

## TURKISH LITERATURE – 20th Century

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### **PART I : Overview -Republic and Renaissance**

When the Ottoman state collapsed after nearly 625 years and gave way to the Turkish Republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk devoted his prodigious energies to the creation of a homogeneous nation-state dedicated to modernization in all walks of life, vowing to raise Turkey to the level of contemporary civilization (meaning the West) and higher. In image, in aspiration, in identification, the official and cultural establishment became largely Europeanized. Education was made secular, and reforms were undertaken to divest the country of its Muslim orientation. The legal system adapted the Swiss Civil Code, the Italian Penal Code, and German Commercial Law. Perhaps the most difficult of all reforms, the Language Revolution, was undertaken with lightning speed in 1928, and since then it has achieved a scope of success unparalleled in the modern world. The Arabic script, considered sacrosanct as Koranic orthography and used by the Turks for a millennium, was replaced by the Latin alphabet. This procrustean reform sought to increase literacy, to facilitate the study of European languages, and to cut off the younger generations from the legacy of the Ottoman past. Atatürk also launched a “pure Turkish” movement to rid the language of Arabic and Persian loanwords and to replace them with revivals from old Turkish vocabulary and provincial patois as well as neologisms. Reform and all, the single common denominator of Turkish identification has significantly been the language. It has provided for social cohesion, cultural continuity, and national allegiance.

Although many of these sweeping reforms did not have a strong impact in the rural areas until the latter part of the twentieth century, in the urban centers drastic changes took place: political system, religious faith, national ideology, educational institutions and methods, intellectual orientation, daily life, script and language—all underwent transformation.

All stages of modern Turkish history (reforms under Atatürk, 1923–1938; consolidation under İsmet İnönü, 1938–50; democracy under Adnan Menderes, 1950–60; and the junta, coalitions, caretaker cabinets, parliamentary governments since 1960) have been marked by the thrust of literary modernization.

Today’s Turkey is homogeneous in population (more than 99 percent Muslim) and integral in political and administrative structure, yet it is diversified, full of inner tensions, a battleground for traditionalists versus revolutionaries, fundamentalists versus secularists. In its reorientation, Turkey seems to have traded the impact of Islamic civilization for the influences of Western civilization—at least in the urban areas. During its *vita nuova*, Turkish culture was influenced by Europe, but it was not European as such. It is no longer predominantly Islamic, but certainly has little kinship with the Judeo-Graeco-Christian world despite the concepts, forms, and values it has adopted from that tradition. It has become a new amalgam of traditions—ancient Turkic, Anatolian, Selçuk, Ottoman, Islamic, Arabic, Persian, European, American—a bridge between two continents, like the two dramatic bridges in Istanbul that now link Europe and Asia. This synthesis, its culture and literature are enchorial, an original creation of modern Turkey. Whatever its strengths and weaknesses of this synthesis might be, there is no other like it.

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

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

Revolution, innovation, and Westernization have been the driving forces of the Turkish nation since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the transformation of sociopolitical structure, economic life, and culture, the men and

women of letters have served not only as eloquent advocates of progress, but also as catalysts, precursors, pioneers, and creators of brave new ideas. Today, as in the past thousand years, Turkish literature seems to bear testimony to Thomas Carlyle's dictum, "The history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history: political, scientific, religious," and to Gustave E. von Grunbaum's observation that "literature has always been the art of the Muslim world, masterpieces of painting and architecture notwithstanding."

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

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

### *POETRY*

**Reforms** When the Ottoman state collapsed after nearly 625 years and gave way to the Turkish Republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk devoted his prodigious energies to the creation of a homogeneous nation-state dedicated to modernization in all walks of life, vowing to raise Turkey to the level of contemporary civilization (meaning the West) and higher. In image, in aspiration, in identification, the official and cultural establishment became largely Europeanized. Education was made secular, and reforms were undertaken to divest the country of its Muslim orientation. The legal system adapted the Swiss Civil Code, the Italian Penal Code, and German Commercial Law. Perhaps the most difficult of all reforms, the Language Revolution, was undertaken with lightning speed in 1928, and since then it has achieved a scope of success unparalleled in the modern world. The Arabic script, considered sacrosanct as Koranic orthography and used by the Turks for a millennium, was replaced by the Latin alphabet. This procrustean reform sought to increase literacy, to facilitate the study of European languages, and to cut off the younger generations from the legacy of the Ottoman past. Atatürk also launched a "pure Turkish" movement to rid the language of Arabic and Persian loanwords and to replace them with revivals from old Turkish vocabulary and provincial patois as well as neologisms. Reform and all, the single common denominator of Turkish identification has significantly been the language. It has provided for social cohesion, cultural continuity, and national allegiance.

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### *Poets*

**Five Syllabist Poets.** In the early part of the Republican era, poetry served primarily as a vehicle for the propagation of nationalism. Younger poets branded Divan forms and meters as anathema. Native verse forms and syllabic meters gained popularity. Intense efforts were systematically undertaken to purify of the language. The group *Beş Hececiler* (Five Syllabist Poets)—Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel (1898–1973), who was equally adept at *aruz*;

Orhan Seyfi Orhon (1890–1972); Enis Behiç Koryürek (1893–1949); Halit Fahri Ozansoy (1891–1971); and Yusuf Ziya Ortaç (1895–1967)—produced simple, unadorned poems celebrating love, the beauties of nature, and the glories of the Turkish nation. Many poets, however, shied away from chauvinism and evolved individualistic worldviews and styles.

**Beyatlı.** Neoclassicism gained considerable popularity under the aegis of Yahya Kemal Beyatlı. A supreme craftsman, Beyatlı was the much-acclaimed neoclassicist who produced, in the conventional forms and meters, meticulous lyrics of love, Ottoman grandeur, and the beauties of Istanbul in poems memorable for their refined language and melodiousness.

#### Early Authors

**Tanpınar** Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar followed in the steps of Beyatlı, about whom he produced a sophisticated critical study and whose aesthetics he distilled into crystalline poems written in syllabic verse.

**Diranas** Ahmet Muhip Diranas, one of Turkey's best lyric poets, wrote all of his poems in the traditional syllabic meters. His agility in molding his lucid ideas and tender sentiments into these meters is most impressive. So is his ingenuity in finding rhymes.

**Kısakurek** Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905–1983), who started out as a poet of romantic agony and spent the latter part of his career as a confirmed Islamic fundamentalist, made an impact with his polished verses, which express suffering as aliterary conceit. His major poem “Anguish” stands as a tantalizing poetic experience of the soul's vicissitudes, as evinced by this excerpt:

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

These theories and movements continued to exert varying degrees of influence on the literature of the later decades, but the themes and the tenor of Nazım Hikmet's verse probably had the widest impact. Effective voices were being raised among poets, dramatists, fiction writers, essayists, and journalists against the established order and its iniquities, oppression of the proletariat, and national humiliation suffered at imperialist hands. The poetry of social realism concentrates on the creation of a just and equitable society. It is often more romantic and utopian than rhetorical, containing sensual strains, tender sentiments, and flowing rhythms, but also occasionally given to invective and vituperation.

**Hikmet** One of Turkey's earliest progenitors of free verse was Ercüment Behzad Lâv (1903–84). Ahmet Oktay (b. 1933), an astute critic, defined Lâv's aesthetic strategies as “surface modernism”—an observation that has considerable validity in view of the fact that Lâv was virtually an innovator for innovation's sake. There are few affirmations in what he wrote, little of what made other poets appealing to those who seek pleasure, and certainly none of the easy communicability of the ideological rhetoric that turned some of his contemporaries into heroes. One tends to concur with the brilliant scholar-critic Orhan Burian (1914–53), who observed in the late 1940s that Lâv is “committed to the cause of creating a new type of poetry out of half-baked ideas and hidden sound structures.” “There is a dryness in his poems,” Burian continued. “His short poems, which give voice to momentary emotions are more attractive.”

#### Early Movements

**Poetic realism** A frontal thrust for modernization took place in the early 1940s when Orhan Veli Kanık (1914–50), Oktay Rifat (1914–88), and Melih Cevdet Anday (1915–2002) launched their “Poetic Realism” movement. Their urge for literary upheaval was revolutionary, as expressed in a joint manifesto of 1941 that called for “altering the whole structure from the foundation up... dumping overboard everything that traditional literature has taught us.” The movement did away with rigid conventional forms and meters, reduced rhyme to a bare minimum, and avoided stock metaphors, stentorian effects, specious embellishments. It championed the idea and the ideal of “the little man” as its hero, the ordinary citizen who asserted his political will with the advent of democracy. Kanık's “Epitaph I” is precisely this type of celebration:

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

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

Orhan Veli’s first book, *Garip* (1941), which included the work of his best friends Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday, was also his most controversial and influential. Their joint manifesto with which it begins was influenced, according to Oktay Rifat, by André Breton’s *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, and marked a turning point in the modernization of Turkish poetry. It declared:

The literary taste on which the new poetry will base itself is no longer the taste of a minority class. People in the world today acquire their right to life after a sustained struggle. Like everything else, poetry is one of their rights and must be attuned to their tastes. This does not signify that an attempt should be made to express the aspirations of the masses by means of the literary conventions of the past. The question is not to make a defense of class interests, but merely to explore the people’s tastes, to determine them, and to make them reign supreme over art.

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

There are no stentorian effects in Orhan Veli’s verse, no rhetoric, no bloated images. In most of his poems, he strikes a vital chord by offering the simple truth, and he is usually so sincere as to seem almost sentimental. He never wrote a complex line nor a single perplexing metaphor. His verse was a revolt of a purist against facile meters, predetermined form and rhythm, pompous diction. Style, in his hands, became a vehicle for the natural sounds of colloquial Turkish.

**Rifat** In a poetic career that spanned half a century until his death in 1988, Orhan Veli’s friend Oktay Rifat also stood at the vanguard of modern Turkish poetry—first as an audacious, almost obstreperous rebel, then as an eclectic transformer of styles and language who was writing from a self-enforced privacy, and finally, as a reclusive elder statesman who was creating a unique synthesis. One could say that these three stages in his writing corresponded roughly to movements elsewhere in world literature—to the socialist surrealism of the 1930s and 1940s, the obscurantism of the French poets Apollinaire, Supervielle, Aragon, Éluard, Soupault and Prévert; and, finally, what one can only call “pure poetry.”

Oktay Rifat’s poetry is, in fact unique—the result of a very personal development. It defies critical analysis in terms of literary schools or influences. Although in the early phase of his career he seemed to belong to an emerging school, he stood squarely against any school that confined a poet’s aesthetic taste. In 1941 when he became a member of *Garip*, he insisted that the text of the manifesto include the following statement: “The idea of literary schools represents an interruption or pause in the flow of time. It is contrary to velocity and action. The only movement that is harmonious with the flow of life and does not thwart the concept of dialectics is the “no-school movement.”

Although most of his output from the mid-1960s on was either spontaneously or consciously universal, Rifat occasionally returned to Ottoman history. In a number of poems, he evokes Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire in masterful terms. He remarkably utilizes for most of these poems the sonnet form and some light rhymes. The synthesis becomes more encompassing with fascinating returns to roots, not the least of which is that his surprising turns of phrase and paradoxical concepts have their parallels in his predecessors' imagination.

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

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

**Reactions to Poetic realism.** In the late 1950s, a strong reaction set in against "Poetic Realism." Literature of commitment came under fire in some circles.

**Necatigil** Behçet Necatigil (1916–79) was Turkey's foremost intellectual poet who enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for his subtle, indefatigably inventive poems. Necatigil severed himself from sentimental romanticism, which was the umbilical cord of all of his predecessors and most of his contemporaries. He carried depersonalization farther than any Turkish poet and banished all subjective intrusions, value judgments, didacticism, and moralizing from his poetry. Necatigil made poetry itself reign supreme. He regarded all things and all phenomena as being possible or at least plausible. This approach granted him the freedom to look beyond the physical state and enabled him to discover distant and seemingly paradoxical relationships among objects, actions, emotions, and concepts.

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

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

He may well be to Turkish poetry what Wallace Stevens has been to American poetry, although there is virtually no resemblance between them in terms of style or substance. It is futile to look for influences when analyzing the basic features of Necatigil's art. He may have found a few themes and devices in the stark abstractions of post-World War II German poetry, but they are all subtle and elusive, as is his entire poetic approach.

Necatigil's "intellectual complexity" is a functional creative process that starts with visual and conceptual concentration on an object or phenomenon, places it into a web of distant relationships, distills from it the ultimate abstractions and expresses it in terms and idioms that stretch the resources of the language to its outer limits. No single poetic voice in modern Turkey is as spare and esoteric or as precise in expressing a vision or a speculation. Although Necatigil is the modern poet par excellence, his creative strategy, based as it was on the proposition that language is the supreme intellect, tends to reaffirm the aesthetic values of classical Ottoman poetry, about which he was fully knowledgeable. Verbal richness, subtle imagery, assonances, visions, and abstractions—the ultimate values of Turkey's bygone poetic tradition—find their ultramodern *vita nuova* in Necatigil's work. His poetry reconstructs the external world as well as the world of imagination through the prospects of language. He proves, by means of his explorations, that poetry can re-create our inner and outer life.

**The Second New** In the mid-twentieth century, an energetic new movement emerged often identified as İkinci Yeni, "The Second New."

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

From the 1940s to the early 1960s, Berk often exposed his art to the impact of contemporary French poetry. In the mid-1960s, he announced his resounding departure from European influences and embraced the norms and values of Turkish classical poetry. *Âşıkane* (double entendre: Like a Lover or Like a Minstrel, 1968) embodies the last group of Berk's French-oriented sonnets and his first collection of verses with a classical flavor. The lyrics in the latter category are in the form and spirit of the gazel, which was the most popular verse form in Islamic Middle Eastern literatures.

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

Among the daring, and quite impressive, explorations into Turkey's own literary heritage have been those undertaken by Turgut Uyar (1927–85), Attilâ İlhan (1925–2005), and Hilmi Yavuz (b.1936);

**Yavuz, Hilmi** the latter remains are the forefront of modern innovators who absorbed and revitalized many of the salient features of classical aesthetics, Islamic culture and beliefs, and traditional Turkish values. Although these three major figures are highly individualistic and their works drastically different from one another, they have all acknowledged the need for coming to terms with the viable and valuable aspects of the Ottoman-Turkish elite poetry. They have used not its stringent forms and prosody, but its processes of abstracting and its metaphorical techniques.

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

efforts

efforts—in

particular,

his

own.

Quiet reflection alternates with eruptions of anger and nausea; moves on to nightmarish abstract depictions; then resolves into an ontological probe wherein Uyar masterfully fuses the concrete and abstract elements of reality.

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

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

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

**Sureyya** Cemal Süreya (1931–90), a major figure of "The Second New" started out in the mid-twentieth century with bold innovations, wild thrusts of imagination, and distortions of language. In time, he would move away from the esoteric to the lucid.

**Ayhan** Ece Ayhan (1931–2002), a confirmed maverick from his emergence in the 1950s on, was a member of "The Second New." He championed anlamsız şiir, meaningless or absurd poetry. The best of this brave new poetry has as its hallmarks vivid imagination, an enchanting musical structure, and an intellectual complexity that dazzled with its audacious metaphors.

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

**Dağlarca, Fazıl Husnu** The most encompassing poetic achievement of contemporary Turkey belongs to Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca (1914-2008), the winner of the Award of the International Poetry Forum (Pittsburgh) and the Yugoslav Golden Wreath (Struga), previously won by W. H. Auden, Pablo Neruda, and Eugenio Montale, and later by Allen Ginsburg and others. His range is bewilderingly broad: metaphysical poetry, children's verse, cycles about the space age and lunar ventures, epics of the conquest of Istanbul and of the War of Liberation, aphoristic quatrains, neomystical, poetry of social protest, travel impressions, books on the national liberation struggles of several countries, and humorous anecdotes in verse. Dağlarca has published only poetry—more than a hundred collections in all. "In the course of a prestigious career," writes Yaşar Nabi Nayır, a prominent critic, "which started in 1934, Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca tried every form of poetry, achieving equally impressive success in the epic genre, in lyric and inspirational verse, in satire, and in the poetry of social criticism. Since he has contributed to Turkish literature a unique sensibility, new concepts of substance and form, and an inimitable style, his versatility and originality have been matched by few Turkish literary figures, past or present." Dağlarca's tender lyric voice finds itself in countless long and short poems:

In Turkish poetics, the quatrain holds a significant and time-honored place both as a stanzaic unit and as an independent verse. In classical poetry, its dominance was second only to the couplet, and most of the prominent poets produced—in the tradition of Omar Khayyam—an impressive body of rubais, four-line epigrammatic verses (a

a b a). The Turks also evolved the four-line *tuyuğ*, also in the **a a b a** rhyme pattern, but composed in a special quantitative meter and usually confined to philosophical comments. In folk poetry the quatrain was—and still is—the essential stanzaic unit, and among its most memorable achievements are the enchorial *manis*, quatrains by anonymous poets, written in syllabic meters.

With the advent of modernism, many structural changes, including the complete breakdown of stanzaic forms, came about. As a consequence, very few of the leading modern poets have used the quatrain. One major exception is Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca. In most of his multitudinous poems, Dağlarca has used the quatrain in all its aspects—rhymed, unrhymed, scanned and free, intact and fragmented.

## DRAMA

A most remarkable development in the Turkish arts has been the explosion of theatrical activity and the strides made in dramatic writing. Very few cities in the world have a broader spectrum of plays or superior performances presented than Istanbul. In 1960, Istanbul audiences had a choice of fewer than ten plays on any given day, but of more than thirty by the end of the decade; the increase in Ankara in the same period was from five to about twenty. In the second half of the twentieth century, an amazing diversity of foreign plays was including *Hamlet* (four separate productions), *My Fair Lady*, *Marat / Sade*, *South Pacific*, *Antigone*, French vaudevilles, *The Caretaker*, *The Odd Couple*, *Tobacco Road*, *The Diary of a Madman*, *Mother Courage*, *The Miser*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Physicists*, and *Oh Dad, Poor Dad*. The Turkish theater fared well not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of the quality of production and performance: many observers, comparing Turkish versions to their European, British, and American originals or counterparts, testified that Turkish theaters often did just as well and sometimes better.

The spectrum of dramatic literature by Turkish playwrights is now impressively broad: from well-made family melodramas to Brechtian Works such as Sermet Çağan's *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* (*The Orthopedic Factory*) and Haldun Taner's *Keşanlı Ali Destanı* (*The Ballad of Ali of Keshan*, 1970); from light comedies to Güngör Dilmen's scathing drama of innocent people brutalized by capitalism and imperialism; from striking village plays by Cahit Atay and Necati Cumalı to an Albee-like black comedy by Melih Cevdet Anday; from Aziz Nesin's modernized version of *Karagöz*, the traditional shadow play, to Refik Erduran's Shakespearean tragedy about Justinian the Great; from a musical drama by Turgut Özakman and Bülent Arel depicting city youth to A. Turan Oflazoğlu's towering tragedy in verse about the Ottoman Sultan İbrahim "the Mad"; from Orhan Kemal's prison drama to Orhan Aşena's dramatizations of history and legends.

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

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

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

The most conspicuous achievement of contemporary Turkish dramatic writing and production has been the conscious effort to create original native drama by making use of the formal and stylistic elements of traditional spectacular plays in a way to satisfy modern taste and contemporary intellectual needs. The main challenge to such



an attempt is to preserve critical sensitivity and to discriminate between the easy attraction of the spectacular and the pleasure of witnessing the true combination of form and content.

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

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

### *FICTION*

**Early Fiction.** The early novels of the republic depicted the disintegration of Ottoman society, ferocious political enmities, and the immoral lives of some members of religious sects, as well as the conflicts between urban intellectuals and poverty-stricken peasants—as in the novels of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974). Turkey’s major female intellectual and advocate of women’s rights, Halide Edib Adıvar (1882–1964), produced sagas of the War of Liberation, psychological novels, and panoramas of city life. Her novelistic art culminated in *Sinekli Bakkal* (1936), which she originally published in English in 1935 under the title *The Clown and His Daughter*.

**Anatolian Fiction.** The harsh realities of Anatolia found fertile ground in the literature of engagement after World War II. Sabahattin Ali (1907–48) was a pioneer of forceful fiction about the trials and tribulations of the lower classes. Two books, both published in 1950 — *Bizim Köy* (*Our Village; A Village in Anatolia*) by Mahmut Makal (b. 1930) and *Toprak Ana* by Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca — exerted a shattering impact on political and intellectual circles by dramatically exposing conditions in villages. The first, available in English translation, is a series of vignettes written by Makal, a teenage peasant who became a village teacher after graduating from one of the controversial Institutes for Village Teachers. The book reveals the abject poverty of the Anatolian village:

**Village Novel.** In the mid-1950s a brave new genre emerged—the “Village Novel,” which reached its apogee with Yaşar Kemal’s *İnce Memed* (translated into English under the title *Memed, My Hawk*, 1961). Yaşar Kemal (b. 1923), the most famous twentieth-century Turkish novelist at home and abroad was frequently mentioned not only in Turkey but also in the world press and literary circles as a strong candidate for the Nobel Prize. His impressive corpus of fiction, written in a virtually poetic style, ranks as one of the truly stirring achievements in the history of Turkish literature.

Dealing with the merciless reality of poverty, village literature portrays the peasant threatened by natural disaster and man’s inhumanity. The drama is enacted in terms of economic and psychological deprivation, blood feuds, stagnation and starvation, droughts, the tyranny of the gendarmes and petty officials, and exploitation at the hands of landowners and politicians. The lithe style records local dialects with an almost flawless accuracy. A pessimistic tone pervades much of village literature: its delineations are bleak even when occasional flashes of humor or a glimmer of hope or descriptions of nature’s beauty appear. A great strength of the genre is its freedom from the rhetoric that mars much of the poetry of social protest. When presenting deprived men and women pitted against hostile forces, the best practitioners offered an affirmation of the human spirit. Their works are often testaments to the dauntless determination of the peasant to survive and to resist—sometimes through rebellion—the forces of oppression.

**Urban Fiction.** Urban writers deal with a broad diversity of social problems in major cities. Accomplished novelist Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar (1888–1963) enjoys fame for nostalgic and sometimes satiric depictions of high-class life in old Istanbul. Peyami Safa (1899–1961), one of Turkey’s most prolific authors, dealt with social problems, cultural tensions, and psychic crises in his many highly readable novels.

Fiction about the urban poor shares some of the strengths of the Village Novel—engrossing plot, effective narration, realistic dialogue—and suffers from some of the comparable flaws—lack of subtlety and of psychological depth. The leading writer of fiction depicting the tribulations of working-class people is Orhan Kemal (1914–70). Necati

Cumalı (1921–2001), a prolific poet and playwright, wrote tellingly about poverty-stricken individuals in rural and coastal areas. Osman Cemal Kaygılı (1890–1945) penned poignant stories of the lumpenproletariat and the gypsies.

**Sait Faik** The short-story writer Sait Faik (1906–54) is admired for his meditative, rambling romantic fiction, full of intriguing insights into the human soul, capturing the pathos and the bathos of urban life in a style unique for its poetic yet colloquial flair.

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

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

**Historical Fiction.** An awakening of interest in Ottoman history after several decades of neglect gave rise to a massive semidocumentary novel by Kemal Tahir (1910–73), *Devlet Ana* (Mother State, 1967), a saga of the emergence of the Ottoman state in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Turkish War of Liberation (1919–22), as in the previous decades, inspired numerous major novels—*Yorgun Savaşçı* (The Tired Warrior, 1965) by Kemal Tahir, *Kalpakkılar* (Men in Fur Caps, 1962) and *Doludizgin* (Full Gallop, 1963) by Samim Kocagöz (1916–93), and *Kutsal İsyan* (The Sacred Uprising, 1966–68), in eight volumes, by Hasan İzzettin Dinamo (1909–89).

Attilâ İlhan produced a two-volume portrayal (à la Dos Passos's U.S.A.) of the crises of Turkish society following World War II, entitled *Kurtlar Sofrası* (A Feast for Wolves, 1963)

**Social Realists.** The best social realists in the second half of the twentieth century included Fakir Baykurt (1929–99), Çetin Altan (b. 1927), Dursun Akçam (1930–2003), Talip Apaydın (b. 1926), Tarık Dursun K. (b. 1931), Vedat Türkali (b. 1919), Kemal Bilbaşar (1910–83), Mehmet Seyda (1919–86), and Zeyyat Selimoğlu (1922–2000). Highly imaginative fiction came from Nahit Sırrı Örik (1894–1960), who wrote compellingly about the late Ottoman period, as did Hıfzı Topuz (b. 1923), a writer of semidocumentary fiction. Another major figure is Peride Celal (b. 1916), whose work evolved from popular novels to sophisticated psychological fiction and an epic treatment of democracy beset by conflicts. Sevim Burak (1931–83) was a successful practitioner of Faulknerian narrative techniques. A multitalented author, Zülfü Livaneli (b. 1946) has to his credit many diverse novels, some of which have enjoyed considerable success in Turkey as have their translations abroad. The short-story scene, which was dominated in the mid-twentieth century by such figures as Sait Faik, Memduh Şevket Esendal (1883–1952), and Nezihe Meriç (1925–2009), and later by Tomris Uyar (1941–2003) and Sevgi Soysal (1936–76), now flourishes, thanks to the work of Cemil Kavukçu (b. 1951), Hasan Ali Toptaş (b. 1958), and others.

**1980's** Since the 1980s, the art of the novel has taken giant strides thanks in part to the growing corpus of Yaşar Kemal and to the impressive work of Adalet Ağaoğlu (b. 1929), Tahsin Yücel (b. 1933), Vüs'at O. Bener (1922–2005), Erhan Bener (1929–2007), Attilâ İlhan, and others. Elif Şafak (b. 1971) enjoys wide fame internationally thanks to her provocative novels that interfuse traditional values and innovative features. The first decade of the twenty-first century has enjoyed what can be characterized as “the post-postmodern” fiction of numerous younger writers—for instance, Tuna Kiremitçi, Müge İplikçi, Perihan Mağden, Cezmi Ersöz, Şebnem İyigüzel, Sema Kaygusuz as well as Ahmet Ümit (b. 1960), who is gaining wide recognition as a master of suspense thrillers, a rare genre in Turkey.

**Orhan Pamuk** In Turkey and abroad, Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952) has emerged as a compelling precursor of new dimensions in the Turkish novelistic art. His major works have been successfully translated into nearly fifty languages, the English versions attracting wide attention and winning a number of major international awards. Pamuk's meteoric rise culminated in his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006. It is significantly that this first Nobel Prize won by a Turk in any field went to a literary figure because literature remains the premier cultural genre among Turks. Pamuk himself asserted that the prize was awarded principally to Turkish language and literature. Although some intellectuals acknowledge this to be a fact, many believe that the prize was awarded in recognition of Pamuk's own creative work; some claim he received the prize because he made damaging remarks about incidents in Ottoman history and contemporary life. Pamuk's formula for success has been postmodernism plus some Turkish exoticism. He has been likened to several giants of modern literature. Such kinships tend to provide a fairly easy passage to fame abroad. The risk involved, however, is that similarities may not sustain the inherent value of the oeuvre for long—unless the writer from the other culture finds a voice uniquely his own, explores new forms, and creates a synthesis beyond a pat formula based on what is in fashion.

It would not be incorrect, however, to assert that Pamuk is at present proceeding away from “influences” toward an authentic, original novelistic art—a new synthesis as evinced by his first post-Nobel novel, *Masumiyet Müzesi* (2008; *The Museum of Innocence*, 2009). His first novel, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* (*Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, 1982) is a *Buddenbrooks* type of work in three volumes that traces a family's life over three generations as well as the process of Turkish modernization from the early twentieth century onward. *Sessiz Ev* (*Quiet House*, 1983) skillfully fuses modern and traditional novelistic techniques, utilizing five major characters who narrate the story through their stream of consciousness. The later two works remain untranslated into English, although both have fascinating features. *Beyaz Kale* (1985), published in English translation in 1990 as *The White Castle*, is a tour de force about the intriguing interaction between a Venetian and an Ottoman look-alike who symbolize diverse aspects of the cultural tensions between East and West.

*Kara Kitap* (1990; *The Black Book* of 1994 and 2006) was hailed as a masterwork, especially in Europe and the United States and solidified Pamuk's reputation. It masterfully depicts the mysteries of Istanbul and evokes the traditional values of Sufism. *Yeni Hayat* (1995; *The New Life*, 1997) is a travel novel woven in a poetic style that deals with imagination gone awry, youthful despair, and republican idealism thwarted.

The success of two novels in particular—*Benim Adım Kırmızı* (1998; *My Name is Red*, 2001), a powerful novel about miniature painters in the Ottoman capital in 1591, and *Kar* (2002; *Snow* 2004), Pamuk's most patently political work—led to his Nobel Prize. His *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* (2003; *İstanbul: Memories and the City*, 2005), a beguilingly evocative description of his beloved and sorrowful city, enhanced his international prestige. His *Masumiyet Müzesi* is avowedly a novel of love, marriage, friendship, sexuality, family life, and happiness. Pamuk was crowned the novel's success by opening a museum by the same name in Istanbul.

## ESSAYS

### Turkish Literary Criticism

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed strides taken in literary criticism when Nurullah **Ataç** (1898–1957) achieved renown as an impressionistic critic who reevaluated the tradition of classical poetry and spearheaded the values inherent in ventures of new poetry, especially “The First New” movement. An exciting and enduring contribution came from Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, a prominent Turkish littérateur and an eloquent exponent of a generation of intellectuals who made a synthesis of classical Turkish culture, French literature, and modern artistic sensibilities. A first-rate poet and novelist as well as an inspiring professor of literature at Istanbul University, he wrote a monumental critical history of Turkish literature, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (*History of Nineteenth-Century Turkish Literature*, 1949), and a superb treatise on the famous neoclassical poet Yahya Kemal, published in 1962.

Among academic critics, Orhan **Burian** (1914–53) held the promise of a strong impact on the evaluation of modern Turkish poetry, but his life was cut short by his premature death.

Mehmet **Kaplan** (1915–86) made astute analyses of poetry and short fiction of the period from the nineteenth century onward. He also produced numerous stimulating studies of early Turkish literature. One flaw in his work

resulted from various lapses of judgment regarding many of his contemporaries, especially Nazım Hikmet and other socialist writers.

The vast amount of **socialist literary criticism** proved ideologically effective in the second half of the twentieth century. Cevdet Kudret (1907–92), Memet Fuat (1926–2002), Selahattin Hilav (1928–2005), Asım Bezirci (1927–93), Fethi Naci (1927–2008), and others were the notable members of this school. Sabahattin Eyuboğlu (1908–73), Vedat Günyol (1911–2004), Adnan Benk (1922–98), and Murat Belge (b. 1943) excelled in producing urbane and erudite essays. Ideologically impartial critical work came from Suut Kemal Yetkin (1903–80), Azra Erhat (1915–82), Hüseyin Cöntürk (1918–2003), Tahir Alangu (1916–73), Rauf Mutluay (1925–95), Konur Ertop (b. 1936), and others.

The most prolific reviewer of all time, Doğan Hızlan (b. 1937), functions as the “conscience” of Turkish literature, setting the lead among fairminded and stimulating critics. This group also includes Ahmet Oktay (b. 1933), Adnan Binyazar (b. 1934), Adnan Özyalçın (b. 1934), Orhan Koçak (b. 1948), Feridun Andaç (b. 1954), Semih Gümüş (b. 1956), Füsün Akatlı (1944–2010), Cem Erciyes, Ömer Türkeş, Cemil Meriç (1916–87), Nermi Uygur (1925–2005), Beşir Ayvazoğlu (b. 1952), Hasan Bülent Kahraman and others

Berna Moran (1921–93), a scholar of English literature, produced several major books about literary theories and their applicability to Turkish literature, that have become guidebooks for critics in the succeeding decades. Jale Parla (b. 1945), who earned a doctorate in comparative literature at Harvard University, stands as perhaps the most important Turkish academic critic of fiction, especially on the strength of her major work *Don Kişot'tan Bugüne Roman* (The Novel from Don Quixote to Our Day).

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

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

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