

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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## TURKISH NONFICTION

### 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 Özyalçınar (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), Nermin 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.

Talat S. Halman, *A Millennium of Turkish Literature: A Concise History*, ed. Jayne L. Warner, rev. ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011). First edition published by Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2008.