrants from the villages, who came to the big city to find work and to settle. To her, power had meant language, since her arrival in Istanbul.

All doors seemed open to her and her people, “except the language of others, which filled the air with sounds and sentences, words, signs and implications” that kept shutting them out, shutting them up, leaving them “in a fatal struggle for breath.” “That is why,” she said, “when I made up my mind to write, I declared I would write in my home voice, the language we spoke at home, which was inseparable from my mother’s voice.”

So Dear Shameless Death, which she wrote shortly after she lost her mother, is pervaded by what Tekin calls her “home voice,” her mother tongue. Aamer Hussein, in his review of Dear Shameless Death, is right in commenting that Tekin “may, like Americans such as Toni Morrison, have consciously crafted an idiosyncratically lyrical idiom to voice the sorrows of her own, marginalised group.”

At the time she finished her fourth novel, Buzdan Kılıçlar (1989, Swords of Ice), Latife Tekin had also identified herself “as a translator”:

I choose to describe myself as a translator … rather than a writer. I find it more meaningful to think of myself as one who translates, who conveys the mute, “tongueless” world of the dispossessed into the language of this world … In my novel (Swords of Ice) I tried to give an account of the world of the dispossessed (of which I’m a member) in the words of others, or rather, in words that we have all stolen
in a journey, a departing from home — not to the big city, it may be argued that gecekondu, for instance, figures as such a “stolen” word. The gecekondu (which literally means “perched overnight”) is not so much a word coined by the migrant poor who set up their makeshift shacks overnight as a descriptive noun designated by “others” who are taken by surprise in the morning when they see the gecekondu sprung out of the blue on public or private land.

In an anonymous review49 of My Name is Red and Dear Shameless Death, Latife Tekin is described as “one of the most original of the young Turks who are transforming their country’s fiction.” She is also designated, with Orhan Pamuk, as “Atatürk’s Children” who “are daring to disobey him, rediscovering and reinventing their Ottoman and Islamic inheritance [as opposed to “imitating Europe”], and finding a strange image of themselves in history’s mirror.”

What can this “strange image” be? But first a brief look at a novel that, from the above reviewer’s angle, would most probably be regarded as the work of an “obedient child” of the founder of modern Turkey.

The Other Side of the Mountain50

Erendiz Atasü (1947–), who wrote The Other Side of the Mountain (translated by Elisabeth Maslen and the author and published some months before Dear Shameless Death), is a self-declared staunch secularist as well as a feminist. Built on recollections, letters, newspaper cuttings, the narrative centers on the fortunes of a middle-class family of the early republic: an intimate, sensitive, but also critical portrayal of modern Turkish history, with an important focus on the educational emancipation of women and on the “metamorphoses of the character of the army officer” (p. 279). According to Moris Farhi, The Other Side of the Mountain “presents us with the soul of Turkey”; in Margaret Drabble’s words,51 it is “a bold and poignant novel, a powerful evocation not only of Turkish history through the twentieth century but also of world history and of the inter-weavings of nationalism and ideology.” But like Tekin’s Dear Shameless Death and Özdamar’s Life is a Caravanserai, it is also a daughter’s autobiography, rooted in a journey, a departing from home — not to the big city but to become one of “The Kemalist Girls of Cambridge.”

The question is, can such a journey and its depiction in the genre of the European novel be reduced to “imitating Europe”? Speaking of her parents’ correspondence, which inspired her novel, the author, in her “Letter to the Reader,” says:

And what did I find between the lines? The spirit of the past. The toughness of the hide concealing that spirit, which is to say the harsh outlines of everyday events, had no place in the language of these courteous and rather shy people brought up under the strict family discipline of Ottoman society … My parents’ generation stood there, the anguish of their lost motherland, the anguish of migrations. In that domain were the orphans of the First World War, children of a nation condemned to death by the world powers, and also the generation of rebirth, young citizens of a young and eager Republic … their faith in the ideals of their youth, their disappointments, their hurt silences… (p. 277).

Basically, the novel hinges on a translation of the Ottoman past into the Turkish modern, and as such, harbors a certain hybridity or “in-between-ness” that is inherent in translation as an act of imitation. In this respect, it can be related to Latife Tekin’s words stolen from Istanbul power-holders, Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s Turkish-German, and the American idiom of Elif Shafak’s characters in New England.

The hybrid and its recognition may be considered unsettling for some readers, Turkish and non-Turkish alike. But it surfaces over and over again in Turkish writing, be it poetry or fiction, a fact that cannot be ignored. Consider Orhan Pamuk’s fiction, which may be read as translations in the broadest sense of Turkish past and present. Rather than labor on a Turkish identity “divided” or “suspended” between East and West as binary oppositions, they interpret, celebrate, both with anguish and teasing pleasure, an overlapping of cultures that has taken root in Turkish society since Ottoman times, its hybrid “soul,” or “strange image” if you like.

From this angle, it is possible to somewhat modify Margaret Atwood’s highly perceptive definition of Orhan Pamuk’s “long-term project” as “narrating his country into being.”52 For Pamuk’s narration also involves translating “his country into being” for the “other.” Nowhere is this more apparent than in Snow, the subject of Atwood’s review. A political novel that Pamuk claimed53 to have written to be more accessible to his Turkish readers, Snow covers problematic focal points of crucial current interest.
both for contemporary Turkish society and its observers from outside: a secularist coup, religious fundamentalists, Kurds, terrorists, and “headscarf girls” caught in an epidemic of suicide. Such “issues” are woven into a narrative of farce and tragedy, which only a master fiction writer can orchestrate. One also senses that Pamuk as a novelist has responded to a certain call or desire that seems to emanate from such sociopolitical “problems” in order to be interpreted. In the Turkish of Snow, the abundant use of the adjective “westernized,” for instance, is intriguing. It seems to operate much like a word “stolen” from the “other” to translate in unequivocal terms perhaps the most questioned aspect of the hybrid nature of modern Turkish society — to translate for those who regard themselves as the “other,” be they Westerners or secularists or fundamentalists.

To conclude, in surveying the recent major literary contributions to the corpus of translations into English, it has been possible also to reflect on their reception in reviews and the implications regarding perceptions of modern Turkish identity. In the light of such reception, it has also been possible to read some of the Turkish works themselves as cultural translations of the complex “who-ness” of Turks and Turkey. In the context of this essay on translations, the complexity seems to inhabit the in-between and the self-translating, a life practice that certainly harbors tensions but resists reductive readings in terms of a simple East-West divide or an afflicted psyche.

Notes

1 Turkish Literature, comprising Fables, Belles-Lettres and Sacred Traditions, Translated into English for the First Time, New York, 1901.

2 Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology, University of Texas, Austin, 1997.

3 Radikal Book supplement 23rd July 2004 no.175


10 In his recent review (The New Yorker, August 30, 2004) of Orhan Pamuk’s Snow, John Updike interestingly gives a long list of the names of the Turkish characters, which, he points out, “have, to an American reader, a fairy-tale strangeness.”

11 Edited and with Introduction by Murat Nemet-Nejat, Preface by Talat Sait Halman, Talisman House, New Jersey. The volume includes a very useful appendix on the Turkish titles and sources of the translations.


14 İlhan Berk, one of the oldest and most productive of living Turkish poets but long neglected by translators, has also been published recently in an individual collection, Selected Poems by İlhan Berk (ed.) Önder Otcu, translations by Önder Otcu and Murat Nemet-Nejat, Talisman House, New Jersey, 2004. Extensively represented in Murat Nemet-Nejat’s anthology, Berk may be said to have finally got the attention he deserved in English.

15 Ece Ayhan’s poetry has also appeared in an individual selection, A Blind Cat Black and Orthodoxies, translated, with an afterword, by Murat Nemet-Nejat, Sun & Moon Press, Los Angeles, 1997.

16 A selection of Lale Müldür’s poetry has been published in English translation by Tony Curtis et al. in Water Music, Poetry Ireland, Dublin, 1998.


18 e.g. An Anthology of Turkish Literature, ed. Kemal Silay, Bloomington, Indiana, 1996.
19 See Mustafa Ziyalan’s essay “Some Notes on Eda” in Eda… (pp. 346-348) on also the more conventional interpretation.


21 Translations (and retranslations) appearing in numerous periodicals, and special issues of journals, such as Mediterraneans (Vol. 10, Winter 1997-1998, Paris), Agenda (Vol. 38 Nos. 3-4, 2001-2002, London) and Descant (121, Vol. 34 No. 2, Summer 2003, Toronto) have contributed to this corpus, as have those in www.turkish-lit.boun.edu.tr


24 Selected Poems by Nazım Hikmet.


32 The first chapter of the book was translated under the title “The Clock-Setting Institute” by Walter Feldman in Silay’s An Anthology of Turkish Literature, 1996.


34 “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future: Ambivalence in A.H. Tanpinar’s Those Outside the Scene” in İrizk and Güzeldere (eds). Tanpinar is also discussed in two other articles in the same issue: by Sibel İrizk, as the author of The Time Regulation Institute (under the title The Clock-Setting Institute) in “Allegorical Lives: The Public and the Private in the Modern Turkish Novel” and by Nurdan Gürbilek as literary critic in “Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel.”

35 But sometimes this point is overlooked. For example, Jale Parla, in her essay “Car Narratives: A Subgenre in Turkish Novel Writing” (in İrizk and Güzeldere, eds), completely ignores Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar’s and Latife Tekin’s works in English translation, thereby depriving, no doubt unwittingly, the Anglophone reader who is unfamiliar with Tanpinar and Tekin, of references to three primary sources in English which would serve to set in context both the authors in question and the critic’s discussion.


37 The New Yorker, 3 September 2001.

38 In Updike’s review (The New Yorker, 30 August 2004) of Snow, Dostoevsky too appears on his list.


40 From the blurb on the inside cover of The New Life, 1998 paperback edition.


44 From a blurb on the back cover of Life is a Caravanserai…, 2000.


46 In Saliha Paker, Introduction to Dear Shameless Death, 2001:11.


51 Both quotations are from the cover blurb.


53 In many interviews on the Turkish television when his book (Kar) was first published in Turkey in January 2002.
A Chronological Bibliography of Turkish Literature in English Translation: 1949 – 2004

Saliha Paker and Melike Yılmaz


1951  Afternoon Sun, Reşat Nuri Güntekin; trans. Sir Wyndham Deedes; London: William Heinemann Ltd.

1952  Selected Poems by Nazım Hikmet; trans. Asoke Ghosh; Calcutta.


1955  Turkish Short Stories, ed. Halil Davashgil; Ankara.


1968  Anatolian Tales, Yaşar Kemal; trans. Thilda Kemal; New York: Dodd Mead.

1970  The Moscow Symphony and Other Poems, Nazım Hikmet; trans. Taner Baybars; Chicago: The Swallow Press.


1972  The Day Before Tomorrow, Nazım Hikmet; trans. Taner Baybars; South Hinksey: Carcanet Press.

1973  They Burn the Thistles, Yaşar Kemal; trans. Margaret E. Platon; London: Collins Harvill.


Modern Turkish Drama: An Anthology of Plays in Translation, ed. Talat Sait Halman; Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica.

Gemmo, Kemal Bilbasar; trans. Esin B. Rey and Marina Fitzpatrick; London: P. Owen.

The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin and Other Poems, Nazım Hikmet; trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk; New York: Persea Books.
Quatrains of Holland, Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca; trans. Talat Sait Halman; Istanbul: Cem Yayınınevi.

An Anthology of Modern Turkish Short Stories, ed. Fahir İz; Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica.


1980 Greek and Turkish Poets of Today, ed. Talat Sait Halman and Yannis Goumas; special issue of Pacific Quarterly Moana, Hamilton.
The Mikado Game, Melih Cevdet Anday; trans. Nermin Menemencioğlu; Ankara: The Turkish Centre of the International Theatre.

Yunus Emre and His Mystical Poetry; trans. Talat Sait Halman; Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies.

Human Landscapes, Nazım Hikmet; trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk; New York: Persea Books.

1983 A Dot on the Map: Selected Stories, Sait Faik; ed. Talat Sait Halman; Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies.

1985 Rubaiyat, Nazım Hikmet; trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk; Providence, RI.
The Sea-Crossed Fisherman, Yasfar Kemal; trans. Thilda Kemal; London: Collins Harvill.


1987 The Birds Have Also Gone, Yasfar Kemal; trans. Thilda Kemal; London: Collins Harvill.


1991 To Crush the Serpent, Yasfar Kemal; trans. Thilda Kemal; London: Collins Harvill.

Translation Review
**1992**

*Modern Turkish Poetry*, ed. Feyyaz Kayacan; Fergar; Ware, UK: The Rockingham Press.


**1993**


*Short Dramas from Contemporary Turkish Literature*, ed. Suat Karantay; Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Publications.


**1994**


*Night*, Bilge Karasu; trans. Güneli Gün, with the author; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

**1995**

*A Flower Much as Turkey*, Ergin Günce; trans. Gülçay Yurdal Michaels and Richard McKane; Istanbul: Broy Yayınları.

**1996**


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

*Poems by Karacaoğlan: A Turkish Bard*, trans. Seyfi Karabaş and Judith Yarnall; Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies and Ministry of Culture Joint Series XIV.


**1997**


*Salman the Solitary*, Yaşar Kemal; trans. Thilda Kemal; London: Collins Harvill.

*Curfew*, Adalet Ağaoğlu; trans. John Goulden; Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.


**1998**


**2000**


*The Other Side of the Mountain*, Erendiz Atasü; trans. Elizabeth Maslen, with the author; London: Milet Publishing Ltd.


2001  


*A Cup of Turkish Coffee*, Buket Uzuner; trans. Pelin Arıner; London: Milet Publishing Ltd.

*A Summer Full of Love*, Füruzan; trans. Damian Croft; London: Milet Publishing Ltd.


2002  
*Death in Troy*, Bilge Karasu; trans. Aron Aji; San Francisco: City Lights Books.


2003  


*Gemile*, Orhan Kemal; trans. Cengiz Lugal; Istanbul: Anatolia Publishing.


*The Idle Years (The Story of a Small Man-2)*, Orhan Kemal; trans. Cengiz Lugal; Istanbul: Anatolia Publishing.


2004
Staying Behind  (Kalan)

Enis Batur
translated by Clifford Endres and Selhan Saveçgil

Anise, fluoride, caffeine: the taste of poison on the tongue, the sly headache, the fog clawing at his vision they’d done a lot to fill the gap between night and morning. He’d stopped shaving every day, he picked up the paper slipped beneath his door each morning and tossed it on the pile without a glance, he was careless about washing the dishes, he never ironed the shirts he wore. For the boy waiting just beyond the door slightly ajar he composed a creaky sentence or two: he’d quickly dropped from daily use the verbs he was tired of, but he kept the adjectives: deaf and wary since being left on his own, the phone disconnected, he never opened the door however the bell implored, he never went out to sit on the back balcony: the question, were it asked, would be more than he could bear.

In the Desert  (Çölde)

Enis Batur
translated by Clifford Endres and Selhan Saveçgil

In Fact

“Before you, it seems, were two roads. On one of them you got scared, I see, and before long turned back. The other one — the familiar one you’d set foot on and forsaken several times — you believed would be safe. Now it’s petered out. You can’t keep going on this one, and you’ve lost your way to that one: here’s your endless narrow labyrinth; there’s the wall you’re up against. Oh, and that road you were so afraid of turns out in fact to be the horizon.”

As If

“I saw hands: playful, nervous, fiery writing passed through my hands — one piece I can’t forget belonged to you, another to the man with the scattered look I met when I was young: between you caravans come and go nonstop, somebody’s always packing big suitcases, migratory birds, flighty gazelle, tell me, have you been marked, a sacrifice, or have you, sad-eyed angel, been spared? it’s as if, like a dead weight before you both, stood time.”

If Only

“You’re shut up in the cup you turned over. In all my years as a witch, I’ve rarely seen a self-forged fate like this. If I told you, ‘Get up and come out,’ you couldn’t move. And if you stay there... . Nobody’s ever managed to live in the dark he’s cut out for himself. In the boundless space within me I see a room for you: you’ll pace it every night — if only there were an exit.”
Be silent, loneliness, your thunder rends my heart.

Evening has lifted dusk’s skirt and is taking a look.

This patter isn’t rain, it’s pine-needles pouring on the roof.

The sea’s belly swells and swells and subsides; Day is born.

The pomegranate I split, a thousand sunbeams open to September.

Your body like the taste of water on hot days.

She sits by the window and combs her hair; the ice is beginning to melt.

Now he can say with ease, “I’m alone”; he has a lover.

I wipe the bloom from a damson plum, a storm clears away.

A thousand and one dewdrops glitter on the grass: night has dropped her necklace of day.

From its own voice the poplar tree recognizes the coming of winter.

Like a fragment of cloud the seagull swoops, circling, to the sea.

The wind strokes the velvet pile of the sea back and forth.

Propped up on ivy the old wooden house tries to stay upright.

They put down their saws, the cicadas are rasping away at the noon.

Laurel, myrtle, fig: the brazier smokes incense over house and garden and sea.

Clinging to the tiller he thinks: to what do I owe my living? The wind, the boat, or the fish?

Apples cradled in her arms: her breasts cool, the apples warm.

No needles, no bark . . . The pine tree waits to be toppled; laden with cones.

“Stop there, don’t pass the limit,” says the lighthouse to the open sea.

South wind. South wind. South wind. And rain.

Whose face is this taking shape in the frame of nothingness? When I come closer the mirror grows misty.

Your nakedness – a bashful child’s first day at school.

Days open up my life like scissors sliding through silk . . .

Above the snow the poplars are stark black; pure white by night.

L’obscurité et la perce-neige à travers la neige.

Sadness descends and settles on the meadows . . . hoar frost.
46. Is it sky or lake I see, the moon or a water lily?
50. My love for you is like the four great storms of the seasons.
52. Rain of stars in the leaves, snail tracks in the moonlight.
53. The frost dispersed, the cicada is quiet as a mouse.
54. Autumn . . . the silence no one can fathom.
56. The fragrant grapes have turned to purple stains . . . Autumn comes in torrents.
57. Archipelagos, steppes, fjords . . . this endless world: your body.
59. Little by little winter adds its salt to our days; we shrink into ourselves.
60. This blue cold sweeps away mists and clouds . . . Snow is on the way.
61. The veined leaf fossil is nature’s letter.
62. October rummages through the clouds: your face mirrors mine.
64. Moonlight deceives all it alights on: like love.
66. “Here I am, right beside you,” says Death, just as I’m beginning a poem.
67. Every chest in my mother’s house opens up to my childhood.
72. Your hair falls over me: hot cascade, cool lava.
76. Ah this parting; a splinter under the nail . . .
77. Night raindrops on the fig tree’s gold-leaf: autumn again.
79. Were the pansy’s fragrance as strong as its color, even the mountains would be stoned.
83. In midwinter the bare tree suddenly yields fruit: the starlings.
86. I have closed the book; I shelter in the shadow of your body.
87. The stars are shy . . . they only show their faces in the dark.
88. The shore has vanished . . . the lighthouse illumines the children’s park.
92. The sun suddenly appeared; the full moon still pure white.
98. Is that tiny point of light on the skyline a shepherd’s fire or Aldebaran?
99. On the threshold of spring door by door the world is unlocked.
100. What a pity! You missed the storks migrating, you were away on your travels.
Minor Angels
BY ANTOINE VOLODINE
Translated and with a preface by Jordan Stump
A deeply disturbing and darkly hilarious novel whose full meaning, its author asserts, will be found not in the book’s pages but in the dreams people will have after reading it.

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BY MARIE NDJAYE
Translated by Tamsin Black
Amid the blurring boundaries and shifting values, the indistinct realities and confusing certainties of Rosie Carpe, a love story unfolds, and all that is ambiguous and tenuous—in short, all of Rosie’s world—is underpinned with a measure of tenderness.
EUROPEAN WOMEN WRITERS

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BY LYDIA CABRERA
Translated by Alberto Hernández-Chíroldes and Lauren Yoder
Introduction by Isabel Castellanos
Lydia Cabrera was captivated by a strange and magical new world revealed to her by her Afro-Cuban friends in early twentieth-century Havana. In Afro-Cuban tales this world comes to teeming life.

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BY ANA MARÍA MOIX
Translated by Sandra Klingery
Through the long hours of one sleepless night, twenty-year-old Julia sorts through the story of her life so far.
EUROPEAN WOMEN WRITERS

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BY MARGUERITE DURAS AND XAVIÈRE GAUTHIER
Translated and with an afterword by Katharine A. Jensen
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EUROPEAN WOMEN WRITERS

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Translation Review
That translation is a task replete with problems is no news to anyone. I suspect that, like me, many who translate bear the secret (and usually stringently repressed) fear that translation just might be an impossible task. The gaps between languages, between ages, peoples, cultures, societies, religions, tastes, and sensibilities sometimes seem too vast to be bridged in any meaningful way. I have occasionally spent 50 minutes clarifying one couplet of Ottoman poetry to a class. And when I presume to translate, what of all this information do I think I can convey in two lines? A few vaguely similar words? The ghost of a thought? Impossible … and yet like many impossible things, and Zeno notwithstanding, the arrow reaches its target, the hare passes the tortoise, Achilles catches Hector, and successful translation happens … all the time.

Before going on to show how translation from Ottoman poetry can happen, let us linger for a moment on the problems. But first a brief definition: for purposes of these remarks, we will understand Ottoman poetry to be the primary literary art of the elite culture of the last and perhaps greatest of the early modern empires, the Ottoman Empire, which at one time or another ruled much of the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe from the early 14th century to the early decades of the 20th. Many of the problem areas for translation from this literature are obvious. For example:

- The Ottomans were Muslims and saw themselves as heirs and continuators of a religious, cultural, and literary tradition that expressed itself in three languages: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, all of which Ottoman poets generally knew to some degree. Only an infinitesimal fragment of this long and voluminous tradition is known even to quite well-read English-speaking westerners. Thus, the very words of Ottoman Turkish are embedded in a matrix of religious ideas, social customs, and linguistic expectations that are entirely unfamiliar to English-speakers.

- The technical features of Ottoman poetry are vastly different from those of English poetry and modern poetry in general. The rhythms are different; the rhymes are different; the genres are different. The poetry is filled with clever and language-specific rhetorical tricks, puns, anagrams, and intentional ambiguities.

- The sensibility of Ottoman poetry is premodern (or early modern). That is, much of Ottoman literary culture is separated from us by large chunks of time and drastic changes in literary taste and general patterns of thought.

Other problems of translating Ottoman poetry are far less obvious, even to people with considerable expertise. Let me just mention two that seem especially pertinent to me.

- Very little attention has been paid to the contexts in which Ottoman poems lived. These poems are usually passed down in the form of “divans,” which are collections by single authors arranged according to genre and the alphabetical order of their rhymes. Except for some occasional poems, we seldom have any indication of the original context of any poem, and it is customary to treat them as if they were written solely as exercises in poetic composition and theosophical speculation. For example, much of Ottoman poetry is about love, yet there has been very little interest in understanding how the Ottoman elites actually loved, not to mention who, where, when, and why. In my opinion, the detachment and coolness of the scholarly gaze has attached itself to the poetry and made it seem far more inauthentic, far more detached, and far less playful than it really is.

- There is an argument in translation circles these days about whether and to what extent a translation should preserve the “differentness/otherness” of the original text. Should the translation attempt to preserve the familiarity experienced by the text’s primary audiences? Or should the text be allowed to retain its difference, the fundamental aspects of its character that make it foreign to the audiences of the translation?

For many reasons, some political and some related to the above-mentioned problems, English translation from Ottoman Turkish poetry has been meager relative to other significant poetic traditions. The orientalist E. J. W. Gibb’s six-volume History of Ottoman Poetry has been the sole major monument of English translation for a century — minimally an indication of a general lack of interest in updating our translation styles. The first volume of Gibb’s work appeared in 1900, and just a year later, in 1901, the year of his death, there appeared a collection of translations by Gibb in an anthology entitled Ottoman Literature, published by M. Walter Dunne as part of the
Universal Classics Library and edited by the Library of Congress with a stunningly ignorant title page announcing that these works were “translated from the Arabic.” An equally ignorant introduction by Theodore P. Ion, J.D., of the National University was followed by several illustrative examples of European orientalist erotic art. In the same year, the Cooperative Publication Society published a volume titled Turkish Literature containing some of the same translations by Gibb as part of its Masterpieces of Oriental Literature series. As a result of the widespread publication of Gibb’s translations and literary history, the period from 1900 to 1905 was the high point of interest in Ottoman poetry in the English-speaking world. There has been nothing like it since.

Gibb’s translations themselves stand as extreme examples of a preserve-the-difference notion of translation — a difference that looms even larger now, in an age unfamiliar with late-Victorian poetic tastes. Gibb tried to preserve everything. The vocabulary available to the Ottoman poet has copious possibilities for single rhymes, and many Ottoman poems, even quite long ones, are monorhyming, which means they use the same rhyme in couplet after couplet. Gibb translated in monorhymes — in English, which has only a tiny fraction of the rhyming possibilities of Ottoman Turkish. Moreover, Ottoman poetry uses rhythms based on a traditional Arabo-Persian system of metrical feet consisting of combinations of “long” [closed (CvC) or consonant + long vowel] and “short” [consonant + short vowel] syllables. Gibb attempted to reproduce, as much as possible, the effect of this kind of rhythm in English. On the whole, it was an amazing demonstration of technical virtuosity, more notable as a tour de force than for its aesthetic qualities as translation.

An example of Gibb’s translations will be instructive for those who do not know Ottoman Turkish. In his history and the two above-mentioned collections, he translates a famous poem by the 16th-century master poet Bākī, a meditation on autumn and old age that, transcribed from the Ottoman, begins like this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nām u nişāne kalmadı fasl-ı bahārdan} \\
\text{Düşdi çemende berg-i diraht i'tibārdan} \\
\text{Eşcār-ı bāğ hırka-i tecrīde girdiler} \\
\text{Bād-ı hazān çemende el aldı çenārdan}^{3}
\end{align*}
\]

Gibb’s translation is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ah! ne’er a trace of springtide’s olden splendour doth remain;} \\
\text{Fall’n from the treen, the leaves bestrew the mead, their glory vain}
\end{align*}
\]

The rhythm of the original goes like this (where [u] represents a short syllable, [-] represents a long, the metrical feet are set off by ‘//’, and a closed syllable with a long vowel is read as “long + short” as in “hārdan,” read [- u -]):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{-} & \text{- u // u - u // u - u // u - u - u // u -} \\
\text{Nām u ni //} & \text{şā ne kal ma // di fas l-ı ba/hār dan}
\end{align*}
\]

Compare this to Gibb’s translation, taking into account that English (like ordinary Turkish) does not really have long and short syllables:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{-} & \text{- u// - u - u // u - - u // u - u -} \\
\text{Ah! ne’er a //trace of springtide’s// ol den splendour// doth re main;}
\end{align*}
\]

The rhyme in the Ottoman is complex. The rhyme itself is in “ār” with an exactly repeated grammatical ending (-dan) in every case. Gibb matches this with his “remain, vain, plane” monorhyme.

It is interesting to note that Gibb himself rewrote his translation. The 1901 publications contain a different, simpler, less archaic, and to my taste more pleasing version.\(^5\) It begins:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lo, ne’er a trace or sign of springtide’s beauty doth remain;} \\
\text{Fall’n’ midst the garden lie the leaves, now all their glory vain}
\end{align*}
\]
Bleak stand the orchard trees, all clad in tattered dervish rags;  
Dark Autumn’s blast hath torn away the hands from off the plane.6

Where Ottoman poetry has been translated since Gibb, the tendency has been to preserve as much as possible the “look and feel” of the original in a faintly Gibbean manner. For example, in the 1978 Penguin Book of Turkish Verse, the famed Edinburgh Ottomanist John Walsh began a translation of a poem by the 17th-century Ottoman Indian-Style poet Nā’īlī like this:

My tears were as the streams which make the garden places sweet;  
Forth flowed my heart like water to a roguish sapling’s feet.

A strange Mejnun am I! The spectres of my Sweetheart’s eyes  
Surround me like distraught gazelles in never-ending suite7

Walsh has dropped Gibb’s attempt at Ottoman rhythms and with them the archaic language, all to better effect.

In his translations from the poetry of Sultan Süleyman, the Turkish translator Talat Halman alternates between a retention of rhyme and dropping that too. For example, a translation with rhyme:

There you stand, slender, a cypress: for me, that spells doom and distress:  
I can’t divine how love has hurled me into this plight, this duress.

Ah, my moonface, your eyes and eyebrows take turns to work their torment —  
And because it’s you who inflicts it, its dread is my happiness.8

When he rhymes, Halman’s verses are often like this, choppy and awkward, but when he drops the rhymes and even the appearance of the couplets, the result is often quite lovely:

I am the Sultan of Love:  
a glass of wine will do  
for a crown on my head,  
and the brigade of my sighs  
might well serve as the dragon’s fire-breathing troops.

The bedroom that’s best for you, my love  
is a bed of roses,  
for me, a bed and a pillow  
carved out of rock  
will do.9

Even more lovely are some translations in eloquent English by the dean of Ottoman historians, Bernard Lewis, who also lets go of the rhymes, as in this bit from a poem by Fuzuli (16th century):

Heedless friend, ruthless fate, restless time,  
Endless pain with none to share, mighty foe and feeble star

The shade of hope fades, the sun of desire burns  
The rank of adversity is lofty, the grade of precaution lowly,

Wisdom falls short, censure resounds ever higher,  
Destiny has little compassion, love’s misfortune grows day by day.10

*******

My own search for a way to translate Ottoman poetry began with gestures of abject surrender. In my first book, An Introduction to Ottoman Poetry (1976), I was quite careful to point out that I was not translating, but rather offering a “prose paraphrase.”11 I continued to shy away from rendering Ottoman poetry in English verse by using the term “literal paraphrase” in Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Song (1985).12 This avoidance was not entirely because of cowardice or lack of confidence, however. In both books, I was at pains to show the complexity, multivalence, and meaning-laden ambiguities of Ottoman poetry, and I felt that there was no way to do this in verse translations with any hope of achieving both clarity and aesthetic merit. It was only after these two critical and analytical works that I felt the need (or confidence) to begin to think about the daunting task of rendering Ottoman poetry in English verse.

My first major step in this direction occurred as a result of a class on Ottoman poetry I taught at the University of Washington with my then-assistant and now precious colleague and collaborator, Mehmet Kalpaklı. One of the assignments in the class was for the students to prepare translations of Ottoman poems by first going carefully over the poems with Mehmet and me and then coming up with English versions of their own. One student, who was an active poet in English, produced a translation of a poem by the famed 18th-century poet Nedim that still stands as a
favorite of mine. Her version was as follows:

At the gathering of desire you made me a wine-cup
with your sugar smile
Oh saki, give me only half a cup of wine,
you’ve made me drunk enough

You crushed me under the hoof of a wild horse
that runs like fire
In those places flames rise up from my ashes
like cypress trees

Ah, east wind, you came to me with the scent
of my lover’s hair
You made me love-bewildered like the hyacinth’s
curl

With your beauteous grace my hair has been standing
like a jinn
With love you’ve made me mirror-colored from head
to foot

Don’t make your crying Nedîm drunk and devastated
like that
Saki, give me only half a cup of wine, you’ve made
me drunk enough

As a result of this class, the poet, writing under the
pen name Najaat Black, Dr. Kalpakli, and I collaborated
to produce an anthology of Ottoman poems rendered in
English verse by Ms. Black. The result was successful, but
the process was difficult and less than satisfactory to all of
us. Too many times, Dr. Kalpakli and I rejected beautiful
lines by the poet simply because we felt that they did
not reflect the Turkish accurately enough. On too many
occasions, we kept lines that we felt less than happy with
for fear of breaking the poor poet’s heart once again. In the
course of the several years it took to bring the anthology
to completion, I became convinced that I needed to have
the courage to translate myself, to test how well I could
transmit my scholarly vision of Ottoman poetry in some
form of appropriate English verse.

The result has been what I see as a series of
experiments, attempts to get at the something in Ottoman
poetry that made it immensely popular over the long (600-
year) life of the Empire. I began from two premises: first,
that all the formal features of the poetry — rhyme, rhythm,
the shape and length of lines, etc. — were expendable, that
they could be radically altered in order to preserve some
of the sense, the rhetorical brilliance, and emotional depth
of the originals, and second, that footnotes or extraneous
explanations should be avoided at all costs. A good
example of how this works in practical application is in an
early attempt, in which I translate the same Nām u nişāne
calma di poem by Bākī that I cited above as an example of
Gibb’s translations (Ah! ne’er a trace of springtide’s olden
splendour doth remain). My version goes like this:

The time of spring has suffered
Loss of fame and loss of face
The leaves of trees have fallen
In the meadow far from grace

The garden shrubbery now wears
Renunciation’s tattered cloak
The autumn wind has taken up
The plane-tree leaf as master’s hand

Everywhere a treasure flows
All golden to its feet
Expectantly the orchard tree
Awaits the bounty of the stream

In the meadow let the breeze
Stir it to swaying ceaselessly
Today the sapling stands
Unburdened, free of fruit and leaf

On this meadow-earth, the leaves
Of books and trees are torn, Bākī
It seems they have a true complaint
Against the winds of time and fate

Here, the single-line hemistichs are broken in two,
giving the appearance of quatrains. The first couplet
rhymes, as does the first couplet (matla’) of an Ottoman
gazel. Thereafter, the end-rhymes disappear and are
replaced by internal rhymes, chimes, or assonances (e.g.,
tree-stream, expectantly-orchard tree, ceaselessly-free,
complaint-fate). The sense of the translation is also more
obviously explanatory than Gibb’s version. For example,
the first couplet more strongly links the garden in autumn
to a courtier fallen from favor. In the second, the relation
of the garden to a ragged dervish is made clearer and the
multiple meaning of the second hemistich is unpacked.
Gibb has a footnote to this hemistich explaining that the
plane-tree has a five-lobed leaf that looks like a hand, but
he fails to point out that the Turkish verb Bākī uses, el
almak (to take the hand), in a dervish/mystical context also
means the act of a disciple taking an adept as master. The
same sort of unpacking, or footnote avoidance, occurs in
the final couplet, in which the two ruling equivoques are the
words varak, which means both leaves (of trees) and pages (leaves) of books, and rüzgâr, which means both “wind” and “fate.” Whether or not this works to convey sufficiently the tenor of Bâktî’s poem to readers who might have needed Gibb’s footnotes is impossible for me to tell.

Bâktî’s poem makes a good text for commenting on one of the problems I mentioned above: that we (sadly) lack information about the contexts of most poems in the Ottoman tradition. There are things we know about Bâktî that fit this poem. He came from a humble background and rose to prominence by virtue of a brilliant mind and formidable poetic talent. As a young man, during the glory years of the reign of Sultan Süleyman (the Magnificent), he rose to the pinnacle of success: professor of canon law, Chief Magistrate of the European provinces, companion of the Sultan, and critic of the royal verses, recognized as the Sultan of Poets. But in later years, under three more sultans, his hopes were often dashed, and his place at court was diminished and finally lost. This poem is the kind of poem in which an Ottoman poet might well have recounted, in metaphors of the garden, the miseries and disappointments of his later years to a gathering of friends and admiring young would-be poets. The poem fits his life so comfortably, but it still comes to us abstracted from its context, in a collection of poems (what the Ottomans called a divan). For all we really know and probably will ever know for sure, he could have written it when he was eighteen. But sure or not, it is instructive to speculate, especially where we can feel a connection.

Having once abandoned the “two-hemistich” look of the original poems, it became possible for me to think about creative ways to give a sense of the original rhythm. Of course we have no certain knowledge of how a 16th-century Ottoman poem might have been recited. Nonetheless, one of the rhythmical features of this poetry that always struck me was the way that the steady alternations of long- and short-syllable patterns were overlaid by patterns of “mini-caesurae,” or tiny pauses caused by phrasing or syntactical inversions in the Turkish. We can see how this works by looking at the first couplet of Bâktî’s autumn poem. As transcribed from the Arabic script, it looks like this:

Nâm u nişâne kalmadı // fasl-i bahârdan
Düşdi çemende berg-i diraht // i’ribûrûn

The inversions of this syntax cause the reading to imply the following tiny breaks:

Nâm u nişâne kalmadı // fasl-i bahârdan
Düşdi çemende // berg-i diraht // i’ribûrûn

In the second couplet, the first hemistich is in canonical Turkish order, and the syntactic breaks seem to fall on the boundaries between subject, objects, and verb, whereas in the second hemistich, the inversions return. We might distribute the breaks as follows:

Eşcâr-i bâg // hûrka-i tecrûde //? girdiler
Bâd-i hazân // çemende el aldı // çenârûn

Even though popular (non-elite), “syllable-counting” Turkish verse depends on similar patterns of phrases but with groups of syllables regularly separated by caesurae (e.g., a 4 + 4 + 3–syllable line), this sense of a supraformal rhythm in Ottoman elite poetry had always seemed that it might be no more than my own idiosyncratic impression. Yet as I grew older and less concerned about potential criticism, I began to take some tentative steps toward controlling the rhythm of my translations while, at the same time, freeing the English poem from the regularity of the standard couplet. The following translation is of a gazel (a short, more or less sonnet-length love lyric) by Sultan Cem (pronounced “Djem”), the brother of Sultan Bayezid II (reigned 1481–1512). Cem escaped certain death at his brother’s accession. He fled to Rhodes, was held hostage in Europe by the Templars and the Pope, and, according to popular tales, had a torrid love affair with a French chatelaine during his captivity. These connections to European Christian allies and lovers seem to be intimated by the striking examples of Christian imagery in Cem’s poem. The translation itself exhibits a transition between the quatraine-like rendition of the Bâktî gazel and something even freer:

The rose-stem arouses no passion
Like your body’s slender grace

Blooms no rose in bower’s paradise
Like the rose of your face

The ring of your curl
Took your lip’s tiny mole
Into its embrace
As though an infant Jesus
Lay in Mary’s arms

The image of your lip, your eyes
Have ruined my eye
That drunk and senseless lies
Wine in its goblet dancing
If I watch your beauty
   May your eye not rage
Even a king’s decree
   Cannot forbid this to eyes

Any wonder the world is filled
   With scents of roasting meats
Today my heart is grilled
   On the hearth of torment

Your glance strung
   The bow of your brow,
Concealed its arrow and lies in wait,
Nearby another,
   Like a gazelle,
Nestles heedless in its bed

A rim of tiny hairs
   Rings your lip,
What heavenly stream is this
   Whose banks are ever grown
   With hyacinth

Though they had dug my grave
   The fountain of life
   Would yet flow for me, oh Cem,
Were I to kiss those lips,
   That Jesus-breath
   Stealer-of-hearts15

At the time I did this translation, I was also beginning to translate some modern Turkish poetry for other projects. My interest most often turned toward present-day poets who were trying to revive or reflect an Ottoman poetic sensibility in their poems. I was struck by the number of times that the arrangement of lines in an “Ottomanesque” modern poem reflected my own feeling about the rhythmical character of Ottoman poetry. A good example is the following translation of a short poem by Attilâ İlhan done in the Ottoman manner — he calls it a gazel. The arrangement of lines in my translation is exactly as in İlhan’s original poem:

suddenly you’d doze off
   waken to stupefying weariness
the sun had withdrawn from the gardens
   the lamps were lit quite early
   the fear of being deceived
   oaths so often broken
   suspected heart attacks
   an insidious grief they were always

things you thought about from time to time
you laughed when they came to mind
   glory and honors and fame
   vain useless things they were always16

The late nights of music in the Ottoman modes and the memories of past parties and loves attest to the long life of the Ottoman gathering of poets and lovers that persists beyond the abrupt ending of the Empire and the fading of its culture. This modern Turkish gazel has both a monorhyme (in both hemistiches of the first couplet and the second hemistich of subsequent couplets as in the traditional Ottoman gazel) and what the Ottomans called redif, or a word or phrase that repeats itself exactly after every rhyme. My translation has dropped the rhyme and kept the sense of the rhyme + redif in the “they were always” phrase. After gaining a more intimate acquaintance with the poetry of Attilâ İlhan and Hilmi Yavuz, I found myself increasingly able to cut loose from my attachment to formal restrictions and search more deeply for the elusive center of Ottoman poems, as in the following by the 16th-century Azeri master Fuzûlî.

   my heart blossoms
      joyous
   when it sees your tousled locks
   i lose the power to speak
      when i see your rosebud
      laughing
   i look at you
   blood spatters from my eyes
when our glances meet
   eyelash arrows
   pierce my belly
they think the box-tree
   twice lovely —
   long of branch, tall of body
but are shamed
   when they see your singular beauty
   oh cypress swaying
many i’ve seen
  who aspire to love
and abandon it
  when they see your lover
wailing

the infidel
  who denies the fires of hell
when he burns for you
  in flames of separation
becomes a true believer

who ever so delicately describes
  the laughing rosebud
is he not abashed
  when he sees your pearl-strewing ruby

go ahead don’t speak
  what is in your heart, fuzülī
every passer-by will know it
  when they see your collar
torn in grief17

This too is a gazel — a love-song — but a song that
sings of an other-worldly love. Most likely written for
a gathering of those for whom the metaphors of love
focus not on myriad beauties of this world’s beloveds
(represented by the multiple charms of the box-tree) but of
the more “real” or less illusory attractions of a mystical,
divine unity (represented by the “single” cypress shaped
like the Arabic script letter elf, the first letter in the name
of God, and symbol of the number one). By discarding
the capital letters and most punctuation, I intended to
hold out a reminder that Ottoman poems really exist only
in the Arabic script, which uses no capitals and does not
punctuate for syntax within a poem. Translation, for me,
is always a matter of leaving out some of what is there
and adding some of what is not. And sometimes one must
leave out so much and add so little that the reader cannot be
expected to get more than a tiny taste. It always seems that
way with the poets of the “Indian Style,” a fashionable style
— especially in the 17th century — of strange, complex,
and convoluted metaphors inherited at a distance from the
Persian poets who went to the Indian subcontinent to try
their luck in the courts of the Mughals during the 15th and
16th centuries. The following in a mystical vein by the
17th-century poet Neşātī is a good example:

When the stream of desire flows
dark with the dust
  of a thousand woes
Would it mirror the moon
  of darling desire’s face?

The heart’s foot
  would never blister so
Were the quarter of desire
  not paved
with tiny pebbles of despair

I’ve had enough, oh woe,
  enough of rage
  and a forehead furrowed
The angry angle
  of desire’s brows
leaves little room for patience

Let love
  only bring its spotless
  patronage to bear
And all the aimless rush
  of desire
will surely lead somewhere

How should the bough
  of Neşātī’s hope be lush
When the stream of desire flows
  so very slowly
in gardens of the heart18

It may look simple, but this poem was one of three that
a select group of U.S. Ottomanists spent two and a half
whole days analyzing. Just the merest hint of what is going
on can be gleaned from a glance at the second couplet. In
the traditional imagery of Ottoman poetry, the heart and
liver (the two are interchangeable) commonly burn with
passion, causing the black smoke of a sigh, flecked with
sparks, to rise through the chimney of the throat, often
to form a black rain-cloud from which a torrent of tears
pours. This conflagration leaves the body and the heart
itself scarred with burns of love like the self-inflicted burns
that Ottoman lovers would display to prove their devotion.
The Indian-Style poet, however, inhabits a new metaphoric
universe in which the heart is seen as a tiny person walking
an abstraction of the traditional “beloved’s neighborhood,”
here a different, inner neighborhood, the roads of which are
paved with tiny “pebbles of despair.” The “scarred heart”
becomes a blistered heart-foot, resembling, perhaps, a
mini-dervish wandering barefoot in search of the ultimate beloved. The metaphorical logic of the traditional poetics — if the heart burns then the smoke and sparks and scars follow — gives way to metaphors that confound logic: how is the heart like a person, what is the neighborhood of abstract desire (in contrast to the neighborhood of the beloved), how can we see the heart as having a foot? A mysterious interior world has replaced the familiar, outer, actual world from which the metaphors of the previous poetic fashion were drawn.

As precious as some of Ottoman poetry clearly is, I am also quite convinced that it was not all like this. Poetry — recited and sung — was an indispensable element of Ottoman parties, feasts, and salons. Although melancholy was seen as fashionable and stimulating, a merry disposition was valued, and it is difficult to imagine that happy Ottoman party-goers, aroused by attractive serving persons, their faces flushed with music, wine, and delicious food, always (or often) experienced their poems as somber and weighty. Might it not have been that some of the rhetorical playfulness we see in the poetry had less than serious intent and that some of the poems were meant to be taken lightly, even as humorous, ironic comments on traditional verse? With this in mind, I have been experimenting also with a “lightening up” of some Ottoman verses, such as this by Bākī:

so drunk and wasted
from having tasted
a cup of this darling’s love
bouncing itself from wall to wall
passes the sun above

when it saw your musky locks
the musk-sac dropped to the ground
and there in the dust
at your feet the pure musk
humbly threw itself down

afloat on the rosy wine you see
the many eyes of destiny
don’t suppose that bubbles appear
in the goblet there
and here

what matter if the police of fate
now and again
these two berate

both kebab and wine unblended
were caught as they say
bloody handed

in the end by loving’s pain
wretched lovers all are slain
and drunkenness
we know will keep
to its conclusion in a sleep

oh vile wheel of destiny
of you bākī
is finally free
thanks to the sultan
blessed by fate
who shelters fortune
at his gate

As I mentioned above, Bākī was a serious man, a professor of canon law who rose to one of the highest judicial positions in the Empire during the latter half of the 16th century. But he was also a conversational companion of Sultan Süleyman, which means that he was the kind of person with whom the most powerful of men could relax and enjoy brief respite from the cares of ruling an empire. That some drinking and carousing were part of this relaxation seems obvious from many sources, and if there were verses by great poets that sang simply of its pleasures, it would certainly be no wonder.

For all of this, one should not imagine that I have entirely given up couplets and rhymes and even footnotes when I translate. For some audiences, each and all of these things are appropriate. Victoria Holbrook has an English rendition of Şeyh Gâlî’s 18th-century mystical allegory in rhyming couplets, Beauty and Love (Hüsn u ‘Aşk), which she translates beautifully in an Ottoman-like rhythm with all manner of rhymes, from the most simple to complex chimes and assonances. For example, in the following passage, Rivalry and Love are traveling through the Land of the Heart when they are captured by a demon:

That ill-fated demon, cursed and damned
Had them thrown in prison by his command

So that their fat and their flesh might increase
To later be victual for that fiend’s feast

And there Rivalry and Love did both stay
As prisoners of pain for many a day
They gave one another solace and faith
And lent to each other’s fortitude strength

In our most recent book, Mehmet Kalpaklı and I translate a number of passages from Ottoman narrative poems in rhyming couplets (mesnevî). Because the book is a scholarly effort, intended in part for audiences who know little or nothing about Ottoman poetry, we decided to stick as close as we could to the “look and feel” of Ottoman poems. We kept the rhymes and the couplets and the shorter, fast-paced rhythms of the originals. The following is an example translated from the Book of Desire, by the 15th-century courtier and poet, Ca’fer Çelebi. It describes a fictional affair between the poet and a high-born woman, whom we see in this passage arriving by boat with some friends for a spring-time camping excursion in the parklands of Kağthane, near Istanbul:

As I watched the vessel, it came to the verge
Fragments of moon I saw emerge
Each so alluring, in beauty arrayed
Every one’s robe of gold-thread brocade
Each a princess in domains of beauty
Attending to each watchful servants on duty
Though each one was lovely and captured the heart
One there was matchless and clear set apart
Arrow-lash* icon, brows Bow-like fair
Scorpio Moon and Hyacinth hair
Gemini-idol, though sun of clear weather
Leo-eyes, Lamb-breath, Fish-body together
Though weighty truly seems her head†
For a waist she has a hair instead
A houri she is, fairies the rest
This one a parrot, those pigeon-breast
So wore that moon of auspicious mien
The sky of a gold-worked robe of green

This is where I find myself now ... throw out the rhymes here and bring them back there; serious here and playful there; try this and that and the other thing. Try to guess at contexts and reflect them in style and tone. There are hundreds of years of Ottoman poems that the world knows next to nothing about — which means that there is a lot of translating yet to be tried. And I look forward to it.

Notes

4 Gibb, HOP III, 158–159.
5 I cannot say which version was the earlier. The volume of the history in which this poem appears was still in manuscript at the time of Gibb’s death in 1901, at which time the other version was finished and in press. There is no way to tell whether Gibb intended to rework the poem to conform to the previously published version in the final revision of his history. It is likely, however, that the more “faithful” version was intended for the more scholarly audiences of the history.
8 Talat S. Halman, Süleyman the Magnificent Poet (Istanbul: Dost Yayınları, 1987) 43.
9 Ibid., 32.
10 Kemal Silay, An Anthology of Turkish Literature (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1996) 150.
11 See, for example, Walter G. Andrews, Jr., An Introduction to Ottoman Poetry (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976) 33.

* This and the following are all astrological references.
† A weighty head indicates an intelligent and serious person.

14 A version of this translation is found, differently formatted, in Silay, *Anthology*, 135.


17 The original of this poem is found in Ali Nihat Tarlan, ed., *Fuzulî Divanı C-1* (Istanbul: Üçler Basmevi, 1951) L:32.

18 A version of this translation was published in the *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Fall 1997) 9.


20 Reproduced with the permission of Prof. Holbrook, whose complete translation will be published by the Modern Language Association at a date as yet to be announced.
Murmurings in the Ter Brugge  (Ter Brugge Mırdanmaları)

Mehmet Çetin
translated by Suat Karantay

each night in tongues unknown to me my heart
says to the numbered summer days that autumn’s come
and dodging into the ter brugge I gnaw at my fingernails

there is nothing that I miss and no one whom I long to kiss
the home that I abandoned was never mine by any means
somehow homelessness has slowly scorched my soul

neither a nationality do I crave nor yet a flag
nor do I crave a sweetheart since women always misbehave
they deceive my heart with flagrant lies they lead me to believe
why I’m hopeless in handling affairs of the heart I’ll never know

what I wish to be is the cloud of a completely different sky
without becoming an Alaskan seal crowned over the head with a club
to have nothing more to pine for is yet another of my wishes
I’m resentful of the birds as I am of rainfall and rivers
for static as a stone I can neither flow away nor flee nor fly

though my wearied body shows warning signs of cancer I’m not dying
more like my dad with each passing day I’m stubbornly more set on living
real fatherhood I do not see despite children born to me unwillingly
each and every fragment of the broken mirror I have within me’s crying
but I go on living even though the mirrors inside are shattering
going on forty can I stop the whole world from disintegrating

yes, I’m every bit as tense as a bird who’s lost its perch
whatever I said ten years ago, one question still remains:
even if to be forgotten, had I ever such a place

though I’d never bite my left-hand nails now I’m gnawing at them
jazz I say to friends of mine who find dreams torn asunder
as for this shrinking frame of mine that I’ve let my lovers plunder
so much for that is what I say, at least I’ve managed this much
I’ll hide out here in the ter brugge and gnaw my fingernails

A Kite Severed from Its String  (İpi Kopmuş Uçurtma)

Mehmet Çetin
translated by Suat Karantay

I represent a widely traveled folk, you see:
tethered to the wild winds however they may blow and thus
thus it is that each infatuation consumes me devastatingly
and I revel in each Kurdish melody that echoes in the mountains

once upon a time I knew no love, I’ve learned, you see:
welcoming each flock of birds that’s landed in my path and thus
thus it is that my life’s erupted in this chaos of love’s ecstasy
a penetrating outcry responding to every man’s exigency

long ago I buried death deep within my heart, you see:
as fright descends ascends a moon to soothe my waters and thus
thus it is that the moonlight will kiss the wounds of the mountain-star
and the melodic refrains of a folk tainted by the venomous aloe

fire burns they say if so let it scorch me, you see:
even at the young age of seventeen I stepped onto the gallows, and thus
thus it is that on the mountaintops though blood may stain my dreams
fires shall be lit and the snow shall melt and snowdrops greet the sunbeams

my life is a dagger protecting the long-distance traveler, you see:
the cyanide clenched lovingly between my teeth serves but the same purpose
proceeding toward death I then hang a “laughing flower” about my neck
thus it is that my life is now a kite severed from its string

thus it is that my life is a kite now severed from its string

The Bed (Yatak)

*Mehmet Çetin*
translated by *Suat Karantay*

escaping to the far corner room of the night
my face appears like death in other faces

flowers on the branch do not define the tree
resemblance is but a strange game of grief
while I cannot yet picture separation
here comes love sneaking into my heart

as the secretive and bitter night approaches
I curl up into this fetal position of mine

I haven’t got a single thing to tell my djinns
with the night so dark there and the moon casting
shadows of death onto the skirts of my mountain
those old memories keep surging in

when the shadowy tunnels of Friday night leading
on to sat’day come I assume a fetal silence

and just as I know the earth begets its blossoms
and I know what fire is although I am no dervish
if I’d been a Corsican I’d have turned to poetry
but the water flows and my tale passes
while even the oleaster takes heart

in the night shining so bright on each link in the chain
I curl into my very own fetal position in vain

and falling flat on my face on the heels of the night
I keep tossing my body to the other side
soon this bed will burst into flame
and whatever of me that remains

the night is still young so I wish it would stretch out
beyond the light and deep into the well of love
I dare say to the scariest of winds and
even the bed takes on a new hope

thus to myself I say
reaching out into the realms of poetry
why not, I’ll just stretch out here diagonally

 Loneliness Between the Legs
(Apişarasi Yalnızlığı)

*Mehmet Çetin*
translated by *Suat Karantay*

shatter-buddha of the green glance shimmering with silk
a riddle that fills itself with poison
keep silent don’t speak to anyone
shred that possibility just drink your genever and think
they make loneliness begin between the legs
shred it shred the person and the khaki belly-ache
shred the night shred the sheets and follow your fate

do it just like that: just like the string from the guitar
sever yourself from yourself like the severed earthworm
swallow yourself in one gulp give your heart a reprieve
swallow your voice shred the silence and spit out your
  lungs

with a cough spit out the world: just like that
get out and let the duisberg planet fuck off
don’t put up with yourself you’re no great prize
don’t use the telephone don’t trust in love or beget children
stretch out on the railway tracks and if you feel like singing
go out in the rain wet your head and fly as high as the moon
don’t give flowers to any sweetheart forget you’re in love
and don’t tell a soul but hold onto your prick

sever once and sever again and let the guitar string sever
shred love and shred that final penchant of your body
it’s nothing but an old tale belonging to those who told it
don’t work in the economic sections of newspapers
go out in the wind and on the most fragile of the branches
build your dream and fall like raindrops into your own
  heart
search for your fate on mountaintops stand closer to the
  moon
exist like the frail primrose in this isolation of yours
blow bubbles and sing songs without meddling with anyone

if mankind makes loneliness begin between the legs
cough it up and spit out the whole world: just like that

**A Review of Bilge Karasu’s *Death in Troy* and *The Garden of Departed Cats***

**Vincent Czyz**

**Editor’s note:** The *Garden of Departed Cats*, translated by Aron Aji, received the ALTA National Translation Award in 2004. Aji was also the translator for *Death in Troy*.

While a few American readers may be familiar with the work of Turkish novelists Yashar Kemal or Orhan Pamuk, both of whom have earned international reputations, considerably fewer are likely to have heard of Bilge Karasu. While fairly well-known in his native Turkey, Karasu, who died in 1995, is only now reaching English audiences with a substantial body of translated work.

*Death in Troy*, released by City Lights Books in 2002, presents readers with a bit of a puzzle: the book’s structure is so fragmentary it is often difficult to know who the narrator is, how the action pertains to what’s already happened and even where exactly things are taking place. When you add to this the flat-footed prose of some of the early chapters, it might make you consider putting the book down.

But that would be a mistake.

The pedestrian prose is used only for the scenes which flashback to characters’ childhoods; they’re gone soon enough. The confusion that may persist for a few chapters is a technique reminiscent of the movie *Memento*: you find yourself following the narration of a character without understanding why you are looking over his shoulder or what exactly you are looking at. A chapter or two later, with a little context, recognition comes like birds in a flock suddenly veering off in perfect simultaneity.

The central character, Mushfik, comes of age in Sarikum, a village on the coast of Turkey where his childhood friendship with a boy named Suat matures into passion. As an excuse to be together, the two contrive fishing trips. In what is probably the most beautifully written of all the sections, one of these trysts keeps Mushfik out too late to return home (he does not have a key and he knows that at this hour his father has locked the door). Forced to take a room in a local hotel, carrying no luggage, and dressed somewhat inappropriately, Mushfik faces a suspicious clerk:

“He stares at my hands on the counter. [...] My hands bear the dampness of salty water, the roughness of the boat’s dusty surface, their callused skin inflamed by the oars. But he cannot know that. He continues to stare, trying to know me by my hands. Silly. He fixes his gaze on my belt. My shirt collar is open too far.

Besides, I’m sweaty. Someone with a sweaty chest, where does he come from at this hour? He checks his watch. Almost one-thirty. He stares at my face, my eyes. As green as his. A moist green, as if he has cried or stared at the burning sand, at the boiling sea. What do you want, ask the eyes. What would I? Annoyed, I look at the green. *I want a room.***

Part of the beauty of this passage is that at this point, we do not know that Mushfik has been with Suat or even that it is Mushfik. And yet the tryst is implied by the late hour, the open shirt, the sweaty chest, by sand and sea that are neither burning nor boiling except in the wake of what has transpired between the two men.

Gossip eventually drives Mushfik’s family to the anonymity readily available in Istanbul. It comes at a price, however; dispossessed and alienated, Mushfik is ever casting wistful glances over his shoulder at Sarikum.

While Karasu explores homosexuality in a repressive society with exquisite subtlety, of equal concern is love in its other manifestations—the smothering affection of Mushfik’s mother for her son, the strained love between Mushfik and his stepfather, the love between husband and wife deformed by jealousy, and even the love of Judas for Christ.

“Judas kissed Jesus when betraying him. Not out of malice but because he loved him, because he was jealous and couldn’t bring himself to share him with eleven others, because he couldn’t bear the thought of letting him dissolve into a dream bigger than Judas, bigger than the other eleven and even Jesus, he kissed him when betraying him because he knew it meant letting him die.”

In *Death in Troy*, as in the tale of Judas, love, as well as passion, often bears frightening consequences. If love is terrifying, loneliness is more so. Ironically, the former is the remedy for the latter, but only, Mushfik comes to realize, when that love is complete, when everything is perceived “from within one’s heart.”

This is very much the view we get. Many of the book’s sections are interior monologues, which often read more like poems (at times, verse is even interspersed among the prose) or short stories. To capture the rhythm of the mind speaking to itself, Karasu often makes do with minimal punctuation, sentences that run on for a page or more, and
sentence fragments. Not surprisingly, there is little sense of place in Death in Troy. Nor, in general, do the characters have lives much beyond their relationships with each other. How Mushfik earns money, for example, isn’t mentioned. But Karasu excels at bringing these distinct voices to life, and, as intimately as one writer might describe a given city, Karasu lays out labyrinthine passages of emotion.

Disjointed, elliptical, and offering an impression of incompleteness even after the last page has been turned—like a painting in which sketch lines and blank canvas show through—Death in Troy is flawed, yes, but still a gem.

The Garden of Departed Cats, published in translation by New Directions in 2004, is perhaps the crowning achievement of Karasu’s oeuvre. Bound to draw comparisons with the work of Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, and Julio Cortázar, it is eccentric, high-brow and, at times, nearly impenetrably surreal. Touted as a novel, it is composed of twelve fairytales—really eleven capped by a kind of epilogue—interspersed with a seemingly independent storyline told in thirteen brief, italicized episodes.

The continuous narrative begins in a medieval city on a peninsula “that stretches like an arm into the Mediterranean.” Tourists have flocked to this unnamed city to watch a game of chess—a tradition left over from centuries previous—in which the pieces are fully armed human beings (one team is chosen from among tourists while the opposing team is made up of town folk) and the board is a circular courtyard. Before the game commences, the narrator, who is a tourist, and one of the locals are already being moved toward one another as though by an invisible hand. The connection between them becomes manifest when they find themselves on opposing teams.

Karasu sets himself a number of Herculean labors in this book. Among them is his attempt to re-route our thinking, to get us to take less for granted, to break our dependence on a web of preconceptions which, like a glove, covers the hand with which we reach out to handle the world and its various phenomena; Karasu wants us to press bare skin against the textures of our lives. Nakedness—the removal of that glove—is explored in “Hurt Me Not,” “the tale of a man who longed to be naked in a world where all people … live and toil to clothe themselves ….” Karasu quickly takes the literal meaning to another level: “After all, teaching as many disciplines as he could and giving away his knowledge was also part of becoming naked.” A variation on this theme is presented in “Red-Salamander,” in which eating the leaf of a certain plant makes it impossible to lie. It doesn’t take much imagination to perceive complete truthfulness as another form of nakedness.

Karasu’s most quixotic quest, perhaps, is to break our Western infatuation with chronology and sequence. “[C]aught in the dream of a goal,” he writes, “we don’t notice in the slightest the singularity, the unchangeable and irreplaceable nature of every moment in the string of moments that later—after our death—will be called our life, and even more encompassing, our destiny.” The goal in “Another Peak” is apparently intimated by the title, but during the ascent of a mountain surrounded by a nearly impassable plain, the narrator articulates his longing to rid himself “of the habit of sorting everything, stacking one thing on top of another like food boxes ….” He adds: “It’s time now to learn that all things are inside one another.” (Here we hear an echo of an earlier story in which the narrator chastises himself for being deceived by surfaces: “I listened to the noise in vain, I should have tried to listen to what was inside.”) The mountain’s summit affords the protagonist the opportunity to see his surroundings from an all-but-impossible perspective.

Karasu also excels at reversals. In “The Prey,” a fisherman is “caught” by a fish that swallows his arm and becomes a kind of extension of himself. “[I]n Praise of the Crab” tries to give the reader a crab’s-eye view of an incident in which the crab is “humiliated” while “In Praise of the Fearless Porcupine” is a look at how humans and their cities have impinged on the lives of a porcupine family. These turnabouts in the hierarchy of things we have all come to expect seem to be motivated by a desire to obliterate boundaries—such as those between the hunter and the hunted or the lover and the object loved—and to establish a balance, an equality so that neither dominates the other. (This is reflected, to some extent, in the balance of power exhibited in the very game the tourists have come to see.)

While some of the stories hold together on their own (“‘Kill Me, Master!’ could easily be lifted out of the collection and its ending would still be heartbreaking), most seem allegories that not only need the framework narrative if they are to be fully appreciated, but also require us to read to the very last page of the book. Like the lemon juice or candle flame used to reveal the text of a long-awaited love letter written in invisible ink, the final words bring out the more elusive strata of meaning within the text. This technique, however, forces us to put up with a certain amount of bewilderment, induces us to scratch our heads at the end of many of the stories and wonder where we’ve been stranded. Truth be told, even when I’d finished the book, some of the stories still seemed insoluble. And, after one or two of them, I felt the way Kafka claimed one should feel after reading a novel: “as though we had been
banished to the woods, far from any human contact, like a suicide.” Karasu’s habit of leaving his characters nameless adds to this alienation, keeps the reader outside the narrative, and tends to detract from the emotional impact of the fiction. A daring book that dispenses with realism and the O. Henry–endings most of us have come to expect, *The Garden of Departed Cats* calls for an equally daring reader.

Karasu couldn’t get away with holding the reader off until the very last page if it weren’t for the confidence his style exudes and the sure-footedness of the prose; his voice always induces you to believe. When, for example, he places the reader in a city that has never had any kind of weather other than rain, he writes with such assurance it almost seems he’s been there: “More importantly, waking up in the morning was not the same as in other cities. Neither excited nor anxious about the weather, people did not rush to open the shutters or the blinds to check out the sky; or lying in bed, nobody thought to look for a ray of light that might be streaming between the curtains and reflecting on the wall, or to listen to the automobile tires to guess if it was raining or snowing, dry or sunny outside.” Karasu evinces a quiet lyricism throughout the book and by choosing very specific details, he is able to crystallize an entire setting seemingly without effort.

“[S]omewhere,” Karasu writes, “in the habitual flow of life a fairy tale is always born when this flow, when this fabric of habit is suddenly ripped apart.” And that is pretty much what Karasu does: he rips apart our expectations and then fills the space he’s created with the fabulous, the bizarre, the unexpected. In spite of the fact that he’s raised the bar far higher than most writers would ever dare, he seems to have cleared it.

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The Academy  (Gümüşlük Akademisi)
Latife Tekin
translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne

At winter’s end, the Atlantis Group from Gümüşlük Academy arranged a symposium on “Meaning: from the traditional to the electronic.” Along with the top names in the electronic and print media, the organizers invited a group not so well known and at odds with those circles. In this group was Yasemin Buenanoche, a young semanticist who had cut herself off from the university and research centers. She started out for Gümüşlük three days in advance of the symposium, drawn there by the secret she harbored of the lost documents concerning the Academy’s beginnings.

It was the first week of February, and Buenanoche’s long and tiring journey, interrupted often by heavy snowfall, inevitably turned into an inner odyssey. The trees that appeared to be sketched in black clusters on the snow-covered plains reminded her of her childhood. Thoughts fizzled out and a whisper floated up from the depths of her soul. SNOW. A white animal with its fur of trees.

Buenanoche had kept an eye on the Academy from a distance, continuing to inquire and think about it even during the years she spent abroad. Her thoughts would always be overcome by the image of a vast, silent garden hedged in by the light of her memories. This rather frightened her.

She had the same feeling when she picked up the documents from where they had been left — to be forgotten — and, on a last-minute impulse, rushed through them. Photographs, pages of philosophical comment, architectural drawings, minutes of meetings — everything led toward a strange argument that seemed magical to her. If she hadn’t been invited, she thought, she could never have visited the Academy.

Yet she felt elated as she sailed through the snow toward a different climate, into the slowly approaching spring and the fragrance of unfamiliar flowers.

On the first day, at the communal lunch, Buenanoche became the focus of attention. Her radiant eyes sparked off a vibrant aura. Her face, mellowed by her inner journey and flushed as though she were having a dream, took on a solitary look. Her words, spoken in a voice that echoed from far away, were gratefully received. While the air still hummed with the bewilderment stirred by her ideas, Buenanoche made the following notes in the guestbook: “Meaning is inherent in the flesh. It can dazzle only when flesh is visible. It’s pointless to look for meaning in words. Meaning is in our palate, our throat, in our hands and eyes.”

Buenanoche loved to fall asleep to the sound of the hammer from the sculpture workshop that spread out over the valley, to look at the morning sky so marvellously wide in the blue distance that met the sea, and to watch the clouds scudding over the mountains. As she strolled among the trees, breathing in the fragrance of tangerines, she was struck by the feeling that she could live in this garden forever. She delayed her return and stayed on for the workshop on “Virtual Spaces” that was to take place at the Academy in a few days.

Buenanoche spent those days half-transformed, in a strange, breezy atmosphere, as if her soul trembled between the pages of the documents she had been keeping — as if powerful thoughts and sensations might invade it and shake her very being. She walked blindly in the twilight, her arms spread wide like someone with no fear of death, wandering over the hills until she reached the little spit on the artificial lake. There she waited — a stone, a flower, or a mushroom in her hand — to watch the sun rise.

Mornings, the Academy’s director had seen her perched on the edge of the amphitheater’s wet steps, watching birds. He lent her his binoculars and gave her an illustrated book, created by the children’s workshop, about the birds that inhabited the Academy garden. He also gave her a map to help her find mushrooms. She was pleased when he warned her about the dangerous attraction of poisonous mushrooms and when he reminded her politely that the binoculars had once belonged to his grandfather. The questions they exchanged led to quiet conversations. They were now able to whisper to each other things that couldn’t so easily be said out loud. They toured the Academy museum, which was still under construction, and the arts workshops happily buzzing with activity. They talked about all the things that interested them, but most of all about the spirit of the Academy.

The image of the vast, silent garden that had veiled her thoughts began to fade from Buenanoche’s mind. Watching a painter’s shadow glide quietly from one courtyard to another in the hazy moonlight, a tired sculptor tread heavily on the stones glistening in the grass, or a silent writer trying to break away from the clamor of words — witnessing these moments of flesh-felt beauty, she felt renewed by fresh intuitions. But time passed too gently.
Buenanoche had noticed how a certain soothing atmosphere reigned over the Academy. Perhaps only those who felt settled inwardly and reconciled to sorrow could exist here, she thought. She had always felt lost in places where she didn’t see people raging in a warped, passionate quest to be transformed — where she didn’t hear crowds screaming in a desperate, painful struggle. She thought she should tell the director that this garden perpetuated the notion of an alternative way of life and was too removed from the world.

As she put her thoughts into words, Buenanoche’s eyes were seeking everywhere — on the hill slopes, in the trees waving in the wind, on the roofs of the workshops, and in the glow from the sea and the clouds — for the bird in the book the director had given her. The picture had left her spellbound. It was mentioned in the diary she found among the documents, in unforgettable words: Skycrow — who had appeared one spring day, and then vanished.

When the heavily laden rainclouds shadowing the bright scene of the sea, the valley, the garden, and the blossoming almond trees broke at last with a deafening crash, Buenanoche shut herself up in the library of the Academy and settled down to study the archives. The growing emptiness she felt — of things that would forever be unknown, standing alone in their own light — became more painful.

During their cheerful companionship, the young director told Buenanoche that ever since he had taken the office two years ago, he had been searching for the lost documents about the beginnings of the Academy. On the day she left Gümüşlük, she remembered this and her heart shivered. As she sped ever farther away, leaving behind mountains and plains, she again became aware, bitterly now, of how the boundaries of her soul, her being, had melted away. Later on, however, seeking relief from the painful twitches that presaged her return to city life, she was struck by a thought that relaxed her and freed her from her shuttered feelings.

A while after she returned home, Buenanoche sent two letters to the director. They had been written at different times but folded together and mailed in the same envelope. In the first letter, vibrant with feelings from her recent visit there, she spoke of pain, the quest for beauty, and a book she had just started reading. In the shorter second letter, she related her impressions of two periodicals published by the Academy: Winter Discussions and The Task of Living. She believed that the ideas they expressed would remain meaningless as long as their imprint was not felt on the flesh.

Finally, Buenanoche sent a third letter, informing the director that it was she who possessed the lost documents from the early years of the Academy. While still a child, she had come across the papers in a wooden chest. Secretly, every day, she would run through them. What had impressed her most back then was how love and conflict had crept into the letters and diary. Among the letters lay one that left its fateful mark on her because it forced her to think about meaning. It had been written by her mother but never mailed. Her mother’s recent death had left her shaken, and being invited to the Academy had revived her feelings about the chest.

“I’ve come to realize that you have as much right to these papers as I. I’ve kept them in memory of my mother, who lived with your grandfather for some time before I was born, in the wooden house on the grounds of the Academy. Some of the photographs I’ll be sending you were taken while that house — a structure of such unadorned beauty that it wrenches the heart — was being built. Expressing a simplicity that defies time, this wooden house is, in my view, the most beautiful one in the garden — standing off in a corner, heedless of the metal-roofed stone houses and buildings with glistening glass walls.

“The afternoon discussions we had in that house meant something altogether different to me. I was thrilled as I looked out the windows and imagined that the same crows still flew over the same hill. I’m sure you can guess how I felt. Your grandfather made the chest and the wooden figures in it. It’s a comfort to think that they will be kept safe in the Academy museum.

“From the letters, I’ve gathered that your grandfather was a sensitive and irritable man. Seeing you work late in the deep silence of the Academy library, I felt that you had inherited your grandfather’s passionate temperament and his gift for imaginative work, just as I inherited my mother’s passion for holding onto memories. I felt even more deeply moved when I saw that you had revived the energy workshop set up by your grandfather, which had been closed for so many years.

“My first full study was on action words. I had just then started thinking about energy and discovered that our inadequate knowledge of it blocked our perception in any number of ways. Your courage in changing the course of your life impresses me deeply.

“Your grandfather and my mother disagreed on what to do when the Academy faced the threat of closure. While he adopted an attitude much like Galileo’s, my mother was all for open struggle. Apparently, it was these differences that...
led to their separation. I’ve come across a stunning passage in my mother’s diary. Sensing that the Academy would be considered more important in the future, they both decided to hide away all the papers having to do with its founding. They wanted to escape historical time. One can tell they knew what to do, which path to follow: leave posterity an inspiring tale reminiscent of Atlantis. I think that’s why my mother could leave in peace, taking the papers with her. Before she died, she asked me to keep everything together in the chest and pass it on, in secrecy, to my own child. By revealing the secret she entrusted to me, I’ve betrayed my mother’s dream to bestow a ‘lost history’ on the Academy. But I can console myself. As long as the contents of the chest are kept there, the Academy will have its tale of a lost history that everybody will talk about.

“When you receive these papers, you’ll see that your grandfather and my mother had also done quite a lot of thinking about energy. Your grandfather’s god was the sun. He believed that part of its lost mass accumulated in the earth. Having figured out that the earth had grown more massive by a factor of 1/400,000 since the beginnings, he tried to prove that most of the problems experienced on the earth were due to this increase in mass. Clearly, some relevant information must be hidden away somewhere in the Academy.”

When the director finished reading Buenanoche’s letter, he remembered her running her hands over the rock surfaces, as if looking for a trap-door to a hidden room. “The time, tension, flow, and resistance formulae of energy transformations.... What frightens me is that they tried to simulate creation from the beginnings up to chaos.”

It was summer when the chest reached the Academy. Inside, on the very top, lay the diary kept by Yasemin Buenanoche’s mother. A letter, also written by her mother, was tucked between its pages. On it Buenanoche had penned a note, revealing that during her visit to the Academy she had mostly been tracing a feeling that, years ago, had got under her skin: “The first time I read these things, I had a hard time grasping what exactly they meant. But, like a stranger, a ray of light pierced my body. I think I awoke from my childhood sleep when I first opened the lid of the chest. If I hadn’t read this letter of my mother’s, I might never have considered what meaning is and where it’s concealed.”

“What a strange thing meaning is!” you’d said. But what about time, dear? Isn’t time rather strange, too? You’re in the hands of time now. How your spirit and your beautiful brain must be twisting about in the waves! Time is like a headache, if you don’t forget about it, it won’t leave you. You’ve got to give yourself up to the pain. I was going to write you a quiet letter, but now I feel wrapped in the scent of our intimacy. I’ve missed you, breathlessly missed you. When I think of you, I feel not just my heart but my whole body pounding...

Reading Buenanoche’s note, the letter, and the pages of the diary where she had placed it, the director felt as if he were a timid stranger inside the wooden house where he had lived for two years.

26th, Monday
Ugh! Rain! Trucks carrying the paving stones got stuck in the mud, all eight of them, one after the other. Unbelievable! What sort of men are these? Trucks backed up one on top of the other, the dirt road full of potholes, stones dumped helter-skelter. It’s already midnight and the men are still hard at it. I came up with the story of the dung beetle and we had a laughing fit. Then we thought, they must know what we’re trying to do here. They must have got stuck in the mud in order to illustrate our equations with multiple unknowns...

30th, Friday
Strange, but I’m beginning to think that peasants don’t really care about their cows anymore. They just hobble their hind legs and turn them loose. Rain or hail, they never go looking for them. There were four cows in the garden, and they’d been there for three days. They broke through the fence and tore down the daisy plant. It had grown huge, but now it’s crushed to pieces. Even though we chased out the cows, their eyes still lingered on the garden, they kept looking back as they went up and over the slope. Nighttime... the same eyes seem to be fixed on us from the same place, following us, twin stars glittering in the sky. Like Manta’s mouth... The pleasure of being watched suddenly turns into fear. Indigo darkness that fills up our eyes is no longer the sky, we’re deep in the sea, a giant fish is about to swallow up the thinking plankton!...

2nd, Sunday
We picked up our hoes and buckets and went off to the mountains to pull up wild orchids for the garden. When we got back, we talked about the spirit that moves us to mend all things. Our quiet expedition to the mountains after the cows had trampled the daisies, how we got stuck in the mud up there, and all those orchids... Everything happens naturally, in the right way. And so quickly that reason can’t
catch up with it. Later on, we realize what we’ve been doing. But always too late. Seeing the perfection of the spirit that moves us, once more the same feeling, the futility of attempting to think...

6th, Thursday
Everyone should have a rock. I have one, a high, sharp one. I feel like a goddess with her own rock. Why would anyone love a rock? I suddenly thought about covering it with mirrors. Then the birds would see how they flap their wings, lots of them would come to peck at it. Even Skycrow, maybe, enthralled, would swoop into the mirror. I’d be able to see Skycrow more closely. Who might stay around and never fly away. But no...


Translation, Goethe observed, is like the back of a rug: You can reconstruct the design, but not the whole pattern and the color scheme. The same sense of defeatism is echoed in such statements as “Never translate; translation is the death of understanding” (Moritz Haupt); “Il y a de belles traductions, peut-être; il n’y a pas de fidèles” (Anatole France); and, perhaps the worst indictment of all since “traduttori traditori” was foisted upon us, Robert Frost’s dictum “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” Ezra Pound practiced more charity and realism when he considered phonopoeia translatable and logopoeia not impossible to transpose, although, like Voltaire (“How does one translate music?”), he found melopoeia resistant to conversion.

Such fury has been unleashed against translation that even translators themselves are usually apologetic. Without challenging the axiom that vast numbers of poems are untranslatable because of intrinsic and intractable features, I would still argue that a grave injustice is perpetrated against many truly successful translations. Criticism of poetry in translation revels in negative judgments and refuses to recognize, let alone praise, the merits.

Having published translations of more than 5000 poems, I have my own share of guilt and pangs of conscience about defects and deficiencies in my work. Nor do I ride roughshod over the failings I detect in what colleagues do. Like a gladiator, any translator gladly takes on other translators. But it is not just a brutal sport to deal a blow on the head of a fellow translator who misreads, misrepresents, distorts, or even destroys a fine poem. It does not take much daring to berate such horrendous renditions as “Goddess, when I sight thy figure wonder makes me dumb to be; / He who sees my plight and fashion for a figure holdeth me; / Naught of love to me thou showest, naught of ruth, till now at length / Passion for thy locks doth tread me like the shadow on the lea,” etc., that one finds in the monumental study entitled A History of Ottoman Poetry by E. J. W. Gibb (d. 1901), who thus butchered a magnificent 16th-century poem by Fuzuli. FitzGerald is virtually a unique phenomenon in rendering Near Eastern poetry in fully poetic terms, although he has often been criticized for taking liberties with Hayyam. The great mystic, Rumi, for example, has had agonizing renditions: Even his best translator, Reynold A. Nicholson, could write such monstrosities as “If so be that thou throwest a glance upon (aught in) the two worlds, do not so.” As recently as 1956, Sir Colin Garbett published such gems as “Yestreen unto a star I cried / To thee my words I trust.” While Rumi still awaits his Arthur Waley, one can relish the Tarzan-language used by the prominent scholar A. J. Arberry in a translation he made of a rubai by Rumi: “His music when he played / Me clapping hands he made.” In doing English versions of late 19th- and early 20th-century Turkish poets, Behlül Toygar was able to use lines like these in 1969: “On edge do stand my hair” or “A shepherd boy am I that saw not the sea / Of old those mounts have known my family.”

All these are egregious examples, but it is a fair assumption that particularly the stringently formal classical poetry of Islamic countries defies effective translation. Some of its stanzaic patterns use the same rhyme in five to one hundred couplets. Innumerable conceits, metaphors, references, etc., have no counterparts in other cultures and languages. Above all, many of the best poems were actually created as musical compositions in their own right and require a miracle for successful transposition.

Translating modern poetry, especially if it is free of strict form or heavy rhyming or excessive onomatopoeia, can be accomplished at a high level of success. Poetic sensibilities in most countries (certainly in the so-called modernized or modernizing societies) partake of the McLuhanite Village. Without necessarily depriving itself of its indigenous cultural elements, modern poetry in vast areas of the world has steadily moved toward a new universality. In my opinion, poetry today is far more translatable than ever before.

Even when one translates from and into such forbiddingly disparate languages as English and Turkish, it is possible, in my judgment, to do full justice to the originals. The old approaches of “fidus interpres” as a form of servility and lack of liberty as the germinator of a “caput mortuum” are no longer tenable — or need not be. In the past, the translator was either faithful and consequently a slave, or he exercised a free hand and came to be viewed as a knave. But modern poetry affords sufficient vindication of Valéry’s observation that “translation consists in producing with different means analogous effects.” Analogy is no longer a problem, in my opinion. Translation can hope to succeed, in this day and age, by means of anagogy. Just as the original poem is a result of its own creative imperative, the translation has its own transpositional imperative, which can be described as — indeed, is — a creative process in its own right.
One can offer the postulate that successful translations are equal in effectiveness to the originals even if, and often to the extent that, they are different from the originals. What some critics view as betrayal is actually betterment. A translator has not only the right to his transformations in order to find counterparts and parallelisms but also the obligation to depart from the geography of the culture out of which he is translating so that he may arrive triumphant in his own cultural terra firma.

Negative judgments about the art of translation have often come from people who are not themselves truly bilingual. Little knowledge of a foreign language and excessive romanticizing of one’s native tongue are the twin enemies of a just and equitable appreciation of effective translation. The rug can be rewoven, with its design, pattern, colors, and everything else. There are of course innumerable horrid or merely low-caliber translations, and there will always be. But then there are also innumerable horrid original poems, plays, novels, stories, essays or, for that matter, atrocious paintings, films, musical compositions. Bad specimens of any genre are not necessarily an intrinsic weakness of that genre. Clumsy translation, by the same token, should not detract from the strengths of effective translation.

In my opinion, translation should no longer be apologetic about what it does and what it cannot do. It is not, contrary to widespread misapprehension, a distorting mirror but rather a hall of mirrors in which the appreciative viewer can often find images of deeper significance, enhanced excitement, and expanded visions. It is possible to change Frost’s dictum into “Poetry is what gets found in translation.” Beyond the discoveries that are essential for absorbing and reconstituting the poem, the process of translation is a creative act. Translation has, in fact, entered the age of artistic creativity.

Having expressed my faith in what an individual translator and those working in collaboration can achieve, I am haunted by the inherent limitations they are confronted with. There are still many problems we must solve to translate the poem within its cultural context. The objective should be to achieve precision and to create a poem in the new language — and to convey the original culture.

I would like to propose a new approach, which could be variously defined as collective or multilateral or concurrent or comprehensive translation. Such definitions, however, refer to the mechanics or strategy of translating rather than to its ideology.

Cultranslation is a neologism (mine, I think) that best expresses the design, the content, and the methodology of a new type of translation I have in mind — a simple contraction of the words culture and translation. It is based on my assumption that most poems function as a microcosm of a culture and must be translated as such. Yet, we must admit that, miracles aside, no single translation can re-create a poem or transpose it into a different culture fully or exhaustively. This problem is especially acute, if not insurmountable, when the languages involved are not cognate and the cultures have little in common. We need a new method to reconstruct a poem’s cultural circumference as well as its internal values.

The solution might be found in an exhaustive or encompassing transpositional approach. If the approach, which requires a rather elaborate strategy, becomes successful, the translations it yields will not only do justice to the poem’s intrinsic literary aspects and its cultural context but also reveal a great deal about the culture into which it is transposed.

Cultranslation involves the following methods, materials, and media. A literary scholar — in this instance, a Turk proficient in English — will select a poem in Turkish from the Ottoman period (14th to 20th century), making sure that it is representative in terms of substance and style, reflects the cultural traits of its era, and lends itself to effective translation. He will then provide the following material in English, along with some Turkish items:

1. A survey of the Turkish language and literature, including morphological and phonological characteristics, stanzaic forms, prosody, rhyming techniques, etc.
2. A brief description of Ottoman Turkish culture with special emphasis on the period in which the poem was written.
3. The biography of the poet and an assessment of his work in general.
4. Copies of articles about or previously published translations of the poet’s significant work.
5. The poem’s text in the original.
6. A literal prose translation of the poem, together with a thorough grammatical, stylistic, rhythmic, and structural analysis and observations about its sound (accompanying by recordings of readings of the poem by different native scholars, actors, etc.).
7. Literal prose translations (with analysis and annotations) by other scholars and specialists.
8. If the poem originally served as the words of a hymn or song, one or more musical versions of it and observations about the interaction between the poem and the music.
10. Any other literal versions that can be obtained from scholars in the field.
11. A faithful but somewhat free literary version.

The above-mentioned material would then be submitted to American and British poets, preferably experienced in translation. The list would include ten to twenty prominent poets who have done highly formal translations as well as those who prefer free versions. Each poet will work independently and produce his own versions of the Turkish poem in English.

The scholar will be available to the American (and British) poets to answer their specific questions, to expand on the material provided, to clarify the ambiguities, to check work in progress, to comment on the new versions, etc.

The complete set of the basic material and the finished product — the poetic versions — will probably make a very interesting book, certainly a unique one. Its contents and methodology are likely to attract the attention of literary scholars, cultural historians, poets, and professors and students in the field of comparative literature.

The explanatory texts on the Turkish poem’s cultural context and its recreation by some of America’s and England’s most distinguished poets and translators will give us the poem itself in its most pleasurable transmutations into English verse and reconstitute the poem as the synecdoche of a different culture. Although the project, in this instance, is based on Turkish, it is designed as a model or prototype for a new understanding and method of translating a poem in all its aspects within its own culture — hence the term Cultranslation — and could be, should be, used for many other languages as well. In fact, its application on a very broad basis will probably constitute the most effective approach to world poetry. As an important by-product, the project will help illustrate differences among the translation techniques of the individual poets. It will conceivably shed light on the aesthetic values of the literature and culture into which the poem has been transposed.

The poem itself is supreme, of course. If my assumption that a single translator can hardly do a definitive version is right, then an in-depth analysis of the poem itself together with its cultural context and a whole consort of virtuoso renditions of it might be a far more effective, if not ideal, way of creating it anew. It might be, I submit, worthwhile to try Cultranslation.

A child with light sandy hair, thin—really thin—whose ribs you could count. I ask his name. First he turns his head away and after keeping quiet for awhile he answers my question: “Edip!” Where were you born? I say. Not a word. His father and mother probably know. But he does know the street where he lives very well. Row after row of wooden houses with small or large gardens. He pushes open a wooden door with his foot. Look, it’s our garden. On the right side was a withered quince tree. On the other side a well. Around the well, morning glories. Then other houses, other gardens.

Countless windows, balconies with zinc floors. People have lived for thousands of years in these houses, almost all in the same way. On the left side a trellis, or something sticking out that imitates a trellis, which keeps the fruit from ripening. We go outside. Opposite is a long, really long and really high wall. A pavilion runs alongside it with huge trees and towers. The place is filled with secrets. Who lives inside? How is Edip supposed to know! Is this the mansion Ruhi Bey burned in the book called How I Am Ruhi Bey. “Is this the mansion Ruhi Bey burned?” He looks at my face. The longer he looks, the number of Edips increases. The last Edip breaks in, “Yes, this pavilion,” he answers immediately, recalling a period in a childhood and early youth which he hadn’t liked.

He was born in August 1928 in Beyazıt, in the Soğanağa District. Then they moved to a house in Haseki. But in those days Edip didn’t know Edip at all. His beginning to get acquainted with himself happened in the above-mentioned house in Sarachanebaş. The theft of plums, riding rented bikes inside the Şehzade Mosque, summer days in vacant lots, acrobats rehearsing their performances, the museum in the fire station . . . But in rainy weather Edip loved, most of all, cinema tickets, the doors of cinemas. May he continue to love them! Suddenly one day he will be 56. He finds himself in first grade, in elementary school, with a short apron and strong-smelling leather schoolbag. Even today when he smells the smell of leather, he remembers his face burning from the beating he got his first day in school.

I mentioned stealing greengage plums. There was a garden adjoining ours. And inside, a plum tree and a house that looked like ours. In those days all the houses in the neighborhood and in the narrow streets resembled each other. From many things that happened, the child’s memory can only recall tiny little fragments from the overall perspective of events that occurred. There in that house with its plum tree we had a neighbor, Nigâr Hamım, whose face I have largely forgotten but whose jokes and imitations I can never, out of a long series of events, forget. Nigâr Hamım, who had twenty or twenty-five cats. Nigâr Hamım who entertained guests with the sherbets given to new mothers when the cats had kittens (actually it was a house made gentle by cats). She had two brothers as well as a husband. Did she have a husband? Yes she had, but it was as if she didn’t. He was never seen, he didn’t like to be seen and it was as if she had fabricated him in order to seem ordinary. One of her brothers was Kenan Bey. He was to be my guardian at the Kumkapı Middle School. The other brother was Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. One of the rooms was full to the brim with books. I can’t be sure at this point whether the books were Kenan Bey’s or Tanpınar’s. But our best neighbors were Gülşüm Hamım and her husband Riza Bey. They were immigrants. When no one answered the garden gate’s little bell I would go to Gülşüm Hamım’s house. Riza Bey probably chain-smoked. And there was a stove that never stopped burning, that stood in a corner of the room like a planet that hadn’t cooled down. Anyway . . .

In the days when the Second World War was beginning, we moved to a flat in Fatih. My mother, father and three sisters all together. I remember the doorman İsmail Efendi. He also worked as an ice-cream seller. In the evening when he was making ice cream, it was one of my greatest pleasures to watch while he decked out his cart. His cart was dazzlingly white. Even the reds and purples were dazzlingly white. It’s as if I learned white from it. In addition, along with my friends from the neighborhood it had become an addiction for me to go into the sea from the sand and charcoal pier at Yenikapı. The sea! For such a long time it was missing from my life. Later I used to make the Seven Dwarves by cutting them out with a jigsaw. Also the streets being watered by the municipal truck and the leafy boulevards in the middle of the streets would affect me like a different country. There was so much land, so many gardens, that it is as if I smell the fragrance of the grass and trees in the neighborhood even today. If I fall, if a part of me bleeds, undoubtedly a green stain would be found next to the red.

After studying for a year at Gelenbevi Middle School, I was enrolled at Kumkapı Middle School. I began to write
my first poems(!). I remember that beautiful place of mine, the peaceful National Library. In my free time I would go, read the volumes of old art magazines and take notes. There was a bespectacled, thin library director. He took an interest in me in the meantime and asked why I read such serious things. I suppose I was a bit shy; and I would survive his questioning by making some incomprehensible reply.

Years of bread coupons and blackouts. I was studying at the Istanbul Boys’ Lycée. There was a large garden in front and in back. It is a beautiful, splendid building. Beyond the back garden is the sea. We are neighbors of the “Sublime Porte.” Leaving school in the evenings, many times I go down “The Incline.” The Marmara, ABC and Incline publishing houses. I follow with attention and passion the new poetry movement. Books of short stories and novels too, of course. I never ever miss the publications of the National Education Ministry. The Greek and Latin classics and 19th century Russian literature absorb me completely. Chekhov and Dostoyevsky are at the top of my list. I feel the lack of freedom and the immensely restricted press in Turkey. *The Golden Chair, Women and Socialism* (I believe it would be Sabiha Sertel’s translation), *Dialectical Materialism, Socialism and the General History of Social Struggles*. I remember that I was able to find one or two plays and one or two books of poetry by Nazim (Hikmet).

Also at school, I had a friend whose influence I was so much under that I owe many things to him. Publishing was such a nightmare that I would like to mention a brief memory. One evening a friend who worked in one of the bookshops I customarily visited pressed a book on me and told me to read it at home. I did what he said. When I got home I opened the package, and the title of the book was *The Engine of the Means of Subsistence*. In those days every poet who wrote “free verse” proclaimed himself to be a communist.

There is no interesting incident in my school memories. The quinces I took from the garden railing on days I forgot and left the bread coupon at home. Likewise the continuous games of draughts on holidays. Also there was a girl I exchanged glances with on the tram either returning from school or in the mornings, though I finished school without our having said a single word to each other. Higher education didn’t interest me. Either that or I understood that I had chosen the wrong school. Later I well remember lamenting that I hadn’t studied philosophy.

I started in business at my father’s shop in the Covered Bazaar (in those times, like today, there were shops that were numbered, rather high up off the ground, with cushions on the floors and wooden shutters). Although business didn’t interest me either. It happened that I never liked to do business—in fact I never could claim that I did. However that may be, there was no other way. At nineteen I was married, and at twenty I was a young man with a child. I was at the same time obliged to make a living, and drawn to poetry. In any case, a few years later my shop was destroyed in the big fire at the Covered Bazaar. My partner was a good-hearted man. He was in charge of sales, while I would read and write in the mezzanine. Our true friendship began in those days with poetry and continued for twenty-two years. The results are in my home, my room and among my books.

One day. Yes, one day Tanpinar wants to see my poems. I am seventeen or eighteen years old. Yes, one day Tanpinar wants to see me. I go to the Narmanlı Building in the Tunnel neighborhood. He offers me coffee in a huge teacup. After sitting down at an enormous table and putting on his glasses, he reads all my poems without showing any signs of getting bored. After he finishes reading, thoroughly it seems to me, he raises his head and speaks his first sentence: “These poems are very nice, all of them are quite beautiful. But not a single one of them is a poem!” Naturally this judgment makes me feel strange as can be, and I leave without seeming to understand. Just before I leave he says some other things. At one point he asks why I don’t write in rhyme and meter. As for me I choose just to remain silent, because he is answering his own question again. Afterwards he lays out some pictures in the middle of the room. He explains at great length how pictures should be looked at. He advises me that I should concentrate very much on pictures and love them. I should add this: I understood subsequently that while I had not read his books, I had encountered that day one of Turkey’s most cultured artists.

What a pity it is that in 1947 I published a book, *Late Afternoon*, which even today will not leave me in peace. I couldn’t avoid publishing my idiotic works in periodicals like *Thoughts, World of Literature*, and *The Spring*. For *World of Literature* and later, for me, it was in other ways a turning point. It happened that two friends and I went together to the Elite Cafe in Asmalımescit, which was in those days a gathering place for the Young Artists, to bring out the aforementioned periodical. Sait Faik, Otkay Akbal, Salâh Birsel and other artists whose faces we were seeing for the first time, conversed around a long table. We unhesitatingly cultivated all sides. We wanted articles, poetry and stories for our journal. But we couldn’t get a positive response from anyone. My friends pulled out, having lost hope. I stayed. Salâh Birsel came to my side in a friendly way and showed a close, friendly interest in
me. He asked if I had any new poems. Of course I had a lot of poems that were “nice but not poetry.” He suggested that when I wrote new ones I bring them and read them. A close friendship was established between us, beginning with poetry and continuing with poetry. He painstakingly explained the true values of poetry, its structural and technical properties. Especially by stressing through the use of examples what composition was all about, he secured in me a practical approach to poetry. I acquired tastes which I hadn’t heard of till then. I still remember how delighted he was when I wrote the poem “What a Table That Table Is,” and how he encouraged me.

The year is 1950. The years of military service. No newspaper other than “The Nation” gets into the school. In fact reading books is forbidden. Six months without poetry. I read on weekends when I get a chance. There’s nothing to tell. Colorless, utterly dry days. I would stop off on Saturday evenings in Kızılay at a restaurant called, if I am not mistaken, Bouquet, at The Nation, and a tavern called The Three Horses. I wanted to see Cahit Süt, Orhan Veli and other artists close up and to meet them. For whatever reason, such chance meetings didn’t materialize. Except that one day they said that Ataç wanted to see me, that he had invited me. Naturally I went right away. We met at a pastry shop and afterwards went for a walk. He continually asked me questions. I was rather bored. After I kept the conversation going by obstinately saying the exact opposite of what I would have said, we parted at the turning to the house where he lived. At a certain point he suggested I visit him at home. But we didn’t meet again. The personality of a writer whose writings I loved so much didn’t interest me; in short I didn’t warm up to Atac. Those six months that didn’t know how to end finally ended. I returned to Istanbul. After a brief leave in the outskirts of Hadımköy, I began my detachment duty at Ömerli. From then on I had plenty of time to read. Poetry? There was still no poetry.

Finally the “Seven Hills” years. I published my poems with Seven Hills. In 1954 my book of poetry called Living in Harmony (Dirlik Düzenlik) was published. Today I look at it and say that if nothing other than the poem “What a Table That Table Is” had been written, it would have been worth it. And yet I haven’t been able to escape from this poem ever in my life. The same poem would turn up in anthologies, the same poem would be talked about by those who know my poetry only remotely; and if they translated a poem of mine into foreign languages, it would be the Table poem. One day in Ankara we were sitting at a table with Mr. Ahmet Muhip Dranas. At some point Dranas turned to me and praised the aforementioned poem. “Sir,” I said, “I am sick of that poem. I have other poems than that one.” Dranas said smilingly, “Oh, I am sick of my poem ‘Sister Fahriye’ too. What are we going to do, every poet has a poem he is fed up with.” Naturally he was right. Because in our country most often one generation’s poetry is read, and when there are new generations, new readers appear. The long and short of it is that there are very few readers who follow our poetry.

After 1955 an overall change began in our poetry. I gathered what I had written up until 1957 in my book Gravitational Carnation. In 1956 Öktay Rifat’s Long-Tufted Street, in 1958 İlhan Berk’s Sea of Galilee, and again in the same year Cemal Süreya’s Üvercinka was published. In 1959 with Turgut Uyar’s The World’s Most Beautiful Arabia, Ece Ayhan’s The Sea of Mrs. Kinair, Ülkü Tamer’s Under Cold Weeds, the overall view of things in our poetry thoroughly changed and settled in. Those who weren’t able to give up the easy idea of seeing poetry as a movement, something that could be seen as a unified output, weren’t long in naming these poets the Second New. Moreover, in 1957 a symposium was launched in the art supplement of the Sunday Post: “What the Bards Say about the Second New.” Those who remember the symposium know that the poetic understanding of the poets who were called the Second New, as well as their poetry, were quite different. There’s no point in rehashing this subject. It has been written about, discussed and explored right up to 1977.

I have never in my life worn flowers in my lapel. But we were like flowers freshly cut and worn in the Flower Arcade [a place in Istanbul filled with restaurants and beer gardens – RT]. We were in the 1960s. It was as if there was no word for “liver” in the dictionary. Drinks worked their way into us as a lover would do. Even wines like Panayot’s poison. Everything was poetry, everything was a line, everything had not ripened yet to maturity, everything was something poetic that had not yet found its name. Even poetic disputes were inexhaustible. Degustasyon, the Nile, the Lefter were full of artists, row after row of them. Everyone was just a bit late . . . to his home, to his lover, to his lonesomeness. Some were coming from Ankara, some were going to İzmir. Their railroad, their sea routes would pass through the Fish Market, through Asmalımesc independently, the barrel-organist at Lefter would open the lid of his barrel-organ and show photos of his Greek mistress. He brought out old pictures and each one was in worse taste than the last. I will say that Armenak in Tragedies [a long poem by Cansever – RT] drank there. Sadness was our overriding emotion. On summer days there would be the real seas, the real beaches. But our shelter was autumn, plate glass windows were in
front of us, looking out onto the street.

“Our sadness is now a meeting place
We are those colorless, those lonely, those exiled medusas
We get rid of a tenth of what we say
Our country, our world, our everything
Is cloudy, milky rakı on the rims of our glasses.”

Much later the seas called me. But much later.
Above I said “Tragedies.” I would like to tell how I began. I don’t know, maybe this wouldn’t interest anyone. Be that as it may, I’m still going to tell. Before, I was observing myself in a serious mood. Later that changed. Daily life came together with a memory that cut like a knife. That is how “Tragedies V” came about.
—Shall we take up the subject?
—Yes, let’s do that.
—Armenak, Vartuhi, Stepan, Lusin . . . why and for what reason did you posit that kind of family?
—They pretty much just appeared. It was up to me to write about them.
—And all these people are negative, unbalanced, out of harmony?
—Yes, it’s like that.
—First let’s each drink a cold beer, then if you want to tell about it . . .
—I want to drink cognac. In the vintage of Stepan’s name.
—Whatever you want. I’m listening to you.
—I think the year was nineteen sixty-three. I left the Covered Bazaar one evening. I went into one of the taverns in the Flower Arcade.
I sat on the edge of a stool at a marble-topped table in front of the window. I ordered my drink. For no reason I felt uneasy inside. I began to observe the buildings and the windows above the tavern. On the one hand my memory began to flood with some memories from the past. Suddenly I saw Vartuhi. How was that? It was like this: I was not a child anymore. With an antique dealer at my side I entered one of the floors above the Arcade. We were going to sell some things. My father had sent me. For whatever reason, as soon as the door opened, a sensation mixed with fear coiled up inside me. Across from me was standing a big, powerfully built woman who didn’t look like a woman, her hair was cut short. I immediately got to my feet and when I found an excuse, rushed out with the antique dealer like one who was escaping. From the antique dealer I got some information about the woman. “This woman is a giraffe,” he said. I couldn’t ask what a giraffe was, but afterwards I asked around and learned that it was a word used to mean a lesbian.
Now let’s come to ’63. When I was looking at the buildings in the Arcade, she was the woman I saw (or rather, it was as if I had seen her). That was how I found the first one in the family. The rest of them fell in of their own accord. All of them being more or less sick types was included in the idea of showing that everyone was on the verge of collapsing and going to ruin.

Stepan, Vartuhi, Armenak
Diran and Lusin
never saw blood fall on the stones.

Again it didn’t happen as at the end of a fairy tale; that would have involved the victory of the future over the past.
Yes, I’m touching on this briefly . . . to me perhaps this is an answer to those who are called the hopeless, destitute members of society. I could go further but I am not a critic. I am certainly not my own critic. Further, in a poem there are already so many clues . . . Ahmet Oktay in an article makes these observations: “Let’s begin from this point of view: Edip Cansever is not the poet of impressions and moments. His developmental design began to produce his essential important works, if we allow a necessary interval, with Petrol, and after The Park of the Hopeless Ones, gradually infused his poetry with its problematic nature.” It’s a true analysis. Until my life is used up I want to think of man as an individual, as someone removed from society.

“Much later the sea called me. But much later. . . .” I said. Now a first sentence: A hotel is a life. Well, when do all the lights of a hotel go out? After I wrote the poem “Hotel” in Dirty August, after starting to forget Jacob Who Was Not Invited, I went south twice. On the first trip I saw Bodrum. To be opened to nature, to establish a connection with nature . . . As soon as I returned I finished Dirty August. It seems as if every time I spoke, art was life for me. That life that, like a master diamond cutter, turns words by shaping and shaping them into a beautiful thing. It gives the first sound, it wants to give the last sound. For years I roamed over those seas. I caught various kinds of fish. On the beaches we cooked mussel soup, roasted fish over fires we built. The sea disappeared from my poems; every day I dreamed up a fairy tale which I spoiled.

How old am I now? No, no, I’m not going to tell you the story of How I Am Ruhi Bey. That’s how new it is for me. But I know, the Arcade, the old Arcade doesn’t exist anymore. Most of the time I go to the Krepen Arcade. They changed the name of that place and called it the Chrysanthemum Arcade. Sometimes a bridal carriage stops
in front of the Three Kings Church. Seasonal peddlers, waiters, sellers of plastic goods wait for the bride to come out of the church. Often the minor agents were waiters, and the waiters were the bosses. In that case how old am I? The color of the yellow salt shaker is reflected in the metal ashtray. They have stacked blue beer crates one on top of the other. Cats fight in the eaves. Now they paint the shrimp and crabs. Let them! White cheese and rakı are enough and even too much. And yet when I am working I don’t drink a drop. It has been two years since the shop in the Covered Bazaar was sold. Most of the time I wander around on the seashore. Rumelihisar is one of my favorite neighborhoods. Sometimes I really want to write a play. Then I abandon it. While there is poetry...

From the gift given me by nature
In order not to go mad and lose my way
I remained as two people,
Two people talking to each other.

(June 1977)
What is a word? The image of a nerve stimulus in sounds…. For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an aesthetic relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue.

– Nietzsche¹

A word is nothing but a metaphor for an object or, in some cases, for another word.

– Gregory Rabassa²

Following Nietzsche’s “aesthetic relation” between subject and object or Rabassa’s “word-as-metaphor,” one is drawn to the notion that “translation” is fundamental to consciousness, or even, being. Whenever one enters a language, processes of translation begin. To author is to be a “translator” of the first order. Lacan implies as much in “The Mirror Stage”: the “I” is the image of a nerve stimulus in sounds (an expression of self-recognition).³ Translation involves holding up the mirror; the mirror reflects the object of translation. In other words, authoring language is a priori a kind of translation. And translation proper augments the representation: Entering another language extends (doubles?) the process (“ben” metamorphoses into “I”) and constructs an interlocutor, a second authority, the translator proper, the author’s shadow – whose authority rests in his ability to rename.

“I Will Be Called a Translator”

What should characterize the prose that would represent Orhan Pamuk to an English readership? How should My Name is Red (MNR) signify in this language? The immense breadth of the original Turkish could be accommodated through an aesthetic that mediated between the historical and the mundane, the artistic and the vulgar, the erudite and the everyday. Lyricism would foster readability and “fluid grace.”⁴ Pamuk’s impressionistic use of Perso-Arabic, Turkish and pure Turkish (öz Türkçe) language registers would be met by Latinate, Anglo-Saxon, and contemporary words and expressions – of which, to my advantage, I had many, many more to choose from. Issues of style, a mediating style, preoccupied me. My aesthetic relation to Pamuk began through influence and imitation, as I focused on the phrasal unit of lyrical narrative, whose complex combinations marked Pamuk’s own elaborate, if I might be allowed, “neo-Ottoman” style.

 Writers of the generation after the last major military coup (Sept. 12, 1980) – which affected all aspects of Turkish politics, society, and culture and broadly represented the transition between leftist-socialist and neo-liberal worldviews – have been increasingly free to resurrect Ottoman and “Ottomanesque” language (and history) in a way that no longer threatens national identity but actually furthers visions of modernity and progress. That is to say, they can use old and new registers of language together in a way that complicates and enriches their prose in sound and meaning. Pamuk consciously makes use of this “mixed style” in his work.

As translator, I faced a number of challenges specific to moving between the Altaic (Turkic) and Indo-European (Germanic) language families. Modern Turkish is an agglutinative language, with S-O-V word order. Grammatical information is contained at the end of words and clauses in often compounded suffixes whose full meaning (including subject, negation, and tense) is not revealed until the end of the sentence.⁵ This places more literary emphasis on clauses and modifiers, which Pamuk characteristically repeats in long parallel structures. Instead of prepositions, Turkish has “post-” positions and relative clauses and participial phrases, no matter how long, come before the words they modify (there are no relative pronouns). Subjects are often dropped; that is, understood rather than explicitly stated, as are modified nouns, whose modifiers assume the function of the understood noun. Grammatical time is divided and represented somewhat differently than in English, giving rise to issues of tense, especially in compounds. This is not to mention Pamuk’s ability to spin out Turkish in long sentences with a complexity of modifying schemes, and to make multiple uses of certain everyday words in an array of meanings that change with respect to context. The issue of vocabulary is further complicated by the effects of Republican language
reform policies that either denied or deferred to living language practices and the use of purely Turkish/Turkic neologisms (öz Türkçe). For these reasons and more, there are, generally speaking, few good literary translations rendered from the Turkish to the English. Two common pitfalls, the overly idiomatic and the word-for-word translation, naturally spell disaster.

The aesthetic relation between Turkish and English has been the focus of my personal life and career. I was raised in a Turkish-speaking household and was accustomed as a child and adolescent to listen and respond to Turkish. Often, in an act of second-nature translation, I would hear Turkish and reply in English. This marked a persistent division and mediation between the two realms within my thoughts. Later, my interest in Turkish language, literature, and culture intensified as a result of my own experience with writing. While completing an MFA in creative writing, I applied for and was awarded a Fulbright grant to do preliminary research in Turkish literature. During this year (1994-95), I co-translated a non-fiction work by Halikarnas Balıkçı (The Voice of Anatolia – unpublished) with English-to-Turkish translator Yurdanur Salman. Later, I began to teach Turkish to English speakers as a graduate student at the University of Washington, which continues to be part of my current work as professor at Duke. From my earliest memories, I have been mediating between languages, first verbally, and then textually. In addition to translations of Turkish poems and short stories, I rendered a number of short fictions from the Uzbek as a master’s student (1996-98). Later, as a doctoral student in Istanbul (1998), I was doing research on the intersections of Republican historiography, fiction, and identity-formation, when I was asked by Orhan Pamuk, whom I’d met the previous year, to submit a sample translation from Benim Adım Kırmızı. Ironically, this sample was the first part of Chapter 28 (“Katıl Diyeceler Bana”/“I Will Be Called a Murderer”) from the novel that would become My Name is Red. This translation was selected by Knopf editor George Andreou in consultation with Orhan Pamuk from a group of sample translations by his previous translators and a fourth candidate.

Before beginning the translation proper in the spring of 1999, I photocopied the entire novel, enlarging it as much as possible so that two pages fit on a single side. This was done so I could freely break apart Pamuk’s long sentences into phrases with red slashes and make notes, highlight words, and scribble questions. I separated the novel into five sections of about 100 pages, each spiral bound across the top. At times I translated longhand into a notebook and later transferred the section, revising as I did so, to a laptop. Most often, I typed directly into my laptop. But the translation was forever changing. I must have read early sections over a hundred times. An element of obsession entered into the work. I began the translation in the U.S., completing half of the translation there, mostly in Seattle. The second half I completed in Kanlıca, Istanbul. I was most productive in translating the last 100 pages of the novel (pages 370–470 in the Turkish), which I rendered from June 14 to August 1, 2000. Discounting weekends, this was a rate of over 3 pages a day. I always aimed for three draft pages a day. This could take anywhere from 4 to 8 hours, at times lasting through the night. The most I ever translated in one day was about five pages. The work required an immense amount of concentration and creativity; it was exhilarating and exhausting.

Often, between the second and third hour, I would hit a stride. That is to say, I could “hear” a sentence or phrase internally in Turkish, take it in meaning, pause for a time, and cast it into draft-English. The metaphor that comes to mind is “breathing.” Literary translation of long novels is marathon-paced work. If I could keep the pace and establish a rhythm, before long I’d begin, for lack of a better term, “channeling” the narrative. This meant I was comfortably synthesizing language registers and was able to anticipate the direction of the prose and plot. Rather than “reading” per se, I was listening and hearing epistemological units that I whispered or spoke into English. I was an amanuensis. Interestingly, I could take in sections of Turkish and convert it in such a way that when I went back to read a page of English that I’d translated, I’d have the uncanny feeling that I was reading it for the very first time. Later, I attributed this to it actually being the first time I saw the English words, whereas I had only been engaged in listening, engaged with the aural meaning itself, while translating. At such times, I felt somewhat like a medium, one who wasn’t just translating on the level of words, but was transferring meaning. The words themselves were like casing or skin. I wasn’t translating step-by-step or mot-à-mot, but converting the meaning of the prose.

Before Pamuk and I went over the pages together, professor of Ottoman literature Walter Andrews graciously commented on my draft. Pamuk and I reviewed the manuscript in two- to three-hour sessions where we covered 80 to 100 pages at a time, addressing questions as we went. George Andreou then read the manuscript again, making additional changes. I slowly and meticulously read the first and second sets of galley pages, which were FedExed to me in Istanbul in winter-spring 2001, going over 25 to 35 pages a day. The manuscript was also lightly proofread at Knopf.
The title was not of my choosing, but the editor’s. I would have preferred to use the word “crimson,” which comes from the same Arabic root as the Turkish word kırmızı.

“Do I Have a Style of My Own?”

Translating from the Turkish, a non-Indo-European language with a grammar that puts the verb at the end of even the longest sentence, isn’t a task for everybody; Erdağ Göknar deserves praise for the cool, smooth English in which he has rendered Pamuk’s fine-spun sentences, passionate art appreciations, slyly pedantic debates, eerie urban scenes…and exhaustive inventories.

– John Updike

The murderer in MNR both desires and eschews style. His motivation for killing Enishte Effendi is a combination of self-doubt and the revelation that the aesthetic past will not persist in any meaningful way, but will be lost to history due to a host of political and social forces – one style gradually replacing another. Translation is also an aesthetic relation to a host of political and social forces – one style gradually replacing another. The murderer’s motive for killing Elegant Effendi is that he claims the murderer’s aesthetic is blasphemous. The murderer has two victims: he kills one for being overly bound to Eastern tradition and one for being too slavish to Western innovation. Much like Pamuk himself, he tries to juxtapose, synthesize, or transcend both. Once these obstacles are out of the way, the murderer moves on to the real task at hand: trying (and failing) to depict himself, in an aesthetic experiment with portraiture. Pamuk’s own “mixed style” in Turkish, at times pushing the bounds of grammar, reveals his response to the presence of a number of stylistic options: mix them as if you were mixing colors to produce an unusual hue. The style of my translation works in a similar mode, wherein vernacular, slang, jargon, natural dialogue, and formal or historical language meet. The mellifluous tones established by Turkish vowel harmony – and its phrasal cadences of rhyme and near-rhyme – cannot be turned out in the metered steps of English. Assonance, alliteration, and syllabics came to my aid. Pamuk had transposed the visual aesthetic discussed in the pages of the novel into the musical aesthetic of phrasal if not lyrical Turkish prose, which I, in turn, worked to transpose into the key of English. Harmony and phraseology were vital to my work, sound being an integral part of the process of translation. The first line of the novel provides a simple example:

Şimdi bir ölüyüm ben, bir ceset, bir kuyunun dibinde.

(pronounced: shim-DÍ bir ö-LÚ-üüm ben, bir je-SET, bir ku-yu-NUN di-bin-DE.)

The murderer/master artist is divided, afraid of being a blasphemer, but drawn to aesthetic innovation. He targets both his accuser (Elegant) and the one who duped him into
drawing images removed from their stories (Enishte), and he still naively thinks everything can persist as before. His fate for his countless transgressions (and translations?), moral and aesthetic both, is quite literally, the separation of body and mind, of tenor and vehicle, of content and form (even of West and East). Meaning is stripped from form, and the mysterious book in which image precedes text remains unfinished. It is left to the author/translator to redeem and undo this violence with another textual and interpretive incarnation: “My Name is Re(a)d.”

**Translation/Transnation**

　*Perhaps one day someone from a distant land will listen to this story of mine. Isn’t this what lies behind the desire to be inscribed in the pages of a book?... I, too, long to speak with you who are observing me from whom knows which distant time and place.*

*MNR,* the fourth Orhan Pamuk novel to appear in the U.S., was his breakaway book in English, and it took over a year to translate. It’s his first novel to sell more in English (about 200,000 copies) than it did in Turkish, and it put him into a literary constellation that not only includes great authors who have emerged out of national traditions like Naguib Mahfouz, Amin Maalouf, Tariq Ali, Milorad Pavić, and Salman Rushdie, but also modernist and post-modernist writers such as Thomas Mann, Umberto Eco, Faulkner, Borges, Calvino, and Joyce. Neither author nor editor nor translator expected it to do so well. Prior to *MNR,* Pamuk’s books sold around 10,000 in English. The combination of a new editor (George Andreou), new translator (Erdağ Göknar), new publisher (Pamuk left FSG for Knopf), good reviews (John Updike, Richard Eder, Dick Davis, etc.), and luck changed all that and extended the author’s horizons far beyond just one national tradition. *MNR* made the cover of the *New York Times* Book Review and received positive reviews in the *New Yorker,* the *Times Literary Supplement,* and the *Guardian.* It won the 2003 Dublin IMPAC literary award, the largest monetary prize for a single work of fiction, and one which is unique in acknowledging the translator with a quarter of that prize money. Both the sinister and dark murder scene on the cover of the Faber & Faber edition and the brightly colored Orientalist pastiche of the Knopf version were certain to draw the attention of browsers in bookstores and at websites. Pamuk, henceforth, is a transnational author, the transnational being an allegory for translation. One indication is the influence of the novel on other writers; *MNR* has had a direct influence on recent novels such as Kunal Basu’s *The Miniaturist* (2004), Brenda Rickman Vantrease’s *The Illuminator* (2005), Louis De Bernières’ *Birds Without Wings* (2004), and Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* (2002). The English version of the Turkish multiplied one of Pamuk’s own themes into other contexts: multiplicity of perspective. (For example, the use of the Ottoman context explodes the limits of the nation-state, whose two-dimensionality is transformed through the inclusion of ever-increasing perspectives.) *MNR* reintroduced all of Pamuk’s work to an English readership. In recognition of this work, Pamuk paid me an unforgettable compliment when he stated to an audience at Duke University in 2002 that the English version was better than the Turkish.

Orhan Pamuk shares some affinities with the postmodern that are directly tied to his translatability and transnationalism. Firstly, he does question the metanarrative of Turkist secular nationalism in its various manifestations and thus is clearly post-national on one hand, though engaged in the work of interrogating national transformations. This is evident in his treatment of the historical, and particularly Ottoman history, which broadly contains any number of elite national “taboos” including multi-ethnicity, multi-lingualism, multi-culturalism, cosmopolitanism, homosexuality and religion. His use of narrative to destabilize fixed identities has been a characteristic of his work since *The White Castle.*

But postmodernity has its own distinct articulations in Turkey, the Balkans, and the Middle East. In the Turkish context, “modern” is part of the on-going project of progress, associated with an elite (self-colonizing?) movement to rapidly “civilize” society that borrowed from both the Soviet example and Europe. Having come of age during the second or third generation of this secular movement, Pamuk aims to challenge its excesses. By the time he was thirty, he witnessed three military coups that were meant to pull state and society back into the parochial line of modernism begun in the 1920s. The conflict between his own cosmopolitanism and the legacy of nationalist rigidity led him to question and deconstruct the latter through his fiction. He is postmodern on this count and others which directly relate to translation:

His first two novels, *Jevdet Bey and Sons* and *The Silent House,* are historical reassessments of the Republic in the twentieth century in distinct realist and modernist narrative styles, respectively. Tellingly, neither has appeared in English versions. Not until his third novel, *The White Castle,* does he begin to write in an idiom and form that could be characterized as “transnational.” Here, he uses Ottoman history as a means to interrogate self and society; though the novel is set in the seventeenth century, it is allegorical rather than historical *per se*
and relies on the slippage between multiple narrators and narrative to establish its meta-historical themes and plot. It is perhaps no accident that this was the first of his novels to be translated into English, for it contained mediating meta-historical and -fictional (“postmodern”) elements (master-slave allegory, imperio-national historiography, an interrogation of narrative identity, the “clash of civilizations,” intimations of autobiography, dramatic mystery, etc.) that were indeed multicultural and transnational, and thereby, inherently translatable.

Afterward, Pamuk developed as a litterateur in two directions at once: as an experimental technician of narrative and as a psycho-historical anthropologist of national culture and identity. It was in no small part his techniques of narrative interrogation that ensured his ongoing translatability: The Black Book and The New Life make use of doubleness, imitation, neo-Sufic themes, cultural archaeologies, and allusions to Eastern and Western narrative tradition to establish a space of psycho-historical fiction that demonstrated the integral role played by narrative in the construction of individual, social, religious and historical identities. But not until MNR does he articulate yet another level of transnationalism: the aestheticization of the “exotic East” and various manifestations of Islam. Here the national culture component of his work is expanded from the locales of a Venice or an Istanbul to include Persia and Central Asia as well, though the main setting is still imperial Istanbul (cosmopolitanism will accommodate such sweeps). In this case his multivalent narrative interrogations reinscribe a latent Orientalism (albeit one which is part of the repressions of the national legacy that Pamuk excavates). These gestures contain an inclusive, outward-looking neo-Ottoman Muslim cultural development in direct contrast to the exclusive inward-looking aspect of Turkish Republican nationalism represented by the 1980 coup. MNR exhibits its postmodernity in a number of ways through its expressions of Ottoman history, its autobiographical self-reflexivity, its fragmented points of view, its use of a miniaturist’s aesthetic as form, its scholarly and philosophical aspirations, its intertextual use of “Eastern” forms of the Koranic parable, mystic romance, and fable, its revelation of the plot through detective work, its focus on the everyday, and its frequent allegorical references to self and nation. It could be said that one of the significant aspects of MNR is that it manipulates the discourses of Orientalism in some measure to explode the limits of nationalism. This is, in one sense, a historico-cultural parallel to the ongoing emergence of the Republic into the transnational arena of international and EU geopolitics.

A further point about translatability is illustrated by Updike in his review, wherein he domesticates Pamuk by comparing each of his novels, even the first two untranslated ones, to a well-known international author of the Western canon: Thomas Mann (Jevdet Bey and Sons), Virginia Woolf/William Faulkner (The Silent House), Borges/Calvino (The White Castle), Joyce (The Black Book), Kafka (The New Life), and A.S. Byatt/Umberto Eco (My Name is Red). This act of domestication places him in a constellation that, needless to say, is transnational.

His most recent novel, Snow, addresses very timely themes of the headscarf ban, political Islam, and terrorism. This is coupled with an ironic portrayal of the way ideology overcomes his characters, who are nonetheless quick to change perspectives. Politics and poetics make for an engaging novel whose setting is Eastern Turkey (Kars), but whose meaning is bound up in an international conversation about the nation, the military, women’s rights, and religion—all persistent and recurring issues of global socio-politics.

This discussion, then, might provide a clue as to why it so difficult for Turkish literature to survive out of its cultural context. There has always been one major Turkish writer who has represented contemporary Turkish literature in the U.S. If one takes a look at the international zeitgeists that have informed translation from Turkish to English since the establishment of the Republic, three or four names stand out, though many translated works exist. Each generation seems to have its representative of inter-cultural mediation based in particular trans- and inter-national ideologies. Halide Edib Adıvar, able to write in English, was a representative of nationalism and feminism in the post-Ottoman era between 1923 and 1950. Her democratic ideals put her on the wrong side of the Kemalist establishment, forcing her into exile until after Atatürk’s death. Eight of her books, non-fiction and fiction both, appeared in English (some are now being reissued). Nazım Hikmet, persecuted by the state until he was forced to flee the country, espoused international communism and humanism throughout the 1940s, ’50s and early ’60s. He has been widely translated and anthologized and is often mentioned with poets like Pablo Neruda. In the ’60s and ’70s, Yaşar Kemal represented a less ideologically informed socialism based in the minstrel epic (destan), the aşık tradition, and the lives of Anatolian peasants and the struggles of Kurds. As with many writers of this era, he was deemed a political threat. In his variety of “socialist realism,” he is part of the polarized cultural context of what some historians refer to as the Second Republic (1960-1980). In his populism and focus on the peasant class,
he is easily placed in the Cold War context that divided Turkish society and gave rise to civil unrest between right and left. Again, he held a strong international appeal. Since the 1980s, in the neo-liberal context that emerged after the last major military coup, it has been Orhan Pamuk who represents an international aspect emerging out of the Turkish national tradition. His work reflects a (some would argue, “politically disengaged”) postmodernism that is yet grounded in national culture. As stated above, his brilliant innovations in narrative are combined with an interrogative gaze back into national or Ottoman history. Pamuk is quick on his feet and able to switch genres and structure, and introduce constant originalities in style. He belongs to the post-1980 “Third Republic,” characterized by transnational integration into global networks.

All of these writers, whose internationality is readily translatable, are also concerned with the relationship between state and identity. They all, in their own ways, espouse critiques of the state and advocate for its accountability to society. But, as should be apparent, Turkish literature in English has little to do with literature in Turkey. The reduction of a literary heritage onto one major writer per generation is an unfortunate reflection of corporate publishing in the U.S. As emphasized in the New York Times after Hungarian novelist Imre Kertesz won the Nobel prize, the American taste for literature-in-translation is very limited. As New Yorker fiction editor Deborah Treisman stated in that article, “the publishing industry has an ingrained fear of translations.” This has at times led to tokenism: the one-writer/one-nation principle of corporate publishing. Lawrence Venuti suggests why in his book The Scandals of Translation:

Perhaps the most important factor in the current marginality of translation is its offense against the prevailing concept of authorship. Whereas authorship is generally defined as originality, self-expression in a unique text, translation is derivative, neither self-expression nor unique: it imitates another text. Given the reigning concept of authorship, translation provokes the fear of inauthenticity, distortion, contamination…. Translation may also provoke the fear that the foreign author is not original, but derivative, fundamentally dependent on pre-existing materials.

Of course, many other Turkish authors have been translated, but often their work does not take hold in foreign contexts.

Between Author and Translator

It was Satan who first said ‘I’! It was Satan who adopted a style!
It was Satan who separated East from West!

Orhan Pamuk plays with the notion of translation-as-authority in The White Castle, a novel that emerges out of dispirited Faruk Darvinoğlu’s act of translating an Ottoman manuscript he has found in the archive of Gebze. His methods are telling: “after reading a couple of sentences from the manuscript I kept on one table, I’d go to another table in the other room where I kept my papers and try to narrate in today’s idiom the sense of what remained in my mind.” The image of having to shuttle between two desks in two separate rooms and record in the Turkish Latin alphabet only what is retained of the Ottoman, is an apt metaphor to describe translation as a mediating body in-between. But what kind of translation is this with which to frame a novel?

Darvinoğlu’s act of translation connotes the horizon of nationalism as manifested in the alphabet reform of 1928/9 and the state-controlled language reforms of the twentieth century. The novel is one of identification; the “gap” between “texts” is the cultural revolution. The subtext is the messy, uncatalogued archive or the seventeenth century Ottoman Empire, a kind of wildly signifying unconscious (which, returning to Lacan, is “structured like a language”). In the wake of the 1980 coup, Darvinoğlu (“son of Darwin”) is trapped, it is the third coup of his adult life, he’s been removed from his position at the university and has taken to drinking. In this state of dejection, through his access to the Gebze archive, Darvinoğlu performs his Houdini-like escape through a translation of Ottoman history. It is, seemingly, the only transgression left to him. The narrative of The White Castle removes us from the confinements brought on by the 1980 military coup. Pamuk, as stated, experienced three coups before he was thirty. His character, Darvinoğlu, reminds us that the geographies that are crossed through translation are not just linguistic, but political and social, historical and psychological. They involve navigating and trying to escape incarcerating discourses of Orientalism and nationalism; even using the former to subvert the latter (the narrative trick he makes use of in My Name is Red). In other words, the neo-imperial/national grip on 1980s Turkey, in the final decade of the Cold War, might be counterbalanced by another imperial discourse: that of the Ottoman, which in order to be understood, needs to be translated as well.

The two main characters in The White Castle are above all, translators. The Venetian slave translates his culture to
his Ottoman master and vice versa. As an indication of the process of being articulated into language and then again translated for one another across cultural boundaries, the two main characters mirror-gaze: “‘Come, let us look in the mirror together.’ I looked, and under the raw light of the lamp saw once more how much we resembled one another….The two of us were one person! This now seemed to me an obvious truth.”\(^{20}\) In fact, they are so adept, that they translate themselves out of fixed sites of identity. This process, the movement from division to unity and back, fundamentally questions distinct notions of “target” and “source,” “self” and “other,” or “author” and “translator.” Master and slave engage in sessions of communal writing, and finally they begin to pass for each other such that we don’t know which is which. The point is not whether they indeed do switch (on which count many reviews are misleading), but rather that they are indistinguishable. This mysterious process describes translation.

Three novels later comes *MNR*, set in the sixteenth century, yet still informed by a multivalent gesture that questions the hegemonic site of present-day Turkey. In its multiplicity of narrators and its aesthetic self-consciousness, the novel becomes Pamuk’s “large canvas.” Here, the translations are multifold, occurring furiously and incessantly between image and text, life and death, God and man, man and woman, color and speech, object and consciousness, miniature and portrait, second and third dimension, etc. The redeeming unity in *MNR*, however, is an aesthetic one of style-in-narration. The failed creation of the illuminated manuscript in the plot is redeemed by the author’s creation of a text that is ‘beyond depiction’: the novel he has written. Narrative redemption is the moral of Pamuk’s world (and integral to it is translation). Many of his works contain the leitmotif a failed or “missing” book or manuscript, whether a source of inscrutable inspiration whose meaning changes depending on how it is emplotted, or translated/rewritten (*The White Castle*); this absent text is of course coupled with the *doppelganger* of the Pamuk “bestseller” itself.

Pamuk’s authority emerges from nothing other than his act of setting up an aesthetic relation between narratives: The Ottoman manuscript/*The White Castle*, a mysterious book/*The New Life*, the Sultan’s secret book/*My Name is Red*, a book of poems/*Snow*, a draft/its revision, an encoding/a re-encoding, the original/its translation, etc. Like Darvinoglu, Pamuk translates post-1980s Turkish dilemmas through the medium of an Ottoman context. The next translation, or interpretation, succeeds through the ticklish tension between itself and the previous version.

The author is the first translator, the translator reauthorizes in the ritual act of renaming the entire text. These author-twins are in one sense imitating each other. This recalls Pamuk’s adaptation in *The Black Book* of the Rumi parable of the mural contest wherein the artist who erected a mirror to reflect his opponent’s masterpiece emerges the winner (“Naturally the prize went to the artist who’d installed the mirror”).\(^{21}\) Translation is putting up that mirror.

This brings up an important theme in *MNR*: the tension between a two-dimensional surface (the painting, the mirror, the page), and three-dimensional self-reflexivity (looking at the self/object from the outside perspective). The third dimension is hermeneutical. It is often a meta-historical or meta-fictional interpretation provided by the reader or perhaps the narrator. Allow me to illustrate this point: Ottoman historian Cemal Kafadar describes the sixteenth century diary of a dervish as being part of a tradition of Ottoman arts and letters that did not develop a third-dimensional, self-reflexive perspective, but rather was “characterized by a miniaturist’s flat depiction of neatly contoured figures that are not quite distinguishable from each other except in their social functions.”\(^{22}\) Elsewhere, referring to the third dimension of interpretation, he states: “There is no third dimension in any of these narratives, no obvious distance between the narrator and the narrated self.”\(^{23}\) The horizon of identification implied in Kafadar’s analysis is a group, social, or corporate identification. If individuality emerges at all, it is only a partial, half-born emergence. Pamuk emulates this tradition. By structuring his novel with this aesthetic guide, Pamuk is coming back to the overarching problematic of what it means to translate (convey?) the individual or artist out of society or nation, out of the restrictions of guild or religious sect. This act is necessary to manuscript/novel production (doesn’t the “author” always emerge at the end of a Pamuk novel?).

Translation intensifies and multiplies these very themes, and the process inherently changes the meanings of texts by placing them in other contexts. Like a trope whose meaning changes depending on how it is em plotted, the novel “turns out” new meanings in new English-language contexts. The novel teaches us how to read the illuminated-manuscript-in-words by tempting the reader with various “third-dimension” or triangulating points-of-view and through juxtapositions of fragmented first-person vignettes, which are open to the reader’s power of interpretation. The characters are repeatedly described as having an awareness of two worlds: they at once look at the sixteenth century world that they inhabit as well as have their eye on the “reader,” a marker for current time. The text has consciousness of the reader. The act of reading, as
acknowledged in the narrative, is one of mediating between two cultural contexts. Pamuk, as author, uses the Ottoman past to achieve his triangulating perspective, to take a critical look at the present. By so doing, he is naturally playing with Orientalist expectations and redirecting them toward national themes; yet, what is ultimately revealed in the novel is not an exotic world but a lesson in how to “read/translate” and understand the other, the “old Turk.” The other is embedded in the miniature, which on first glance seems “off” because it lacks a familiar perspective. Master Osman’s lament at the end of the novel, the anxiety and lament of obscurity, is what Pamuk is writing against:

Hundreds of years hence, men looking at our world through the illustrations we’ve made won’t understand anything. Desiring to take a closer look, yet lacking the patience, they might feel the embarrassment, the joy, the deep pain and pleasure of observation I now feel as I examine pictures in this freezing Treasury – but they’ll never truly know.24

The melancholy of remaining unknowable permeates the narrative. The dilemmas experienced by the characters, issues of style, ideological affront (whether to Islam or the nation), breaking with aesthetic tradition, money and fame, family, love, authority, belonging, jealousy, rage, all relate to present-day Turkey, and specifically, Orhan Pamuk’s world of the Turkish author. The author creates narrative, the translator recreates and proliferates narrative, allowing for additional, third dimensional perspectives or interpretations. In their aesthetic relation to each other, author and translator transmit knowledge of another worldview. As for Pamuk’s aesthetic, more than love story, detective story, philosophy of art, or historical fiction, it’s a narrative of transnational postmodernism that liberates the author/translator from constraints of modern-day time, geography, history, and ideology. This allows him to do what he does best, that is, pen elegies about separation, lament the loss of golden ages, interrogate identity, valorize Istanbul as the cosmopolitan site of narrative production – above all emphasizing internationality. For at the end of every Pamuk novel we come face to face with the author-as-translator himself, who seems to reaffirm the fact that the work of narrative transmission is cooperative and ongoing, vital and never finished.

Notes


5 A typical Pamuk sentence in its original syntax (hyphens indicate suffixes): “Book of Kings poet Firdusi, Ghazni-to came Shah Mahmud’s palace-of the poets-by a provincial as belittled-being-after its first three lines very difficult a rhyme-with-finished-that a quatrain no one complete-could-that its last line uttered-just-when-he I there, Firdusi’s caftan on-was-I.” (And in its final version: “I appeared in Ghazni when Book of Kings poet Firdusi completed the final line of a quatrain with the most intricate of rhymes, besting the court poets of Shah Mahmud, who ridiculed him as being nothing but a peasant.”)


9 Toward the end of the novel the murderer is decapitated, though his head continues to narrate, describing what it sees.


11 I have taught My Name is Red three times in seminars on Ottoman Identity and Cultural History at Duke University. The novel is both a great challenge and full of provocative resonances with new scholarship on the Ottoman Empire.

12 I use this term “meta-historical” in allusion to the theorization of Hayden White, who analyzes the function of linguistic structures in historical narratives to uncover

13 This paradox between the Ottoman imperial legacy and the nation constitutes a theme in Republican literature that can be even traced back to the canonized writers of Turkish literature. This is why MNR is even comparable to works like Adıvar’s The Clown and His Daughter or Tanpınar’s A Mind at Peace in terms of gender, aesthetic structure, and the transnational/cosmopolitan.

14 This is a latent tension in much Turkish historical literature.


20 Ibid., p. 82.


23 Ibid., p. 138.


Bibliography


The Whore of Babylon  (Babilonia Fahisesi)

Gülseli İnal
translated by Sidney Wade and Serya Yeşilçay

LAYER I
RH/102.9055

It is said:

At one end of the triangular garden the crimson threads of the body slipped into the depths
Released themselves in the newly-connected moss spiral law of the eyes
With the weight of heavy heavy stones
The wing of the sun-god’s bird guards the pharaoh’s door the centuries-old melody continues
Swearing over and over to Ra
With the lion bull eagle nature of the Sphinxes the most exalted
Map of sin opened
In the Nile Valley the exodus has just begun from the house of the dead
The river has always nourished the unknown
The lotus stirred in secret towards a single crossing
And so very forgetful drank up all the colors

A pink girl
Her yellow red red hair cut off
Her back slashed with a black moon
In my face the earth was forbidden and in the thick book
The poisonous herb lived on
There was oblivion

LAYER III
IR/192.22

O white wind haired ocean messenger
Your marble arms
Even beyond marble
Your hair fused with foreign time
Ruined with a word on the tip of your broken lips
Now in the sieve of your transparent soul
In your ruin extend your red rudder

In all the temples of the earth
My heart stopped suddenly
A whisper fell among the oleanders
From behind the diminishing whirlwind
Still a solomon sorrow

Sanctuary
When that star ship embarked on its journey
Yearnings were heard in its twin soul
When that enigmatic lid was opened
Hundreds of corpses
From this civilization

Heavy blue reptiles
Teeming in the waters of the western ocean
Dawdle on the fringes of plantlife
A handful of imaginary men
Accumulated above
The sharpest glances of that body
As over there born from the desire of waves water child

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WATER CHILD

Suddenly grew up with the sea pressing at its back
The western water avoided itself heavy flowing muddy
On an ivory seabed
My head beyond the winds
Hot sorrow

Baalbek, deep waters of your soul’s glazed walls
Limed with earth
With the word
Clay and word
Doused with hatred
We were left still breathless

As soon as the secret word rises from the metallic body
That deep orifice
Burning for roots
Thousands of years ago I was like this
My name engraved on the captive pane

The golden sound of the chain broken
Sinks to the bottom
The darkest mire
With the temple slaves
Terra
Du
Sum
Baalbek was founded on the old shore alas this was a desert
Completely filled with jewels
Everyone who entered
Had every wish granted
And were transported with genie mediators

SUPPORT POINTS FOR A DESIRE TO RISE

I found myself for a time
In the slender world dust web
Later my footprints who and how
This way for ages
Whose rain and wind could not erase
This way

On the unembroidered shores of pure desire
At the bottom of the oldest cement wall
Washed also came along
Someone’s white-faced
Mildewed love
In the year 7000 of the Christian era
In the days when water was heavy as iron
Everything suddenly cloaked in its oldest form
Colorless faceless
Plasterless
As if a charcoal being
Percolated in as far as the fire layer
Vegetation yellowed and wilted
Maybe a red rider
Maybe YOU
Were passing through meridians
Through these balls of dust
The thousand petalled lotus
And your coal dust was your home

They were full moon days
I watched my old shadow
Come to the place of sharp light
It lightly compelled and
Settled itself inside my body
With the decisiveness of a sharp knife
As if it were a river from a clear spring

Then an all-effacing light
Came and colonized my consciousness
I found myself inside a colorless mountain range
Though the only thing left shining behind
Were my nails
A poison-colored sparrow hawk on the cliff
Blended in with the claws
And that sand that rock and I and that bird
Nothing left behind unerased
And the voices
Living under the rocks
The voices of pearl races
I heard . . . I had forgotten everything all over again . . .

May 97
An Interview with Önder Otçu

Edward Foster

Önder Otçu did his undergraduate work at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey, and his graduate work in social anthropology at the University of Oslo, Norway. A translator from Norwegian, English, and Portuguese into Turkish, and from Turkish into English, he is also a critic and novelist. His much praised translations of works by the distinguished Turkish poet İlhan Berk are collected in Berk’s Selected Poems (2004). Önder Otçu was a resident fellow at the MacDowell Artists’ Colony in 2002. He lives in Istanbul.

Edward Foster is the author of several books of criticism, literary history, and poetry, most recently Mahrem: Things Men Should Do for Men. He is the founding editor of the journal Talisman and Talisman House Publishers. He directs the division of humanities and social sciences at the Stevens Institute of Technology.

EF: Perhaps the most quoted statement about translation is Robert Frost’s, “Poetry is what is lost in translation.” Is there in fact something in poetry that can survive translation?

ÖO: Robert Frost is right. What he says about poetry in the context of translation is a nice way of defining what makes a poem a good one. Quoting Saint Exupéry’s “War Pilot,” just as in every man, there is something further than the “material” with which a man is made, something which that building material cannot explain, and which, in its escaping all explanation, constitutes the most critical aspect of a man’s making, there is also something in every poem, which the material constitution of a poem cannot explain. I think this thing, this crazy little thing, is what makes a poem a poem.

It’s also what Frost says is lost in translation. And it really is lost in translation, in my translations, too, because translation is an experience with language at that point when it first enters the world. What we might call “primacy of experience” seems to be the key issue here. The poet has primary access to the experience of his/her poem before it takes place in language. But the translator has access to the language only, not the primary experience itself.

What is that experience? Sometimes words behave in ways that we, their users, cannot comprehend; they look at other words, sometimes extending an arm to them, sometimes refusing to extend an arm, and sometimes extending an arm but at the last moment not actually touching other words. This kind of relationship seems to be lost in translation. It’s as if you were a photographer and photographed someone’s smile. It’s not possible to photograph that certain smile twice. It’s never quite the same a second time.

EF: I imagine the problems involved in translation must be even greater for those like you who are transmitting poems from one culture to another that is radically different. I’d guess it’s one thing to go from, say, German to English and something very, very different to go from Turkish to English.

ÖO: I’ve never considered translation as a challenge that involves moving something from one language to another. This may be due to the feeling I have as a reader with extensive experience with poetry in English (a little less so in Norwegian, much less so in Portuguese). I can try to understand a poem in English, but English for me is a second language, a foreign language.

The challenge, the difficulty, in translating lies elsewhere. If I have to translate prose, for instance — my own prose from English to Turkish or vice versa — I feel more challenged. I guess this is because prose is more or less linear and horizontal. Grammar in prose is like a big brother: you can’t do away with it. But poetry is less linear or horizontal, less dependent on conventional grammar, than it is vertical, multi-layered. In his poem “anyone lived in a pretty how town,” for example, cummings writes, “Wish by spirit and if by yes.” But what is possible here in English is not always possible in other languages.
A great mind can change the way time is organized in language by, in effect, drawing circles with language, reasoning circularly (as İlhan Berk does sometimes), or by compressing information, which is what Ece Ayhan calls a “hermetic” or “algorithmic” way of conveying a message. According to Webster’s, “algorithm” has to do with finding solutions through a finite number of steps that frequently involves the repetition of an operation; the poet does not have to repeat the linguistic operation himself. The attentive reader can do that for him/herself.

In one of his poems, Ayhan says “finger kid question,” but he says this only after having established in earlier poems how, simply by raising a finger when other kids remain silent, a particular kid can ask a daring question in order to challenge authority. Think of a single finger in a class. If it is the teacher’s, the meaning is one thing; if it is a student’s, it’s another. You see, this kind of relationship is made possible in an ongoing way in Ayhan’s poetry, and the reader is never surprised when she or he sees the phrase “finger kid question.” But this kind of relationship requires a vertical understanding of the information as given in the language. The poet is there more to provide the materials and context for one’s personal reading than to write poems sufficient in themselves.

Great poets never provide too much language. They depend on the reader’s use of language; they leave language to him or her. It seems to me that poets are interested in constructing new relationships in language, and if poets need relationships that have already been registered, they simply allude to them. And that, precisely that, is what I find difficult in translating poetry.

Translating a poem is, for me, part of the broader experience of understanding it. I translate poems because I am a literary critic, not because I am a translator.

**EF:** But what about deep cultural differences? I should think that moving a text written in Turkish into English would require adjustments no less profound than bringing Americans to a recognition of the difference between life in Dallas and life in Istanbul.

**ÖO:** Translation serves one of the most challenging of human minds — the one that wants to read, to think about, and to understand what is written in a foreign tongue. The translator has to assume that — geographically, culturally, linguistically, psychologically, individually — different people have minds that are equal, equivalent, and compatible. The need to communicate has always gone hand in hand with the need to be different. At the risk of sounding like a post-modernist, I would say that cultures are in fact as incommensurable as are individuals, even those who belong to the same culture and who speak the same language.

When you say “adjustments,” though, I take it that you are referring to the mental processes that take place in the translator’s mind, in his or her own unique solitude. With that, we are at the heart of William S. Burroughs’s “interzone,” the ultimate space between two totally abstract, transhistorical, all-embracing, supercultural forms of existence. For example, the distinctions between “he,” “she,” and “it” in English are a major problem for the Turkish translator, since Turkish has only one pronoun, “O,” for all three. When one translates “O” from Turkish, one has to sexualize/genderize it in English. In other words, when a writer and/or poet says, “I love O,” s/he could do so without revealing his/her sexual orientation. “I love O” in Turkish is, furthermore, never the equivalent of “I love him” or “I love her” in English, since if one were a man and said the former, he would be indicating a broad social category, whereas in Turkish he would simply be talking about his feelings of compassion and/or desire. In Turkish, he would be talking about himself, not a “him” or his “lover.”

To cite another example, in Norwegian there is only one word for being “alike” and “equal,” while in Turkish “equal,” “alike,” “similar,” and “matching” are all different words. As a result, in Turkish, but not in Norwegian, one can have an experience that is “not like” another but, in another sense, is equal to it.

Ernest Hemingway, in “Fascism is a Lie,” his speech to the American Writers Congress in 1937, summarized the question succinctly: can my experience in this culture, language, and mind be made to feel like your experience in your culture, language, and mind. In the preface to my book of translations of İlhan Berk’s poems, I use the metaphor of unlocking doors from inside to describe the process of translation. The translator moves “like a cat-burglar” between languages, and the more effective s/he is, the less visible s/he becomes; in turn, the less visible s/he is, the better the translation overcomes differences.

**EF:** Given the profoundly different readings among English-speaking critics of even canonical, widely studied writers, I wonder what it is, really, that can survive in all
serious readings or translations of a particular work. If those who have committed themselves to a given writer can’t agree, even in broad outline, on the most fundamental aspects of a work, what can we expect an American reader to find in the books of, say, Bilge Karasu? The average American, I would wager, has very little significant, personal acquaintance with the Turkish milieu out of which his books evolve.

You had a residency at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. How could one expect the average resident of a small New England community like Peterborough to imagine the physical environment Karasu evokes in, for instance, *Death in Troy*, to say nothing of the subtleties of its cultural traditions?

ÖO: Bilge Karasu’s work combines a sagacious modesty with a beautifully clear language of mind, and this is as hard to convey in a translation as it took to bring it about in the original. The problem may become more intricate in *Death in Troy*, given the unassuming narrator’s sense of justice in situations about which other characters have been mistaken.

Every single thing offers by its very nature its own criterion for justice in what it does to others and, in turn, deserves from them.

A poet or a writer is never the person one would like to think s/he is. A poet or a writer is rather an area, a territory, the domain of a particular language through which we pass and then leave behind. As Foucault argues in “What is an Author?,” a poet or a writer is whatever the language chooses to do through its user. In response to your question “What is it, really, that survives in any authoritative way in a translation?” my answer is “whatever it is that the chemistry of the text makes possible for a certain translator.”

A recent translation of a poem by Nazım Hikmet includes the line “I love you just like saying I am alive.” In fact Hikmet never ever said anything like that despite the fact that the line is correctly translated, literally and grammatically, from the Turkish. It seems to me that the translation lacks Hikmet’s very proud, masculine, revolutionary voice trying to appear humble, but never fully succeeding, as he seeks to deny his own powers in front of the lady he loves. He was an aristocrat, a daring man, and a Turk; how could it be adequate to translate him as saying being alive is like loving someone?! I would translate the line as “Loving you, I dare do, just as I dare say I am alive.” But is this what is in the poem, or is it my interpretation of the poem in relation to the poet?

Another translator might be able to add a little Elvis-touch, ending with “Love you, oh I do, so alive as I do, and say and feel you.” At the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, I met tremendous people for whom understanding how life vibrates precedes any attempt to talk about it or to interpret it in writing or to translate the forms with which it is represented in language. It’s this sort of thing — things that do not seem to be related to translation — that occupies a translator of great texts many days and nights (the color outside the curtains changes, and he or she says, “Oh, it’s bluish again”).

EF: What are your plans for future translations?

ÖO: My plans for future translations include going out and buying a pack of cigarettes at six in the morning, strolling down an empty street that looks like one in a Botero picture, the word “marriage marriage marriage” constantly recurring in the mind like a matrix imposed by the street. And then my mind leaps forward to the problem about the “sign” and what it is, and how someone else’s desire to make me recognize “it” effects my pleasure in using it. Then, if I find a satisfactory answer to the problem of the “sign,” only then, thinking about whether or not I have calibrated myself sufficiently to translate into English some long-forgotten poem by Bilge Karasu, which has been hidden at some point inside myself, am I ready to set to work. Or hearing cummings calling me “Wish by spirit and if by yes,” “Wish by spirit and if by yes,” “Wish by spirit and if by yes” ceaselessly, over and over again, I am ready to work at translating it into Turkish. Who knows which will get me?
Potatoes (Patates)

İlhan Berk
translated by Önder Otçu

I don’t like the potato. But all the world consumes it; it is grown everywhere, knows no boundaries, belongs to an international family. Not a man with stature, the potato does not belong to a particular class and is a socialist. He has all the quantities of a democrat. And this you can’t disparage. I do not like the potato, but I love its shape. On the other hand, artists have not used it significantly as an image in their paintings, say, the way grapes, pears, apples merit their attention; but regarding its shape, I bet it will soon make its way into the art world, magnificently. It’s oval, spherical. The oval and the sphere are among the most indispensable shapes of modern art. These involve simplicity in the simplest way. Is this true only of its shape? How about its color? It has the most saturated earth color, and because of its relationship with the earth, no other plant can compete with the potato. What a hard worker in the underground! It carries out its duty quietly with the kind of wisdom that is particular to the prophets. From the soil it yells:

– Hey! The Ground! Hear me?

but this does not lead to disobedience! It is sagacious, prophet-like. Furthermore, it is durable, by no means comparable to apples paintings are filled with in full decay. Nor does it remain unchanging as its shape would suggest; it does change; it spreads out, branches out, sprouts. Well, what else would an artist wish? The onion, too, has these qualities (and has not appeared in paintings much either.) It is worth mentioning that onions and potatoes are siblings. I do not like the potato, perhaps because it cannot maintain life unaided. It changes shape, and as for its use, it always mediates between things. For the potato kind to join the hodgepodge of dinner is enough life. Seeing it, and thinking of its place in the world, you feel potatoes are a host of the same thing. All it does is share…share one thing, which is its own being, losing it, annulling it, eradicating it.

You see, the potato has no personality.

I don’t like the potato.

Appendix, 1988

Dear Potatoes, I am jotting down this appendix because I disparaged and blacklisted you too much. I apologize to you this late afternoon in the September of 1988, after so many years. You know, I blamed you for not maintaining your personality and, also, for complicating things. I begrudged you, only you, the tiniest appreciation while I was known to be the one who praised so many ordinary pleasures of this world. I was furious and my anger was all about the way you viewed yourself as a good-for-nothing, did not take care of and even effaced yourself and eventually let others plunder you.

But today, after much experience, I understand that your true virtue lies in this very ordinariness and this way of sharing until there’s nothing of yourself left. Your true personality has always been there, hidden and fundamental. So, please excuse this ordinary man at your service, whose sensibility is tainted by holding onto personality too much. Give him a hand: a hand that teaches him that it is through this ordinariness and losing oneself that it is possible to make some sense of this world, if that’s possible.
In this essay, I would like to address an overlooked and underrated aspect of the poet Oktay Rifat (1914-1988). Rifat’s lyrical and surreal qualities are widely acknowledged, as is his skillful use of nature and seascape imagery, but here I wish to contemplate a different element of his work. I wish to claim him as a fighter for freedom of expression in every area of life and literature. My focus is particularly on his poem “Freedom Has Hands,” which I see as a political poem and a paradigm of his liberal conviction.

Rifat is not normally considered to be a political poet, but as his son Samih Rifat has acknowledged, “Freedom Has Hands” is a political poem. But before going on to that work, we can get a strong sense of Rifat’s sentiment regarding freedom by looking at a poem that has been much anthologized, “The Embrace.” It is a love poem to freedom and does not need any annotation except to say that it has the incantation of a prayer:

**The Embrace**

Warm me this night,
O my trust in freedom
Wrap me warm
Against my mattress thin and blanket torn;
Out there is unimaginable cold and wind,
Outside – oppression
Torture
Out there – death.
O my trust in freedom
Enter deep
Warm me through this night.
On my palm a place is ready
For your hands,
On my thighs a place
To lean your knees.
Enclose me,
Sheathe me,
Wrap me warm,
O my trust in freedom
Wrap me warm this night.

(Translated by Ruth Christie)

In 1966, when “Freedom Has Hands” was published in Turkey, its title cried out in the prevailing climate of that time. Even more so than the more lyrical “The Embrace,” it is a study of freedom, the only extended one in Rifat’s poetry. The word “freedom” appears in this single poem more often than in the whole of his work. I’d like to quote it in full:

**Freedom Has Hands**

1
Our horses galloped foaming
to the calm sea.

2
What is this flight? Is it the dove’s joy of freedom?

3
It was forbidden to kiss, did you know,
forbidden to think,
forbidden to defend the work force.

4
They’ve picked the fruit from the tree
and they sell it in the market
for as much as they can get,
labour’s broken branches on the ground.

5
Light is blinding, they say,
and freedom is explosive.
Arsonists smash our lamps
and with oily rags set fire to freedom.

As soon as we reach out, they want an explosion,
and they want us to catch fire when we light the flame.
There are mine-fields,
bread and water wait in the darkness.

6
Freedom has hands,
eyes, feet;
to wipe the bloody sweat,
to look at tomorrows,
heading straight for equality.
I’m the cage, you are the ivy;
tangle, tangle as much as you are able!

Love of freedom is this:
once you’re tempted there’s no escape,
it’s a habit that never gets old,
a dream that is truer than reality.

The historic flow of brave herdsmen,
the workers, bees of the universal beehive;
milling round black bread,
brothers who bring freedom to our world.
By that bread the mind is roused from sleep,
our endless night dawns with that bread;
people attain independence with that sun.

This hope is the door to freedom,
half-open to happy days.
This joy is the light of happy days,
gently, timidly its rays strike us.

Come people of my land, show yourselves
like a budding branch at the door of freedom,
and beyond you the sky is brotherly blue.

The first verse especially, and the whole poem in
general, are reminiscent of Nazım Hikmet’s anthemized
poem from “Kuvâyi Milliye” (also known as “The Epic of
the War of Independence”). Rifat seems to use Hikmet’s
poem almost as a subtext, not only with the galloping
theme at the beginning, but also with the “labour” theme
in verse 4, and in the exhortation of the final verse. The
“budding branch” is like the tree in the last verse of
Hikmet’s poem, and of course the “brotherliness” in Rifat
echoes the “fraternity” in Hikmet (both of which are
inadequate translations for *kardesçesine*, which in Turkish
means “like siblings”). Here are Hikmet’s words:

Galloping full-tilt from furthest Asia,
craning its mare’s head to reach the Mediterranean;
this land is ours.

Blood-soaked wrists, teeth clenched, feet bare,
and earth like a silken carpet;
this heaven, this hell is ours.

O shoddy world!
– But once an Orhan Veli lived.
Come, brother Orhan, come,
Take my hands,
Use my eyes.

(Translated by Ruth Christie)

In offering the dead Orhan Veli his hands and eyes,
Rifat is giving Veli the freedom to live again through him.
Thus, both freedom and the freedom to write are handed
on. In verse 8, the poet speaks of the love of freedom being
addictive: “it’s a habit that never gets old, a dream that is
truer than reality.” The ninth verse, with its black bread,
seems to draw in Eastern Europe and Russia. Perhaps the
worker bees refer to Nazım Hikmet’s propagandistic poem
of 1935, “My Poetry”:

I’ve no private means,
no property, no land.
All I have is a pot of honey.
Its colour redder than fire,
a pot of honey!

(Translated by Ruth Christie)
Bread, brotherhood and freedom are also combined in a short Rifat work from *Poems* (1969):

**Bread**

Eleri 113 (II – 51)

At the table where thoughts are harvested. When the strong wind blows, when the grain parts from straw, for bread eaten in brotherhood on the table of freedom – and for more and more bread.

The last verse of “Freedom Has Hands” ends with the “brotherly blue.” I believe that, for Rifat, blue signified freedom: the freedom of sky and sea. In one poem he says, “I can’t say whether the sea is more blue or the sky,” and goes on to caution, “I can’t say whether I know that tomorrow will come.”

Blue sky and blue sea are properties especially characteristic to the Mediterranean. Rifat was a skin-diver and spear fisher. We see traces of this in the first verse of “Dikenli Taşta” (“On Sea Urchin Rock”): “The fish that are my friends,/ I harpooned and threaded on the wire,/ and sold them/ at the fish-seller’s counter.” In an earlier poem, “Sandalda” (“In the Rowing Boat”)—first published in my translation in the *Penguin Book of Turkish Verse*—Rifat suggests that “the blue went to my head,” and the poem ends:

I understand that love of freedom and love of peace are the same as the joy of living.
Our days are fresh with this belief and for this the sky is blue and sparkling, sparkling.

As a skin-diver, Oktay Rifat would have been familiar not only with the blue sea surface, but also the “bluing out” effect of the deep water. Like in sleep, the body is horizontal and the sea becomes a dreamscape with the body buoyant and weightless. I believe the underwater world had an influence on Rifat’s life and poetry: its limpidity, its buoyancy, its fluidity, its depth, its loneliness or solitude, and its silence and freedom.

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**For Oktay Rifat**

*by Richard McKane*

Laws of symmetry in rhyming poetry: the re-versing of conversation in in-verse proportion to extort the secrets of language extant yet secreted for ages, like Rifat’s musical fossils, and those dog-gnawed ossicles, till finally the poet becomes the modern oracle, drugged with words that remain his only obstacle. The poet, Pasternak said, is like a tree, and the leaves falling are like the pages of his poetry. The autumn leave-taking and the spring’s releaf, the winter bereavement and the summer’s brief green triumph are all poetry’s seasons: the axe that fells at random is the only treason.

The dogs buried bones in the forest and jumped over logs. You can rest there and drink the clear-flowing spring of memory, inspiring in conclusion, leaf with tree, page with poetry.

27 March 1973

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Portions of this essay appeared in a presentation to the Oktay Rifat Symposium in Istanbul and were subsequently published in *Oktay Rifat İçin, For Oktay Rifat* (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999) in English and Turkish. I am grateful to Yapı Kredi Yayınları for inviting me to the Symposium and for allowing me to republish these passages in altered form. The poems in this essay are taken chiefly from *Voices of Memory: Selected Poems of Oktay Rifat*, translated by Ruth Christie and Richard McKane, with an Introduction by Talat S. Halman (The Rockingham Press and Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1993; still available). Uncredited translations are my own. Page references to the originals are given in the most recent Adam publications of Oktay Rifat. I am grateful to my co-translator Ruth Christie for her translations of Oktay Rifat and Nazım Hikmet, and to the publishers David Perman of The Rockingham Press and Güven Turan of Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
The Market  (Pazar)
Oktay Rifat
translated by Ruth Christie

They were like barbarian gods
grate and dignified,
with their black clothes and caps
their moustaches and baggy trousers
their shoes made from rubber tires,
waller-hanging kilims graced with deer,
open rolls of cotton prints,
skins of cheese, tomatoes, figs,
in the middle of their big deep baskets.

Shepherd’s Pipe  (Kaval)
Oktay Rifat
translated by Ruth Christie

The day he compared the graveyard to a flock of sheep,
the day he realised that ‘to die means to join the herd,’
he wrote it down. But in this sentence
was no graveyard, no tune from a shepherd’s pipe, no shepherd.
A shepherd’s piping came from elsewhere, light and playful.
‘Here are the shepherds,’ it said, the sheep stirred,
but as soon as it turned to a grave, the pipe went quiet.
Better to bury all these unwritten things
in a single line: ‘to die means to join the herd.’
Now the pipe was playing, only to him, but could suddenly stop.

The Black Swan  (Siyah Kuğu)
Ece Temelkuran
translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne

“The Black Swan” is one poem in a lengthy sequence of interrelated “poetic fables” in The Book of the Edge. The “mindless soldier” in the first line refers to an insect character from the previous poem, “The Butterfly,” and the creature introduced in the last four lines is the central character (a bull) of the poem following “The Black Swan.”

from The Butterfly:
...
The purple insect commanded his fervent, poisonous soldiers. They must’ve have spotted me. Suddenly they attacked before I could move my eyes from beneath the ground...

The Black Swan

I guess a mindless soldier bit me in the eye. I must have passed out and rolled down that green hill. How else could I, on my own, have come to this luminous lake?
How my eyes ache now, bleeding at each killing witnessed, after each one, aching.

I’ll have to wash my eyes in light. When light comes in, the eye learns how to repose within itself, to bathe in its own water.
Just as swans do who must learn how to let their necks slumber on their bodies...

No sooner had a swan crossed my mind than a black swan appeared on the lake. It parted the water silently and stopped still in the very middle.

Clad in their usual beauty, the white ones swanned about. All along the shore they swam, within reach, a wonder. Near to land, to speech. At the lake’s midpoint the black swan stood still.

Too proud to be bothered by pride, too detached to waste time being vain. She knew if she dwelled on herself in enchanting darkness she would drown, so she must have learned very young not to lose herself in a far-off gaze.
Her mother must surely have told her
the hapless history of black swans who do that.

Black swans who delve into themselves
Dive into deep, incurable worry.
They, unlike the white ones,
aren’t filled with goodness and consoling light.
Once they’re drawn into their sinister selves, they will be wholly consumed.

Because of her black curse,
this swan’s grace can’t be happily seen.
She brings on shivers, thus she can’t be easily praised.
Since crowds don’t gather to talk about her
no agreement can be made on how to honor her.
Being the way she is,
staying that way isn’t easy...

If a black swan has kept alive,
she must surely have learned from her sorrowful mother,
who died young, how to survive,
as she watched her mother rip herself apart,
as she watched her tear at her own neck,
trying to pretend she was one of the others...

If a black swan remains
precisely in the centre of the lake,
singular, like a word about which no other may be spoken,
she must surely know how to be a black swan,
who slows down death yet stands out starkly.
Who remains different
underneath her soul-crushing load.

This swan can’t revel in her blackness.
Although you might think she would,
she doesn’t dream at night how wondrous she is.
None of the stories made up about her are her.
She stays still on the lake’s loneliest spot,
to ward off the pain of boorish tales told about her,
to keep her body untouched by word or sound.

But the frogs, the noisiest creatures in the world, persist.
Even about a black swan they must croak on and on.

They came and found her, I saw it myself.
Loudly debating her neck, her feathers,
her black solitude, so hard did they question her
about the whys and wherefores
that the black swan lifted her wings
and plunged them into the water,
ever to rise again.

Like an ancient, noble queen
who, if spotted in disguise, would do the same,
the black swan buried herself in her skirts’ folds and
drowned.

Like all black swans who have drowned,
even before time, her shadow left.

I tried to save her,
to do justice in this world. I got up and ran
around the lake, to find the shore nearest to her.

Could a swan saved from suicide still be a swan?
...

Those loutish frogs shouldn’t triumph, that was my broken
wish.

I ran along the shore so fast, so blindly,
I only noticed him when we came face to face.
How could I ever have missed him? Unbelievable!
Could he have been hidden by the rain?
He must’ve been eyeing me from the distant woods.

(The sequence continues with The Bull to which “him” in the
last few lines refers.)

in Kisi Kitabı (The Book of the Edge); Everest, Istanbul, 2002.
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How could I have known what would happen to me
out there in the sea?
A swordfish appeared suddenly. Before I knew it,
a swordfish had split me in two. Slit me
with its sword, straight down
my left side.

Plunged that sharpest of blades in my back,
ripped out a bone
with its teeth. Tossed it in a tangle of seaweed.
Into the cavity left there, slipped a bit of silver
it had hid in its mouth.

The wound is in my midriff.
It will never heal.
The sea’s keenest edge, the sword,
will leave its mark in my spine.
Time’s bitter salt…
The swordfish stain in my waist.

Nothing is as it was
now that silver has entered my spine.
For in the silver wisdom is hidden,
like the argentine wisdom every wound holds.

Before leaving, of course,
the swordfish told me the secret of its silver.

In you I have grafted silver’s wisdom.
Now there’s white metal within your bones.
Into your flesh humanity secretes
the stored-up testimony of its whole history.
You will understand all things.
You will hear those who speak and those who don’t.

You are now as poor and as wise as silver.

From now on, you hold a grief inside you
much more than your face will ever show.

I could have inserted bronze in you instead.
So nothing could make you bend or bow down.
But then you wouldn’t understand those who did.

I had gold in my mouth, too.
I could have stuck that gram of gold in your body.
Today’s world would have deemed you worthy,
but you wouldn’t have known worthlessness.
The applause of the present would’ve swept you away.

You might not have scoured diamond either.
But then you would have scratched each thing you touched.
You wouldn’t have known how it feels to be cut, that aching.

There might now be iron in your backbone.
You could have been given greater strength.
But held up by your iron frame,
you wouldn’t be able to speak of the oppressed.

What if I had mixed some steel in your spine’s fusion?
With steel’s history of conquest and spoliation
you could’ve been even more captivating.
But then you couldn’t have said a thing
about the history of those held captive.

Within you I have placed the most abject
and also the darling of all metals.
With it, you have a chance to become no body.
For silver finally tarnishes down to nothing.
Even when it shines the most brightly it knows
what it means to be earth and dust.

Only nothing can speak in everything’s tongue.
Only no one can speak from everyone’s heart.

Silver-spined one! It’s to speak that you’ve come.
Other than what you are here to say,
your flesh, your hands, your knick-knack collection,
everything you do, is only a strut.
For you do have things to say.

So much that—no matter how grievous it may seem—you’re
no more than what you’ve got to say.

Silver-spined one!
Into this world you have come
and from it you will go
strangely.

Fairy (Peri)

Bejan Matur
translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne

The fairy arrived.  
She stopped on a hill.  
She said, have you brought my mother?  
Yes, we have, they said. Now your mother will stay here. 
The fairy stopped speaking. She looked at her mother 
whose face was pale. 
Maybe it’s pale because of the night, said the fairy. She 
looked far away.  
She saw that the road never ends, the way to leave never ends.  
She knew how to wait, so she waited and said, I have sinned.  
Here,  
On these hills still like children,  
In this vastness that left star-clouds behind on the mountains  
I cannot live anymore.  
If nothing should happen, these hills like childhood remain.  

She had spent her childhood watching this distance  
And after all the watching and sighing  
She had grown wings  
And as she sighed her wings grew longer.  

There’s a road that leads off, she said. That always leads away.  
A road that leads to cities and vineyards.  
Suddenly the sun entered her.  
Entered what was clear and fresh inside her.  
I wish I weren’t a fairy, she said. I wish I weren’t.  
She felt in her wing the stab, a tiny arrow of pain.  
She folded in her wing.  
With her beaming smile she called out to her mother.  
Yes, mother, she said, I think I’m a fairy,  
I cannot talk of death anymore.  
Not birth  
Not life  
Not death.  
Please don’t ask this of me,  
Don’t.

in Tanrı Görmesin Harflerimi (God Must Not See the Letters of My Script); Metis Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999.
Travel Notes  (Yol Defteri)

Cevat Çapan
translated by Ruth Christie

I.
“O God of fire, to whom my feet are nailed,”
so speaks the poet,
who believes in thunder and lightning.
And believes a cloud will die with its beauty and
whiteness and emptiness
and that dreams are true.

We talk of these things by the shore and evening falls
the sky flushing pink over the milk-white sea.
We’ll miss this silence, says the man.
I’ve learned how not to miss anything, says the woman.

II.
Ours is a night journey,
from west to east by moonlight
as far as Tu Fu and Li Po,
tracing the heart-wounding arrow
on the baobab tree
and shedding the old poet’s tears of blood
in the Yellow River.

III.
My grandfather was a courier,
on his way through the Zigana Pass
he gathered tulips and hyacinths.
As he came down to Trabzon,
his dark-blue eyes
saw the Black Sea
through the depths of green.

IV.
When you’re halfway there,
don’t look back.
In the cradle of darkness
may those angels’ eyes,
the fireflies,
protect you.

V.
Let me never stop sheltering in the cool shade
of the sacred spring on the slopes of Mount Ida;
never grow deaf to the sky-rending roar of planes
Let me, the prince concealed as the crafty shepherd,
choose one of the trio of beauties,
then fly from joy to the Sea of Islands,
knowing my wings will melt
in the fire of my dream(s).

VI.
Was that my mother’s youth
that gazed so long at the sea,
then bowed her head
without a word?
Or told us of the orange-groves
while the smell of pine, and a phosphorescent gleam
filled the room with the voice of the sea?
Perhaps it was the tears of time
silently flowing away.

VII.
Near morning
you put out the nightlight,
and before making tea,
do you watch the ghost
who sits in the garden under the walnut-tree,
and the ivy climbing the neighbor’s balcony?
It was I who arranged Morandi’s bottles
at the foot of the wall.

VIII.
From Selimiye I leapt to a dolmuş,
it was already dark;
running down corridors through a barracks
I emerged from a dungeon.
It was spring,
trees smelt of spring,
the city was bathed in light,
“the lime trees messenger of gentle warmth.”
A Walk (Gezinti)

Tağrul Tanyol
translated by Ruth Christie

I walk in the shadowy darkness of silent harbors,
imprisoned in an exile’s solitude,
an old-time song walks with me when I stop the harbor,
comes to an end at the obscure tables of the tea-house.

I walk as the sky turns into silent lights,
darkness lit and extinguished, far off the posters of night are ripped down,
I walk along dark shores stars pour into the sky.

I walk in the darkness that casts anchor in dark-skinned harbors,
a slow fear quietly climbs the steps of silence.
Up there the last lights of a town strip off deaths unprepared for arrive at the stroke of midnight.

Rust (Pas)

Gülten Akin
translated by Ruth Christie

I had gone to my native town to clean off some rust,
To visit some stones on site, excavations etc.
To show respect I wore my hair long again And put on country clogs
So I wouldn’t get lost in the earth and dust.

On the edge of town they waited to meet me. Surrounded and isolated
I never thought I could be a guest to my childhood. I never imagined that for my women kinsfolk
That would be their first move To reject me and send me back.

I never imagined children put to school In the streets and parks, Or inns and hotels built over beloved ruins, Windows of cakes instead of saffron pilav.
I never dreamt of ice cream made from ice instead of snow, And not a single Çapanoğlu left in Yozgat.

Grandfather dead, grandmother dead and my mother, I couldn’t enter our old home.
Grandfather who for years survived The ravages of grief and tobacco, Grandmother who for years survived, Ravaged by poverty and grandfather’s ruin, Mother who for years survived An incurable wasting away.

From now on I’m not Gülten from Yozgat, I belong to wherever I die. Let me die in the eastern regions By the cold waters of the trackless mountains.
Turkey’s Mysterious Motions and Turkish Poetry

Murat Nemet-Nejat

I. An Ambivalent Space
Days prior to the start of the Iraq war, Turkey’s new ruling government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan agreed in principle to let the United States use the Turkish territory as a base in the war. All that was needed—American naval ships waiting on the sea—was the approval of the Turkish Parliament. In a rebellious breakdown of party discipline, the parliament refused, forcing the American forces to give up their pincer strategy. This startling twist, maybe as important as any in determining the outcome of the war, reflects the teetering, even miraculous, equilibrium of conflicting forces which is modern Turkey.

Nothing in modern Turkey—and its history—is exactly what it seems. The AKP (Akparti), which negotiated the acceptance of the American troops, is also on the religious, Islamic wing of the political spectrum. Turkey is often assumed to be—at least by the European Community—a country whose democracy is suspect; but the parliament’s refusal to endorse the decision of the government represents the most radical, populist kind of democracy. Kemalism is known for its radical embrace of the Western through a secular state, but Kemal Atatürk fought one of the most radical, populist kind of democracy. Kemalism, with its bent towards the West and belief in the separation of religion and state, represents a total break with Turkey’s Ottoman past and an embrace of the West. But secularism was inherent in the Ottoman principle of religious tolerance. Kemalism suppresses religious, particularly Islamic, expression through clothing in public places, veils for women and hats for mullahs being the most resonant instances. But Kemalism also involves, through linguistic reforms, the coming to prominence of pure Anatolian, as opposed to Ottoman, Turkish—one of the most spiritual languages, the quintessential Sufi language in the world. What Kemalism suppresses with one hand, it gives back with another. This is the magical, startling contradiction of Turkish culture and history: a place of suppression and democratic expression, of spiritual secularity, of East and West, a place where often “either/or” is replaced by “and.” The winner—political or otherwise—cannot obliterate the other. They exist in a loose confederacy, intermittently and dynamically becoming dominant or subversive.

Anatolia is primarily Islamic, spiritually Sufi, populated by Turks who came from Central Asia centuries ago. But Anatolia was Byzantine and Christian before the 12th century. These two realities are superimposed on each other creating the ambiguous, ghost-like reality of Turkey. Nothing gets lost in Anatolian history, but survives as a pregnant essence. Though primarily Turkish, Anatolia has also, among others, Christian Armenians and Kurds. Though the Turkish War of Independence was fought against Western powers, it was also fought against Greeks, who lived in Western Anatolia. The disappearance of Anatolian Armenians, the presence of Kurds, and the memory of Greeks are integral parts of modern Turkey, shaping its decisions, influencing its fate.

The inability (maybe refusal!) of the dominant to obliterate totally the vanquished turns Anatolia, consequently Turkey, into a dialectic space. The intuitive impulse of this history is towards inclusion, synthesis. A church is re-imagined as a mosque, from Hagia Sophia in Istanbul to a mosque in Konya. Or, endless Byzantine frescoes in caves are “forgotten,” left alone. As a result, the official dogma has contradictions loosely attached to it. No break is as drastic as it seems, having assimilated an inherent part of the other.

The ascendancy of Kemalism in the foundation of modern Turkey is a good example. Secularism, the separation of religion and state, represents a total break with Turkey’s Ottoman past and an embrace of the West. But secularism was inherent in the Ottoman principle of religious tolerance. Kemalism suppresses religious, particularly Islamic, expression through clothing in public places, veils for women and hats for mullahs being the most resonant instances. But Kemalism also involves, through linguistic reforms, the coming to prominence of pure Anatolian, as opposed to Ottoman, Turkish—one of the most spiritual languages, the quintessential Sufi language in the world. What Kemalism suppresses with one hand, it gives back with another. This is the magical, startling contradiction of Turkish culture and history:

II. Sufism and the Spirit of Revolution
Kemalism, with its bent towards the West and belief in science, is grafted on a primarily Anatolian population whose soul is Sufi. To erase the Ottoman class structure and increase literacy, Kemalism also simplifies the Turkish alphabet by codifying it in Roman characters. This second step is subversive, in dialectical tension with secularism. To understand this process, one must understand Turkish Sufism, its embodiment in language.

In Djalalladin Rumi and Hafiz, Sufi poets writing in Persian, wine and dancing are the essential means through which ecstasy and union with God are sought. In Anatolia, tears—the disintegration of the self through ecstatic suffering—are the way to reach God. The 13th century Turkish folk poet Yunus Emre—a contemporary of Rumi—is the purest/simplest expression of a yearning for God, the soul “a water-mill,” eternally bending, pouring. The 16th century folk poet Pir Sultan Abdal, a contemporary of Hafiz, in political poems asking for the “faultless blood”—that is, pain and self-sacrifice in the pursuit of God—invites
his listeners to rebellion. For his work, eerily echoing the ideology of the suicide bomber, Pir Sultan was hanged by the Sultan.

Tears are free, while wine costs money. Turkish Sufism is of the have-nots, the poor, the suppressed. Its ecstasy is full of ghosts.

Modern Turkish poetry starts in one swoop in the 1920s, around the time of the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923, by a group of poets turning to spoken Turkish as a literary language, a totally revolutionary act within the frame of all Middle Eastern literature. Partly due to Kemalist reforms, trying to strip language of Persian and Arabic vocabulary and literary syntax and forms, the poets turned essentially to Sufi/erotic folk poets. The schism between spoken and literary languages, prevalent in Arabic and to a lesser extent in Persian, is non-existent in modern Turkish poetry. Even in its most obscure forms stylistically it reflects, is truly of, the people. It is full of voices bellying official ideology. Its sinuous, yearning, melancholy cadences, called the “eda,” are permeated with the Sufism of the have-nots.

The history of modern Turkish poetry through the 20th century is a progressive cracking open of Turkey’s Kemalist and Islamic surfaces, from secularism to Sufism, from a focus on Turkish Moslems to Kurds, Christians and Jews, from the cultural capital Istanbul as solely an Islamic city to its Byzantine origins, from domestic eroticism to a wider, violent, sado-masochistic, consuming passion, from heterosexuality to all varieties of gay desire. In our time when the ideological conflict in the Middle East is based on the need to demonize and totally obliterate the other, from Iraq to Palestine to Israel, Turkish poetry — implicitly Turkey — despite its seemingly chaotic contradictions, stands as an ideal, a subversive vision of synthesis, of inclusion, of freedom, of hope.

### III. Eda and the Poetry of Motion

In the 1990s, I began to work on an anthology of Turkish poetry. *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* was published by Talisman House in the United States in 2004 and covers poems from 1921 to 1997, including essays on and by Turkish poets. *Eda*, which is the principal concept in Turkish poetics, is based on the quality of Turkish as an agglutinative language. Possessing total syntactical flexibility, Turkish can suggest subtle nuances of thought and feeling by changes in the word order. This cadential movement — partly a music of the mind — surrounds the words with an aura. This aura, this movement, is *eda*.

*Eda* is intimately linked to the city of Istanbul, an imaginary landscape where eternal conflicting forces of history and desire are reflected and synthesized. But the language of *eda* also responds to changes in history and desire are reflected and synthesized. But the language of *eda* also responds to changes in Istanbul as a historical city, thereby retaining its role as a reflector of historical reality.

From the 1920s to 1997, Istanbul altered from a city of well under a million to a metropolis of twelve million. Numerically, the explosion started in the late 1950s with the beginning of the influx of the Anatolian population into the city for work. But in the early 1990s Istanbul underwent a subtle conceptual transformation, in addition to its numerical one. With the fall of the Soviet Union, it became an economic and spiritual focal point as people converged from former satellite countries in the West and Turkish republics in the East, in search of goods and ideas formerly unavailable or suppressed in their countries. At this point, Istanbul became transformed from a national city of twelve million to a global metropolis, a crossing point of conflicting dreams.

*Eda* reflects this tectonic, strategic change. In the 1990s, Turkish poetry underwent an intense creative period in a sequence of startling poems. The previous peak period, which ran roughly from the early 1950s to the 1970s, created a poetry of depth, splitting Istanbul and language into visible and secret places. In the new poetry the language flattens. The stylistic essence of the best poems of the 1990s is motion. Often written in long sinuous lines, in these poems the thought, the eye, the image never stay in one place, constantly shifting conceptual, ideological, or identity lines. The music of this motion across borders — the *eda* — echoes Istanbul as the global city.

In each poem, two seemingly irreconcilable concepts (or desires) are superimposed on each other, creating a flat, unified field. The poems reflect the impulse towards synthesis at the heart of contemporary Turkish poetry. I will discuss three poems, all included in the anthology *Eda*, suggesting the poetic range of this movement. The translations used in the quotes are my own.


This poem is the opening salvo and, possibly, the manifesto of the poetics of motion. It is an exquisite arabesque, a supreme example of the Islamic/Ottoman sense of design and order, expressed through the image “green” and the sinuous movements, cadences, of its language. The poem’s purpose is to break open the Islamic Istanbul of the last five centuries to its historical past, Constantinople, trying to create a dialectical synthesis between a Byzantine dream world (the “blue”) and Islamic rationality. The poem ends...
with the speaker calling for a new name for Istanbul to represent its new spiritual (and historical) consciousness:

you are asleep now in the white washed Byzantine room, you are very alone. one of the ancients is saying, “Don’t cry.” “Tomorrow is your birthday. Tomorrow a new name will be given to you.”

Lale Müldür was booed and stopped when she wanted to read the poem in public in Istanbul. The fact that one of the great poems of the 20th century was booed off stage reflects the conflicting forces in Turkey and the critical position it has in our time. On the one hand, one has a majority of the population instinctively turning away from the West, insisting on the Islamic and ideological singularity, purity, of Istanbul. On the other, one has a poetic and political vision, incubated in Kemalism but different from it, which dreams of a synthesis reconciling antagonisms in a new order. It is a counter-vision to the dilemma between civil war and reconciliation which has beset many other cities in the Middle East, from Beirut to Baghdad to Tel-Aviv.


The poem is made of twenty-seven coffee cup readings of fortune. The speaker’s eye constantly moves among arrangements of hardened coffee grinds—abstract shapes—spinning a Shamanistic yarn of hope, desire and the future. This telling and filling a pregnant emptiness with words—full of animist images of nature—is the eda of the poem. Hidden in this poetic gesture is the liberation of the former Turkish republics: an Islamic population, but still with pre-Islamic roots in Central Asia, which looks to Turkey as a spiritual beacon:

A mass of coffee grinds’s flying to the sky. A profound sadness is getting up, about to get up, and leave, leaving behind its space empty, that is, nothing to interpret in its stead. Either for good or evil. A portion of universe waiting to be filled, is what’s left.

Something has ended, you’re relieved, have gotten rid of a burden. (What the load is, I can’t tell.)

c) “souljam,” küçük İskender, 1994

Composed of six hundred forty-eight fragments, “souljam” is simultaneously the most anarchic and mystical of Turkish poems. The contradictory impulses of Turkey coexist in this poem in their most violent and extreme forms, but in exquisite balance nevertheless. Culled from entries in a journal the poet kept from 1984 to 1993, the arrangement of fragments seems arbitrary, following the subjectivity of the poet’s mind: an expression of exploding chaos. On the other hand, a yearning spirit permeates the poem, across fragments, suggesting that the seeming chaos belongs to one single mind, that the chaos is illusionary, its subjectivity divine.

One has in the poem the balance of contradictory forces, the Sufi Arc of Descent (away from God) and Ascent (towards God).

“souljam” is the nihilistic expression of a deeply religious sensibility. While militantly gay and full of blasphemies, the underlying emotion is a yearning love. Stylistically, also, the poem pulls in East and West in extreme incarnations. Ottoman poetic turns of phrase, pop references, and scientific arguments “jam” (both in a musical sense and the sense of violence) in a fertile eclecticism, a cauldron of thoughts and feelings.

The refusal of the Turkish parliament to let in the Americans and the poem “souljam” are part of an existential continuum. Given the anxieties of Turkey about its Kurdish population, the refusal was a self-destructive act. But it was also a spiritual, popular act of solidarity, of empathy beyond its borders. Like the poem, it was an ambiguous destructive/regenerative gesture, pregnant with truth.

The reality of Turkish poetry is that of looking into a mirror. More than giving answers, it reflects with dazzling clarity the crisis and the potential rebirth of our time. This poetry helps us understand the contradictions that are Turkey without giving answers or opinions as to what one can do. It only shows that the Turkish crisis is not something which happens “there,” in a specific geographic place, but, in a most concentrated form, is the crisis of all of us, East and West, where we stand and where we may go at this moment in our history.

**from souljam** (cangüncem)

**küçük İskender**  
translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat

**sixty-seven**  
i will hate the spider crawling on me. on me, i can’t kill it

**sixty-eight**  
carnation crack in ice.

**sixty-nine**  
what if summer’s thaw started at this critical juncture?

**seventy**  
oh, left left your divine body like a broken sculpture  
in my hands!

violence is the foreign tongue of the body  
fragmentary improvisations of yearning

**seventy-one**  
verses of adventure:  
which color is blowing the dancing young man,  
feet and body naked,  
i cannot tell.

**seventy-two**  
could you understand, the curse of a course, to be  
read only by a compass?

**seventy-three**  
spring wrote me no letters of utopias, winter did.

**seventy-four**  
your loveliness is where  
is missing,  
where is missing  
is the air!

**seventy-five**  
post *naked lunch*  
panislamic  
femininity

**seventy-six**  
penelope’s explosive reweaving  
mystic riffs of absence

**seventy-seven**  
my soul is a jellyfish, without a womb  
light descends in the gutted out space of the dome.
Black Mulberry (Karadut)

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu
translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat

My black mulberry, my forked darky, my Gypsy,
My grain of pomegranate, my grain of light, my only one;
I am a tree, my limbs, a porch hanging with grapes,
I am a hive, you are my honey, my bitter honey,
My sin, my ague.

Tongue of coral, teeth of coral, thighs of oyster,
I gave you a life, my wife,
My black mulberry, my forked darky, my Gypsy,
What more will you be to me, my odd one, queer one,
My smiling quince, my weeping pomegranate,
My baby, my stallion, my wife.

in 100 Ask Siiri, 131

Pomegranate (Nar)

Haydar Ergülen
translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat

Winter is too vast let’s go to the pomegranate
the surface of the day grew cold, to the pomegranates
pomegranate will have something to tell us
a thousand warm words strew from the summer
my tongue dry, from here let’s go to the pomegranate
pomegranate has a house, very crowded
I wish we lived there too
the house too big
every room a distance, children closed boxes
the backyard a chaos. When we split grapes
how we were vineyard friends, it seems,
the thief is robbing the garden
from its leaves
the vineyard
stripped naked
if the roughneck enters the pomegranate garden
sadness, fall on words prior to the skin,
before the tongue feels cold feels sad, the skin
must bloom and disperse us, going to the pomegranate
the house like pomegranate a garden inside a garden
woman, garden to love, the mad creeping ivy woman
holding to your love, now, let’s go to the pomegranate
say, we coaxed this love from the hand of pomegranate, let’s.

in 40 Şiir ve Bir (1997)
**Rage** (Bekleyen)

*Necip Fazıl Kısakürek*  
*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

As you are a nymph escaping to the mountain,  
So am I a monster chasing after you;  
Call your world, if you will, to ease your burden.  
In my world, we shift alone.

The chill paths you follow will frighten you,  
And my steps will echo in your ears;  
Nightmarish arms in delight will engirdle you,  
Hearing my heavy breath bite your neck.

Alone in your room a wintry night,  
When you tremble, remember me!  
That it is I who push against the window,  
That I roar outside, not the wind.

The poison that my panting spits  
Will press dry, like a rose, your life;  
Run wandering, whereso you will, town after town.  
For in the end, I take you.

If, like my dark purpose, you are eternal,  
Wait, I shall take death for a friend;  
If my rage must contend with being dust,  
I myself will carve your stone: wait.

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**Red** (Kızıl)

*Müstafa Ziyalan*  
*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

I am unleashing  
divorce  
gently

the metal threads  
through my heart

a kisser while biting  
a biter while kissing  
just like  
a lighthouse

patches of black and blue  
or  
star light

the minuscule  
digressions  
of the stiletto
Notes on Translated Writers

Gülten Akin is Turkey’s outstanding woman poet. She studied law and worked as an attorney in several small Anatolian towns. She now lives in Ankara. In the words of Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar, “She has a calm, strong voice, deeply embedded in the sinewy language of ordinary people, in the sad and joyful songs that form the treasury of Turkey’s folk culture” (from Modern Turkish Poetry, Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar, ed., The Rockingham Press, 1992). Her poetry, deeply invested in social responsibility, includes the collections Rüzgar Saati (Hour of the Wind, 1956); Kestim Kara Saçaşırımı (I Cut My Dark Hair, 1960); Ağıltar ve Türküler (Elegies and Folk Songs, 1976); İlahiler (Hymns, 1983); and Sessiz Arka Bahçeler (Silent Back Yards, 1998). She won the Turkish Language Association award for poetry in 1961 and 1971 and the Sedat Simavi Literature Award in 1992.

Enis Batur is a Turkish author who has published over twenty volumes of poems, essays, and criticism. He has been translated into French, Italian, and Persian. Among other awards he has received Italy’s Sibilla Aleramo prize and was featured at the Rotterdam International Poetry Festival of 1998. Some of his poetic collections include Eros ve Hôtel (Eros and Hôtel) and Bir Ortaça Yalnızlığı (A Medieval Solitude), both 1973; Tuğralar (Monograms, 1984); and Sarmış (Cistern, 1985). The poems here are from his Gri Divan (The Grey Divan), published in 1990.

İlhan Berk was a leading figure in the “Second New” generation of Turkish poets and has been a force in the modernization of Turkish poetry. His poetry strives to synthesize the Western and Eastern traditions, drawing upon mythology, history, geography, and the visual arts with a modern, and often postmodern, affect. He graduated from the French Department at the Ankara Gazi Training Institute and taught school for ten years. He was the recipient of the Turkish Language Association Poetry Award in 1979 for Kül (Ash), the Behçet Necatigil Poetry Award in 1980 for İstanbul Kitabı (Book of Istanbul) and the Yeditepe Poetry Prize in 1983.

Edip Cansever (d. 1985) was a leading member, along with Turgut Uyar, Cemal Süreya, Ece Ayhan and others, of what was called the Ikinci Yeni or “Second New” movement, which revolutionized Turkish poetry in the 1950s and 60s, making poetry both more realistic and more imaginative, through the influence of Surrealism and Existentialism. His collection Yerçekimli Kəranfil (Gravitational Carnation) won the Yeditepe Poetry Award for 1957. Other collections include Nerde Antigone (Where’s Antigone, 1961), Tragedyalar (Tragedies, 1964), and Şairin Seyir Defteri (Logbook of the Poet, 1980). He inherited from his father a furniture shop in the Covered Bazaar in Istanbul, where he worked for most of his life.

Cevat Çapkan studied English literature at Cambridge and is currently a professor of English language and literature at Istanbul University. He translates deftly from English, American and Greek poets. His own poetry has appeared in the collections Dön GÜVERCIN DÖN (Return of the Dove), winner of the 1986 Behcet Necatigil Poetry Award; Doğal Tarih (Natural History, 1989); Sevda Yaratan (Creator of Love, 1994).

Mehmet Çetin served a long prison term after the 1980 coup. His poetry collections include Rüzgar ve Gül İlkimi (Season of Winds and Roses, 1988); Birağızdan (In Unison, 1989); Eylül Çiçekleri (September Blossoms, 1990); Hatıradır, Yak Bu Fotoğrafta (Burn This Photo, It Is a Keepsake, 1995); and Aşıkaran (Love-Breaker, 1997). Çetin is the winner of the 1988 Enver Gökçe Poetry Award.

Haydar Ergülen studied at Middle East Technical University and currently works as a creative director in an advertising agency. His major poetry collections include Sokak Prensesi (Street Princess, 1991); Eskiden Terzi (Once a Tailor), winner of the 1996 Halil Kocagöz Poetry Award; 40 ŞİİR VE BİR (40 Poems and One, 1997); and Karton Valiz (Cardboard Suitcase, 1999).

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu (d. 1975) taught painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul and is one of Turkey’s best-known contemporary painters. His poetry, which evokes the visual arts of Anatolia, broke away from the “perfect line” of the classical poets to look for fresh, bold images. His major collections include Yaradana Mektuplar (Letters to the Creator, 1941); Karadut (Black Mulberries, 1948); Tuz (Salt, 1952); DÖRDÜ BIRDEN (All Four Together, 1956), which combines all his previous poetry plus new poems; and Karadut 69 (Black Mulberries 69, 1969).
Gülseli İnal studied philosophy at Istanbul University. Principal works include Sulara Gümüllü Çağrı (The Call Immersed in Water, 1995; poems), Lale Sesi, Yıldız ve Yoktular (They Were Tulip Voices and Were Non-Existing, 1987; poems), Dolunay (Full Moon, 1988; a lyrical narrative, filmed in the same year), Letoon (1989; poems), Dans Natura (1990; prose poems), Bakkaris (1991; poems), Sis ve Gula (Sis and Gula, 1992; poems), and Saklanmış Levha (Hidden Tablet, 1995; prose poems). İnal’s poetry can be qualified as cosmic, mesmeric and metaphysical.

küçük İskender (“little Alexander”) writes poetry characterized by an empathy for social outcasts and a sympathy for anarchist social thought. His startling, sad, and ironic poems have been gathered in collections such as Gözlerim Sığımyor Yüzüme (My Eyes Are Too Big for My Face, 1988), Erotika (1991), Dedem Beni Korkattu Hikayeleri (“Grandpa Scares Me” Tales, 1992), Periler Ölürken Özür Diler (Fairies Apologize When They Die, 1995), and Pop H’art (1997).

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (d. 1983) is one of the most important representatives of the arabesque style in Turkish poetry. His religious, powerful, and often obsessive poetry draws upon both the syllabic folk form and the Ottoman gazel, pursuing depths of remote illumination in the manner of the Sufi tradition.

Bejan Matur, born into a Kurdish Alevi family of Marâş in southeastern Turkey, is one of the most outstanding of poets writing in Turkish. She has a degree in law but has devoted herself to poetry, which she published in four collections between 1996 and 2002: Rüzgar Dolu Konaklar (Wind Howls in the Mansions), Tanrı Görmesin Harflerimi (God Must Not See My Letters), Ayn Oğulları (Sons Reared by the Moon) and Onun Çölünde (In His Desert). Selections from these collections were published in 2004 under the title In the Temple of a Patient God in Ruth Christie’s translation. Cevat Çapan describes Matur’s poetry as “a wealth of imagery and music that brings to life in a lyrical and fairy-tale idiom the logic of fantasy and complex life-experiences of the East.”

Oktay Rifat (d. 1988) was born in Trabzon, where his father was governor. He studied political science in Paris and worked for most of his life as an attorney for the Turkish State Railways. With Orhan Veli and Melih Çevdet Anday, he launched the Garip movement in the early 1940s. In the mid 1950s, he changed his style and became one of the leading poets of the “Second New” movement. His major collections include Yaşayip Ölmek (To Live and Die, 1946); Aşağı Yukarı (More or Less, 1952); Elleri Var Özgürülüğü (Freedom Has Hands, 1966); and Koca Bir Yaz (A Great Summer, 1967). He also wrote novels, plays, essays and translations from French. A selection of his poems (Voices of Memory: Selected Poems of Oktay Rifat, 1993) was translated by Ruth Christie and Richard McKane and published by The Rockingham Press in the United Kingdom.

Tuğrul Tanyol was educated at the Catholic Lycée of St. Joseph and the University of the Bosphorus. He won the Necatigil Prize for poetry in Turkey in 1985 for Ağustos Dehlizleri (August Vestibules) and has to date published five collections of poems and many articles on cultural and literary issues. In 1993 he took part in the Trois Rivières poetry festival in Quebec, the first Turkish poet to participate. He currently teaches social sciences at the University of Marmara. Tanyol has been translated into French and English. His work is lyrical and composed and, although his imagery is often surrealistic, it is controlled by a classical clarity. Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar wrote of him that he is a poet “alive to the pitfalls of blind ideological allegiances.”

Latife Tekin, born in Kayseri, central Turkey, is acclaimed as a unique writer of fiction that gives voice to marginal lives and communities. She finished high school in Istanbul and worked as an activist in a left-wing women’s association until the military coup of 1980, after which she began working on her first novel, Sevgili Arsız Ölüm (Dear Shameless Death, 1983). Since then she has written seven more works of fiction. The most recently published is Pelin Özer’s book-length interview (Latife Tekin Kitabı, 2005), in which Tekin gives a sharp account of her writing career and of the controversial reception of her books. Tekin now lives near Bodrum with her son and daughter and runs the House of Literature, a writers’ retreat, which she founded at the Gümüşlük Academy (www.gumuslukakademisi.org), the inspiration for her narrative translated in this issue and for Unutma Bahçesi (The Garden of Forgetting, 2004), her latest novel. In addition to English (Dear Shameless Death, 2001, and Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills, 1993, 1996, 2004, both from Marion Boyars), she has been translated into Persian, Italian, French, German, Dutch and Spanish.
Ece Temelkuran, born in İzmir, is one of Turkey’s sharpest and most popular newspaper columnists. She has a degree in law and has focused on the women’s movement, political detainees and the Kurdish conflict as an investigative journalist. Her book Oğlum, Kızım, Devletim (My Son, My Daughter, My State), published in 1997, is a probing account of the protest action by the mothers of political detainees. She has also published three books of prose poems in 1996 and 2002, one of which, Kıyı Kitabı (Book of the Edge), is currently being translated into English by Deniz Perin. Temelkuran’s two most recent volumes, İçeriden (From Within) and Dışardan (From Without), both published in 2004, consist of selections from her regular column in the newspaper Milliyet.

Güven Turan studied English and American literature at Ankara University. He has worked as an instructor, lecturer, copywriter and creative director, and now works as an editor with Yapı Kredi Yayınları. He is known for his meticulously woven poetry, rich in imagery and detail. Collections include Güneşler…Gölgeler (Suns…Shadows, 1981) and Sevda Yorumları (Interpretations of Love, 1990). His novels, short stories, essays and translations from English and American poets have been published widely.

Mustafa Ziyalan is a graduate of the German High School of Istanbul and studied medicine at the University of Istanbul. After living in Vienna and Mainz, he worked as a general practitioner and coroner in an Anatolian village. After training in psychiatry in Istanbul, Los Angeles, and New York, he is currently a psychiatrist in New York, working with schizophrenia and AIDS patients. His poetry, short fiction, essays and translations have been published in Turkish literary periodicals and anthologies since 1983. He has published two books of translations, from Paul Auster and Ingeborg Bachmann, and two volumes of his own poetry: Dünle Yarin Arasında (Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, 1990) and New York’un Arabi (Nigger of New York, 1998).

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Notes on Contributors

Walter Andrews taught Turkish language and literature in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at the University of Washington from 1968 to 1992. He now continues his relationship with the department as a research professor. He has published widely on Ottoman Turkish literature and culture both in the United States and Turkey. His publications include several books, edited works, translations, editions of Ottoman Texts, and many articles. His latest book, *The Age of Beloveds*, co-authored with Mehmet Kalpakli, will be appearing from Duke University Press in February of 2005. He is presently the co-director of the Ottoman Texts Archive and Ottoman Historical Dictionary projects.

Serdar Arat is a professor of art at Concordia College and the director/curator of the Concordia Gallery at the same institution. He holds a B.A. from Boğaziçi University, in Istanbul, and an M.F.A. from the State University of New York at Albany. His work has been featured in more than a dozen one-person exhibitions (with multiple reviews in the *New York Times*), including the Monique Goldstrom Gallery in New York, Gallery 1756 in Chicago, and Galeri Nev in Istanbul-Ankara, as well as appearing in more than thirty group exhibitions at such venues as the Bronx Museum and Art in General in New York, Sotheby’s in London, and Galerie Trigone in Liege, Belgium. A number of his works are held in public and corporate collections.

Ruth Christie studied English language and literature at the University of St. Andrews. She taught for two years in Turkey and later studied Turkish language and literature at London University. For many years she taught English literature to American undergraduates resident in London. With Saliha Paker she translated a Turkish novel by Latife Tekin (Marion Boyars, 1993) and, in collaboration with Richard McKane, a selection of the poems of Oktay Rifat (Rockeyingham Press, 1993) and a major collection of Nazım Hikmet’s poetry (Anvil Press, 2002). In 2004 *In the Temple of a Patient God*, her translations from the Turkish of Bejan Matur, was published by Arc Visible Poets. Translations of several short stories and poems by other Turkish writers have appeared in magazines and anthologies in Britain and Turkey.

Vincent Czyz is the author of *Adrift in a Vanishing City*, a collection of short fiction. He contributes book reviews to *Rain Taxi*, WBUR and the *American Book Review*. A resident of Istanbul, Turkey, for five years, he currently resides in Vineland, New Jersey.

Clifford Endres and Selhan Savcoglu both live in Istanbul and teach at Kadir Has University. Their translations have appeared in *Agenda, Massachusetts Review, Quarterly West, Seneca Review, Near East Review, The Turkish PEN*, and other journals.

Edward Foster is the author of several books of criticism, literary history, and poetry, most recently *Mahrem: Things Men Should Do for Men*. He is the founding editor of the journal *Talisman* and of Talisman House Publishers. He directs the division of humanities and social sciences at the Stevens Institute of Technology.

Erdağ Göknar teaches Turkish language and cultural history at Duke University. He is an award-winning translator of literary fiction, and his recent translations include *My Name is Red* (Knopf, 2001) and *Earth and Ashes* (Harcourt, 2002). He is currently translating A. H. Tanpinar’s *A Mind at Peace*.

Talât S. Halman is professor and chair of the Department of Turkish Literature, Bilkent University (Ankara). Formerly he was on the faculties of Columbia University, Princeton University, and the University of Pennsylvania and professor at New York University, where he also served as chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures. In addition to many volumes of original poetry and scholarly articles, he has published Turkish translations of works by William Faulkner, Mark Twain, Rumi, Shakespeare (Complete Sonnets), *et al.*, and English translations of Ottoman poetry and contemporary Turkish literature.

Suat Karantay is a professor in the Department of Translation and Interpreting at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. He completed his B.A. and M.A. in comparative literature and his Ph.D. in English and American literature. His current areas of interest are literary translation and contemporary Turkish literature. He maintains an extensive website on contemporary Turkish literature at www.turkish-lit.boun.edu.tr.

Mel Kenne teaches in the American Culture and Literature Department of Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Turkey.
He has three published books of poetry and a sequence of poems in a musical/poetic/dramatic production on compact disk, entitled The Book of Ed. As a translator, he has rendered into English the work of several Latin American, Spanish and Turkish poets. He and Saliha Paker have co-translated a number of poems by Turkish poets and Latife Tekin’s novel Sevgili Arsız Ölıüm (Dear Shameless Death).

Richard McKane studied Classics and Russian at Marlborough College, graduating from Oxford in 1969, the same year he published Selected Poems of Anna Akhmatova (an expanded edition of which appeared from Bloodaxe Books in 1989). He began to learn Turkish in the late 1960s and lived in Turkey during the 1970s. He contributed to the Penguin Book of Turkish Verse and, with Ruth Christie, published collections from Oktay Rifat and Nazim Hikmet. He has also translated or co-translated more than a dozen books of Russian poetry, including a collection of Mandelstam (from Bloodaxe) and, recently, Ten Russian Poets (Anvil Press). Two books of his own poetry, The Turkey Poems and Coffeehouse Poems, have been published in English and Turkish and by Yapı Kredi Yayınları.


Önder Otçu did his undergraduate work at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey, and his graduate work in social anthropology at the University of Oslo, Norway. A translator from Norwegian, English, and Portuguese into Turkish, and from Turkish into English, he is also a critic and novelist. His much praised translations of works by the distinguished Turkish poet İlhan Berk are collected in Berk’s Selected Poems (2004). Önder Otçu was a resident fellow at the MacDowell Artists’ Colony in 2002. He lives in Istanbul.

Saliha Paker is a professor of Translation Studies in the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. Since 1992, she has been an Honorary Research Fellow of the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham. She studied English and Classics at Istanbul University and has taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. For the last twenty years her research has focused on Ottoman and modern Turkish translation history. Her work in English includes an edited volume, translations: (re)shaping of literature and culture (Boğaziçi University Press, 2002), essays in various international publications, and translations of modern Turkish poetry and fiction. She is currently on the Executive Council of the International Association of Translation and Intercultural Studies and on the Translation Committee of the International Comparative Literature Association.


Sidney Wade, guest editor for the current issue, received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Houston and is a professor in the Creative Writing program at the University of Florida. She was a Fulbright Fellow in Istanbul in 1989–90 and received a fellowship to the Breadloaf Writers’ Conference in Vermont in 1994. She is currently vice president of The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP). Her translations of Turkish poets such as Yahya Kemal, Pir Sultan Abdal, and Gülseli İnal have appeared in venues including Two Lines, Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Literature, The Kenyon Review, and Kitaplık. She has published four collections of poetry, including Celestial Bodies (2002), Green (1998), and Istanbul’dan / From Istanbul (1998). Her poetry has been published in journals such as The New Yorker, Poetry, Paris Review, and Yale Review.

Serya Yeşilçay received her B.A. in Western Languages and Literature from Bosphorus University in Istanbul, Turkey and her M.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Florida. She currently lives in Gainesville, Florida, where she teaches magazine and feature writing at the University of Florida (and is in the process of writing her own great American novel).

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Review:
Literature and Arts of the Americas

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Founded in 1988, Review is the major forum in the United States for contemporary Latin American, Caribbean, and Canadian writing in English and English translation as well as for coverage of arts in the Americas. Review is published by Taylor and Francis Ltd. in association with the Americas Society, a national, not-for-profit institution that promotes understanding in the United States of the political, economic, and cultural issues that define and challenge the Americas today.

Review first brought the work of Latin American writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa to critical attention in the United States, and they were followed by numerous other important figures. Translators Edith Grossman, Gregory Rabassa, and Margaret Sayers Peden are among those who have contributed to Review. Issues of the magazine are developed from the Americas Society’s literature programs, which often focus on specific countries, regions, or on more abstract themes such as urban voices, women’s writing, or Latin American/Latino performing arts. Review has regularly included selections of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, book reviews of newly translated titles, profiles of visual artists, and essays exploring currents in music and the performing arts.

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