

# TURKIC LITERATURE

## POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

### PRE-İSLAMİC TURKISH LİTERATURE

**Overview.** It is with the Orhon inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. that we get the most significant documents of early Turkish literature. Those inscriptions as well as the oral epics and a large body of oral lyric verse constitute the best work of the nomadic and settled Turkish communities until the latter part of the eleventh century. Among the oldest specimens of written literary works are memorial tablets, stone monoliths, and stelae found in the Yenisei Valley of northeastern Mongolia as well as documents unearthed in the Sinkiang region of modern China. Dating from the seventh to the ninth century, these works include stories of the battles the Turks fought against the Chinese, a variety of legends, and numerous specimens of verse (found mostly in Chinese translation) written in Uyghur Turkish.

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

### NONFICTION

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

### FICTION

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

In addition to the early Dede Korkut tales, which recount the Turks' heroic exploits, the oral tradition produced a large body of legends and stories.

**Dede Korkut Tales.** The Book of Dede Korkut has been called the Iliad of the Turks. The similarities are too few and too inconsequential to warrant systematic comparison, but, like the Iliad, the stories of Dede Korkut represent and embody the epic élan of a nation's literary imagination. Constructed not as a monolithic work but as a series of interrelated legends, The Book of Dede Korkut relates in prose and verse the tribulations of the Oğuz, an ancestral nomadic Turkish tribe, in their migration from Central Asia to parts of the Middle East. The stories that make up the epic have collective authorship in the form in which they were transcribed, although originally they may have been the work of a single writer. Since its emergence, possibly in the tenth century, the epic has undergone much substantive and stylistic change as a part of living oral literature. A significant aspect of its evolution was the introduction of Islamic themes as the Turks gradually adopted Islam.

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

### POETRY

**Lyrics.** Turkish poetry made its debut in the Uyghur dialect presumably in the sixth century, it had become a living tradition. This tradition's principal achievement is folk poetry composed by minstrels and troubadours, who

voiced in a spontaneous, sincere, and simple language the sensibilities, yearnings, social protests, and critical views of the uneducated classes. Utilizing Turkic verse forms and syllabic meters, often extemporized and sung to musical accompaniment and replete with assonances, alliterations, and inexact rhymes, folk poetry harped on the themes of love, heroism, the beauties of nature, and, at times, mysticism.

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

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

**Early Lyric Poetry.** Some of the earliest specimens of verse attributed to Turks are available only in Chinese translation. These epigrammatic poems (possibly excerpts) reveal a refined and subtle poetic sense:

Young girls are weaving cloth,  
I can't hear the sound of the loom,  
But I hear those girls breathing.

In Uyghur texts, we find many early verses, some attributed to individual poets, vidual poets, others anonymous, but many were accomplished practitioners of their art, as can be seen in the closing stanzas of Aprin Çor Tigin's "Love Poem":

Gods of light, grant me this bliss  
Let my soft gentle darling and I  
Join our lives forever.  
Mighty angels, give us power  
So that my black-eyed sweetheart and I  
Can live and laugh together.

**Epics .** Although all but one of the long epics, the Oğuzname, failed to survive intact, the material, that has come down to the present in partial or fragmentary form charts the continuity of literary evolution while presenting a panorama of life and culture among the Turks before their conversion to Islam.

The early epics are usually poetically conceived depictions of gods and heroes. Among them we find a fairly elaborate cosmogony, mythic accounts of the emergence of the Turks, stories about preternatural phenomena, and many legends of victory and defeat, of migration and catastrophe. The epic literature evolved in the Uyghur period is a narration of the emergence of tribes, their peripatetic adventures, their fight for survival against natural disasters and hostile communities, of exodus and injustice, of brave deeds and social disintegration, of victory and enslavement. Epic literature evolved as a collective creative endeavor and was kept alive, with substantial changes over the centuries, by minstrels—often called ozans or sometimes bahşis—who, accompanying themselves on a stringed instrument commonly referred to as a kopuz, narrated stories and chanted poems.

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

**Oguz Epic.** The only long epic from this period that remain intact is the Oğuz epic, whose origin might conceivably go as far back as twenty centuries. It is an elaborate and lyrical description of superhuman and worldly episodes in the life of the legendary hero Oğuz. The focal themes are those of heroism and struggle for survival. In blending miracles with daily life, the epic utilizes the motifs of nature's power and beauty. Interspersed in it are lyric

passages that are further proof that ancient Turkic verse, in substance and form, had by this early period attained an appreciable level of artistry.

### **EARLY ISLAMIC TURKISH LITERATURE : Central Asia (11th - 12th Centuries)**

**Migration.** The earliest identifiably Turkic groups of Central Asia were settled communities with a distinctive culture and oral literary tradition. Most of them became peripatetic tribes after leaving their homeland under the pressure of natural hardships (perhaps

droughts or floods) or marauding enemies. Some resettled in nearby regions, others moved on to the distant Far East or the Near East. The exodus brought them in contact with diverse cultures and communities from which they acquired tools and terms, concepts and concrete objects—thus indicating their receptivity to anything useful that would serve their purposes.

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

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

It was not an accident of history that most of the fighting Turks of a millennium ago bypassed Judaism and Christianity, with which they had come into close contact in Asia Minor. Islam's appeal to them was manifold. In Geoffrey Lewis's words, "The demands which it makes are few; the rewards which it promises are great, particularly to those who die battling "in the Path of Allah." But what must have had even more weight with the Turks who came over to Islam in such numbers during the tenth century was the fact that acceptance of Islam automatically conferred citizen-rights in a vast and flourishing civilization." Once conversion to Islam became firmly entrenched, the Turks started serving the cause of Muslim domination and propaganda fide. As Julius Germanus has observed: "Islam and its martial spirit was one of the greatest motives in the uninterrupted success of the Turks. They had fought, as idolaters before, for the sake of rapine and glory, but the propagation of the faith gave a moral aim to their valor and enhanced their fighting quality." In time, Islam became so pervasive a force that the Ottomans ceased to consider themselves Turks, proudly identifying themselves as Muslims.

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

Is Alp Er Tunga dead and gone  
While the evil world lives on?  
Has time's vengeance begun?  
Now hearts are torn to shreds.

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

**Yusuf Has.** The writing of the *Kutadgu Bilig* by Yusuf Has Hâcib coincided almost exactly with that of the *Divanü Lügâti't Türk*. Yet these two works could not be more disparate in orientation: the *Divan*, although written mostly in Arabic, is quintessentially "Turkish", whereas the *Kutadgu Bilig*—a monumental philosophical treatise in

verse (approximately 6,500 couplets), on government, justice, and ethics—reflects the author’s assimilation of Islamic concepts, of Arabic and Persian culture, including its orthography, vocabulary, and prosody.

**Elite vs Folk Literature.** The disparity was to become the gulf that divided Turkish literature well into the twentieth century—the gulf, namely, between *poesia d’arte* and *poesia popolare*, to use Benedetto Croce’s two categories. The first embodies elite, learned, ornate, refined literature; the second represents spontaneous, indigenous, down-to-earth, unassuming oral literature. *Poesia d’arte* is almost always an urban phenomenon, whereas *poesia popolare* usually flourishes in the countryside. The former, as the name suggests, has a strong commitment to the principle of “art for art’s sake,” whereas the latter is preponderantly engaged or utilitarian in function and substance.

**Central Asia.** In the two centuries prior to the establishment of the Ottoman state, while the process of Islamization gained momentum, the intellectual elite of the Turkish states produced Islamic treatises, poems, translations, and Koranic commentaries. In the second half of the twelfth century, the *Divan-ı Hikmet* (Poems of Wisdom) by Ahmet Yesevi, founder of a principal mystic sect, and the *Atebet-ül Hakayık* (The Threshold of Truths), a long poetic tract by Edib Ahmed about ways of achieving moral excellence, wielded wide religious and literary influence.

**İsiamization of Dede Korkut Tales.** The Book of Dede Korkut, composed of twelve legends, narrates in prose and verse the adventures of the Oğuz Turks migrating from Central Asia to Asia Minor. These tales of heroism constitute the Turks’ principal national epic, which invites comparison with the world’s best epic literature. Although the martial spirit dominates The Book of Dede Korkut, it also has eloquent passages that express a yearning for peace and tranquility:

If the black mountains lying out there were quite safe,  
Then people would go there to live.  
If the rivers whose waters flow bloody were safe,  
They would all flood their banks for joy.  
If black stallions were safe,  
They would then sire colts,  
If the camel were safe in the midst of the herd,  
She would mother young camels there.  
If the white sheep were safe in the fold,  
She would bear there her lambs,  
And if gallant princes were safe,  
They would all be the fathers of sons.

(Translated by Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal,

### **Early Islamic Turkish Literature : Selçuk Mystical Literature in Anatolia**

**Gazi vs Sufi.** Turkish communities, through many centuries, experienced the duality of the *gazi* (warrior, conquering hero) and *Sufi* (mystic) spirits. Whereas the raiders and the soldiers of Islam kept waging war to expand the frontiers of the faith, the *Sufis*—men of peace, humanism, and love—preached the virtues of tranquillity in the heart and all over the world.

**RUMI** The mystic philosopher whose thoughts and spiritual guidance were to dominate Anatolia from the thirteenth century onward and inspire many nations in modern times was Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207–73). With his poetic celebrations of love and the arts and life itself, he heralded in the thirteenth century a new glittering age of humanistic mysticism. His ideas—which stressed the deathlessness of the loving soul, the joys of passion, the inherent worth of the human being, the aesthetic and ecstatic imperative of faith, the need to go beyond the confines of scholasticism and to transcend schisms, and above all, the godliness of man— not only gave renewed vigor to Islamic mysticism but also represented for the Islamic religion in general a counterpart of the Renaissance, which was to emerge in Europe a century after Rumi’s death.

**Early Life.** Celaleddin was born in Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan) in 1207, the son of a renowned scholar and mystic, Bahāüddin Veled. When Celaleddin was about twelve years old, his family was forced to flee Balkh

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

**Creativity.** In 1244, a dramatic encounter changed Mevlana's spiritual life. In Konya, he met a wild mystic who seemed to have come out of nowhere—Şems of Tabriz. It is said that Rumi discovered the inner secrets of love through Şem's influence and came to the realization that love transcends the mind. At this stage in his life, at age thirty-seven, he was above all a scholar. He had read in depth in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Hebrew, and commanded vast encyclopaedic knowledge. But now passion reigned supreme over his mind. The frontiers of the intellect suddenly appeared too narrow, constricting, claustrophobic. As a result of his affection, perhaps love, for Şems, he embarked on a period of virtually constant ecstasy and excitement, of poetic creativity, of immersion in music—and the sema, mystic whirling.

**Synesthesia.** The passions of the mystic mind which Mevlana called "my spiritual kingdom," intensified by his pains and ecstasies, gave rise to his collection of odes and quatrains entitled *Divan-ı Kebir*, and to the great *Mesnevi*, consisting of some twenty-six thousand couplets, which is a masterwork of poetic narration and Sufi wisdom. It is small wonder that the great mystic was given the supreme title of "Mevlana" (Our Lord, Grand Master). His reputation rests not only on the spiritual heights he attained in his poetry, but also on his having brought the dimension of aesthetics to mysticism in a systematic and comprehensive way. Poetry, music, dance, and the visual arts—rare in most Islamic movements—were integrally combined in the practices of the Mevlevi Order. Not only the synesthesia of the verbal, musical, and visual genres, but more comprehensively, the unified use of intellectual, spiritual, and artistic elements constituted the hallmark of Mevlana's faith.

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

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

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

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

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

This season is not the spring, it is some other season,  
The languid trances in the eyes have a different reason,

And there is another cause for the way each single branch  
Dallies by itself while all the trees sway in unison.

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

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

Rumi felt little respect for organized religion and stressed the primacy of internal faith and inner allegiance:

I roamed the lands of Christendom from end to end  
Searching all over, but He was not on the Cross.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By the late thirteenth century, Islamic mysticism, in particularly Rumi's Sufi philosophy, had become influential in many parts of the new homeland of the Turks. After several centuries of turmoil in Anatolia—with the ravages of the Crusades, the Byzantine-Selçuk wars, the Mongol invasions, strife among various Anatolian states and principalities, and frequent secessionist uprisings still visible or continuing—there was a craving for peace based on

an appreciation of man's inherent worth. Mysticism, which attributes godlike qualities to man, became the apostle of peace and the chief defender of man's value.

### **HACI BEKTAS VELI** (Thirteenth Century)

An influential Anatolian mystic who formulated compelling ethical precepts, Hacı Bektaş Veli was the founder of the Bektaşî sect, which was to become the most popular of Anatolian sects. His teachings continue to inspire the people of Turkey.

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

### **YUNUS EMRE**

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

We love the created  
For the Creator's sake.

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

The Providence that casts this spell  
And speaks so many tongues to tell,  
Transcends the earth, heaven and hell,  
But is contained in this heart's cast.

The yearning tormented my mind:  
I searched the heavens and the ground;  
I looked and looked, but failed to find.  
I found Him inside man at last.

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

When love arrives, all needs and flaws are gone.

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

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

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

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

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

His poems frequently refer to his full acceptance of the “four holy books” rather than a strict adherence to the Koran—the other three being the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Talmud.

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

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

Too many words are fit for a beast of burden.

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

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

I am not here on earth for strife,  
Love is the mission of my life.

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

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

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

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

In this sense, he was akin to Petrarch, also a fourteenth-century poet, and to Erasmus, who, as a part of classical or Renaissance humanism a century later, shunned the dogmatism

imposed on man by scholasticism and tried to instill in the average man a rejuvenated sense of the importance of his life on earth. Similar to Dante's work, Yunus Emre's poetry symbolized the ethical patterns of mortal life while depicting the higher values of immortal being. Yunus Emre also offered to the common man "the optimism of mysticism"—the conviction that human beings, sharing godly attributes, are capable of transcending themselves:

The image of the Godhead is a mirror;  
The man who looks sees his own face in there.

The central doctrine of Sufism is *vahdet-i vücüt*, the unity of existence. Yunus Emre explicitly states this fundamental tenet:

The universe is the oneness of Deity,  
The true man is he who knows this unity.

You had better seek Him in yourself,  
You and He aren't apart—you're one.

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

He is God Himself—human are His images.  
See for yourself: God is man, that is what He is.

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

For those who truly love God and His ways  
All the people of the world are brothers and sisters.

Humanism upholds the ideal of the total community of mankind. Yunus Emre's humanist credo is also based on international understanding that transcends ethnic, political, and sectarian divisions:

The man who doesn't see the nations of the world as one  
Is a rebel even if the pious claim he's holy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

— — —

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

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

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

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

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

Yunus Emre also denigrated the pharisees' orthodox views and the strict teachings:

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

He had no use for the trappings of organized religion:

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

— — —

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

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

You set a scale to weigh deeds, for your aim  
Is to hurl me into Hell's crackling flame.  
You can see everything, you know me—fine;  
Then, why must you weigh all these deeds of mine?

In poem after poem, he reminds the fanatics that love is supreme and stringent rules are futile:

Yunus Emre says to you, pharisee,  
Make the holy pilgrimage if need be  
A thousand times—but if you ask me,  
The visit to a heart is best of all.

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

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

Like Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), one of the greatest Islamic Sufis of all time, who was put to death for proclaiming "Anal Haq" (I am God), Yunus Emre announces that he has achieved divinity:

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

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

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

Yunus Emre's humanistic and aesthetic values, which were kept alive in Anatolia's oral tradition, have had a powerful impact on Turkish culture since the early part of the twentieth century and appear likely to remain influential.

## OTTOMAN LITERATURE - Overview

**Ottoman Empire.** The Ottoman state had a life span of more than six centuries, from (1299 to 1922). A single dynasty reigned in unbroken continuity. Islam was not only the religious faith, but also the political ideology of the basically theocratic Ottoman state. The empire was multiracial, multinational, multireligious, multilingual. In ruling over these disparate elements, the Ottoman establishment achieved remarkable success in administrative, military, and fiscal organization.

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

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

### PART II : OTTOMAN POETRY (Divan Poetry)

**Position of Poetry.** The Ottoman elite was passionately devoted to poetry. Perhaps the crowning achievement of Ottoman culture was poetry, which also served as the propaedeutic to all other literary arts and as an element of visual and plastic arts like calligraphy, architecture, and miniature painting as well as of the decorative arts. Divan poetry, as the Turkish elite poetry that was influenced by Arabic and Persian literature is often called, found favor at the court and at the coffeehouse, it satisfied the aesthetic needs of both the elite and the man in the street. Significantly, two thirds of the sultans were poets—some, in particular Mehmed “the Conqueror” (1432-81) and Süleyman the Magnificent (1494-1566), were first rate.

**Elite Poetry.** Divan poetry was composed by and for an intellectual elite mostly affiliated with the court. Most of the prominent poets received a theological education at a medrese (Muslim academy) where instruction was given in Arabic and Persian, both considered a sine qua non for a man of letters. The Ottoman poets as a rule viewed it the epitome of literary achievement to publish a collection of poems in one of these two languages—or preferably in both. Fuzuli (d.1556), ranked among the two or three greatest classical poets, wrote three divans (collections of poems)—in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

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

**Prosody.** Aruz (Arabic: arud), a quantitative prosody devised by the Arabs and perfected by the Persians, dominated Divan poetry. This metric form is based on the arrangement of syllables according to vowel length and consonantal ending. Each short vowel at the end of a syllable accounts for a short sound (.). A syllable ending in a consonant or a long vowel is taken as a long sound (–) The meter of one famous line would thus be:

Â-şık ol-dur kim kı-lar câ-nın fe-dâ câ-nâ-nı-na

In this complaint by Fuzuli, that “The lover is he who sacrifices his life to his loved one,” the meter as it stands is one of the most frequently used. The name of the meter is Fâilâtün / fâilâtün / fâilâtün / fâilün, which reproduces the sound pattern. The final k of âşık is linked with the word oldur and the final syllable of the line, as in the case of all meters, is automatically accepted as long even though it ends in a short vowel. The poet could choose from about a hundred different meters.

**Incompability.** This prosodic structure was essentially ill suited to Turkish phonology. Aruz meters have a preponderance of long syllables, whereas Turkish makes frequent use of short vowels. Three successive short syllables, for instance, can be used only at the end of just a few meters, and no meter can accommodate four successive short syllables. (The name “A-na-do-lu,” meaning Anatolia, to cite one blatant example, could not fit any aruz meter.) This incongruity caused two anomalous situations: it forced poets to distort the pronunciation of hundreds of Turkish words in order to fit them into the molds of the meters and to borrow in huge numbers Persian and Arabic words with long vowels. The prosody afforded definite rhythms and predetermined euphonic structures which, as pleasing to the ear as they certainly are, can become repetitious and tedious to the point where the substance is virtually subjugated to the meter.

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

called murabba, often used for lyrics of love and levity); and musammat (extended versions of many of the other basic verse forms).

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

**Achievements.** Despite the tyranny of form, which even forced on the poet the requirement that each poetic statement be contained within the couplet or distich and that a static metaphorical system be regenerated with such sets of conceptual congruity as gül, the rose representing the beautiful sweetheart, and the bülbül, the distraught nightingale symbolizing the eloquent poet in love, prominent Divan poets attained a profound spirituality, a trenchant sensitivity, an overflowing eroticism.

**Themes.** The themes recurring in the work of the masters range from self-glorification to self-abnegation, from agony to ebullient joy, from fanatic abstinence to uninhibited hedonism. Islamic mysticism, as the soul’s passionate yearning to merge with God, constitutes the superstructure of much Divan poetry.

**Early Poets.** Among the early masters of the Divan tradition are Ahmedî (d. 1413), Ahmed Pasha (d. 1497), Ahmed-i-Dâi (fourteenth–fifteenth century), and Necatî (d. 1509).

**Fuzuli.** Fuzuli, the great figure of Ottoman literature in the sixteenth century, emerged at the peak of the Ottoman Empire’s grandeur. He is the author of the mesnevi entitled Leylâ vü Mecnun (Leylâ and Mejnûn), a long narrative poem of close to four thousand couplets, that explores the philosophical implications of worldly and mystic love. Perhaps no other poet exerted as much influence as Fuzuli on the elite poetry of the succeeding few centuries.

**Other Classical Poets.** Hayalî (d. 1557), Yahya of Taşlıca (d. 1582), Şeyhülislâm Yahya (d. 1644), and Nailî (d. 1666) achieved well-deserved renown for virtuosity, graceful lyricism, and an elegant use of the language.

**Baki.** Baki, the great sixteenth-century poet laureate, attained wide fame for the aesthetic perfection of his secular gazels and kasides.

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

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

**Achievement.** Although there is a measure of truth in these critical comments, Divan poetry achieved impressive success as poetry pure with a commitment, in Platonic terms, to abstraction's being more real than reality itself. The auditory imagination operative in its aesthetics never fails to impress the sensitive ear. Although it may be steeped in evocations of *la belle dame sans merci* the emotional dimensions than the most accomplished classical poets such as Fuzuli and Şeyh Galib (d. 1799) establish in their poems sway the romantic souls on one level and the cerebral readers on another. And despite much repetition of metaphor and stock epithets, Divan poets offer innumerable fresh, compelling imaginative metaphors and images.

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

What endures in this dome is but a pleasant echo.

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

We have so removed our physical existence  
We are now hidden in the gleaming mirror.

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

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

Rifts are rampant, the community of peace is rent with fear,  
I am at a loss, for I can find no true pathfinder.

**Beloved.** Within the theocratic framework, the poets saw and showed the sultan as sacrosanct. Ottoman panegyrics charted a progression of love—from an ordinary sweetheart to the sultan and ultimately to God. In fact, in many Ottoman poems written by the court poets as well as by the independents and mystics, a three-level interpretation of the “beloved” is possible: darling, king, and divine being.

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

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

Fuzuli is a beggar imploring your grace's favor;  
Alive he is your dog, dead he is dust at your feet.  
Make him live or die, the judgment and the power are yours,  
My vision my life my master my loved one my royal Sultan.

Because the poets frequently bemoaned their suffering at the hands of the loved one, the complaint was thereby about the sultan and about God, whose will the sultan represented on earth.

**Sultan.** Those sultans who were themselves poets also contributed to the view of their reign as being less valuable than love, in particularly the love of God. Mehmed "the Conqueror" (d. 1481) expressed this concept in a pithy line:

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

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

What they call reigning is nothing but worldly quarrel;  
There is no greater throne on the earth than the love of God.

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

Away from the loved one, the heart is a country without a king,  
And that country stands as a body whose life and soul are lacking.

Tell me, Muslims, what good is a body without its life and soul—  
Just black earth that nurtures no life-giving basil nor rose of spring

And the black earth where no life-giving basil nor sweet roses grow  
Resembles the darkest of nights in which the moon has stopped gleaming.

Oh, Nevâî, tortures abound, but the worst punishment is when  
Separation's pain is all and reunion's solace is nothing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**From: Elegy to the Cat**

I.  
He's dead and gone! Alas! What shall I do? Pity, pussy!  
The flames of death devoured you! A calamity, pussy!  
The lion of doom tricked and mauled you: Woe is me, pussy!  
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

III.  
That cat of mine was so playful, such a wonderful guy.  
He had a grand time catching the birds that fly in the sky.  
He'd eat anything he got—a roll, a patty, a pie.  
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

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

VII.  
Fearless like a lion, a ferocious beast in combat . . .  
You think he was old? No, he was a young and sprightly cat:  
Every hair of his whiskers was a scimitar, that's that.

Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

Me'âlî, sixteenth century

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

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

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

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

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

What good is a lofty place if it has its price,  
Boo to the base fellow who sells it, boo to the buyer.

Ruhi distilled the theme of inequity into one couplet:

Hungry for the world, some people work nonstop  
While some sit down and Joyfully eat the world up.

Numerous poems of protest and complaint were directed against not the central government, but the local authorities and religious judges. In the fifteenth century, Andelibî denounced a judge for taking bribes:

Go empty-handed, his honor is asleep, they say;  
Go with gold, they say: "Sir, please come this way."

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

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

Mr. Prayer and Mr. State joined hands  
To inflict all this on the populace:  
One brought it into a state of coma,  
The other gave his prayers for solace

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

**Nesimi.** In the early fifteenth century when Nesimi was being skinned alive for heresy, the religious dignitary who had decreed his death was on hand watching the proceedings. Shaking his finger, the mufti said: "This creature's blood is filthy. If it spills on anyone, that limb must be cut off at once." Right then, a drop of blood squirted, smearing the Mufti's finger. Someone

said: "Sir, there is a drop of blood on your finger. According to your pronouncement, your finger should be chopped off." Scared, the Mufti protested: "That won't be necessary, because just a little bit of water will wash this off."

Hearing this, Nesimi produced the following couplet in extempore and in flawless prosody while being skinned alive:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Clean, they say, has called me a dog;  
This word displays his compliment indeed,  
For I belong to the Maliki sect:  
A dog is clean according to my creed.

**Women Poets.** Poetry was an Ottoman passion not only for men, but also for women who reveled in listening to or reading poems. Some women composed impressive poems in the formidably difficult conventional forms and meters. From the fifteenth century until the end of the empire in 1922, they produced a considerable number of polished verses, vying with the best of their male counterparts and often achieving prominence.

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

Zeyneb, renounce womanly fondness for the decorative life;  
Like men, be simple of heart and tongue, shun flashy embellishment.

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

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

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

Since, they say, woman has no brains or wit,  
Whatever she speaks, they excuse it.  
But your humble servant Mihri demurs  
And states with that mature wisdom of hers:

Far better to have one woman with class  
Than a thousand males all of whom are crass;

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

**Mihri Hatun**  
(d. 1506)

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

At one glance  
I loved you  
With a thousand hearts

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

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

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

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

Was it my lucky star, was I blessed with divine power?  
In my field of vision, Jupiter ascended tonight.

He looked like a Muslim, but was wearing pagan garments;  
From his enchanting face—I saw clearly—came streaming light.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although the classical tradition continued until the early part of the twentieth century, after Şeyh Galib it produced few figures or works of significance.

**Seyh Galib** eighteenth century

My darling with the rosy face—at one glance—  
You turned my heart’s mirror into a wine glass,  
Passing on to me your joy and nonchalance . . .  
Here’s my heart, for you to ignore or to grace:  
May the home of my heart be your drinking place.

Such a flame has the candle of the spirit  
That the dome of the skies cannot contain it;  
Not even Mount Sinai saw from its summit  
The lightning bolts that my chest nurtures within it:  
My bosom is up in flames thanks to your grace.

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

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

**Seyhi.** In the early fifteenth century, Şeyhî, a physician-poet, wrote one of the most remarkable satires of socioeconomic inequity, a verse allegory called “Harname” (The Donkey Story) in which he contrasted a starving donkey with well-fed oxen. This depiction of oxen graced by crowns was certainly courageous as satire because the target in the allegory could well be the sultan and his entourage.

*Excerpt*

### **Seyhi**

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

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

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

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

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

His lips dangled, and his jaws had begun to droop;  
He got tired if a fly rested on his croup.

Goose pimples covered his body whenever he saw,  
With those starving eyes, just a handful of straw.

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

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

One day, his master decided to show pity,  
And for once he treated the beast with charity:  
He took the saddle off, let him loose on the grass;  
As he walked on, while grazing, suddenly the ass

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

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

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

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

Struck with wonder and full of envy, he stood there,  
Brooding over his own plight which was beyond compare:

We were meant to be the equals of these creatures,  
We have the same hands and feet, same forms and features.

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

**Fuzuli.** Fuzuli, the great figure of Ottoman literature in the sixteenth century, emerged at the peak of the Ottoman Empire's grandeur. He is the author of the mesnevi entitled *Leylâ vü Mecnun* (*Leylâ* and *Mejnûn*), a long narrative poem of close to four thousand couplets, that explores the philosophical implications of worldly and mystic love. Perhaps no other poet exerted as much influence as Fuzuli on the elite poetry of the succeeding few centuries.

### **Fuzuli**

I wish I had a thousand lives in this broken heart of mine  
So I could sacrifice myself to you once with each one.

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

I reap no gains but trouble at your place when I come near;  
My wish to die on your love's path is all that I hold dear.

I am the reed-flute when griefs assemble. Cast to the winds  
What you find in my burnt-up, dried-up body except desire.

May bloody tears draw curtains on my face the day we part  
So that my eyes will see just that moon-faced love when they peer.

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

There's nobody to burn for my sake but my heart's own fire;  
My door is opened by none other than the soft zephyr.  
O waves, don't ravage all my surging teardrops, for this flood  
Has caused all welfare buildings save this one to disappear.

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

Fuzuli, sixteenth century

### **Sultan Suleyman**

*Love letter in poetic form sent by Süleyman the Magnificent to his wife, Hürrem*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Muhibbi (Sultan Süleyman's pen name), sixteenth century

## **Baki**

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

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

We don't rely on the state's golden staff—  
The grace of God grants us our wherewithal.

Although our vices shock the universe,  
We want no pious acts to save our soul.

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

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

**Nedimi** eighteenth century

Song

Come, let's grant joy to this heart of ours that founders in distress:  
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.  
Look, at the quay, a six-oared boat is waiting in readiness—  
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Let's laugh and play, let's enjoy the world to the hilt while we may  
Drink nectar at the fountain which was unveiled the other day,  
And watch the gargoyle spatter the elixir of life away—  
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

First, for a while, let's take a stroll around the pond in leisure,  
And gaze in marvel at that palace of heavenly pleasure;  
Now and then, let's sing songs or recite poems for good measure—  
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Get your mother's leave, say it's for holy prayers this Friday:  
Out of time's tormenting clutches let you and I steal a day,  
And slinking through the secret roads and alleys down to the quay,  
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

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

## OTTOMAN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

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

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

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

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

**Nesimi.** A great poet to lose his life because of passionate mystic verse, a from that incensed the traditionalists, was Nesimi (d. early fifteenth century).

**Alevi-Bektasi Movement.** Two folk poets, Kaygusuz Abdal (fifteenth century) and Pir Sultan Abdal (sixteenth century), whose poetry represented the Alevi-Bektaşî movement (long considered heretical) and expressed a strong challenge to the orthodoxy of Islam, fired the imagination of many Anatolian communities. Even God was not spared from badinage. Kaygusuz Abdal wrote several poems that have barbs against God:

You produced rebel slaves and cast them aside,  
You just left them there and made your exit, my God.  
You built a hair-thin bridge for your slaves to walk on,  
Let's see if you're brave enough to cross it, my God.

Pir Sultan Abdal challenged imperial power and local authorities in abrasive terms:

In Istanbul he must come down:  
The sovereign with his empire's crown.

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

Come, soul brothers, let's band together,  
Brandish our swords against the godless,  
And restore the poor people's rights.

He even lambasted a judge:

You talk of faith which you don't heed,  
You shun God's truth, command and creed,  
A judge will always feed his own greed,  
Could Satan be worse than this devil?

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

Come on, man! There, Hızır Pasha!  
Your wheel is bound to break in two;  
You put your faith in your sultan:  
Some day, though, he will tumble too.

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

The state has issued an edict against us  
The edict is the sultan's but the mountains are ours.

## OTTOMAN FOLK LITERATURE

**Oral Folk Literature.** Oral folk literature, created by the collective poetic and narrative faculty of the common people of Anatolia, has been kept alive through the centuries by ozans (minstrels), saz poets (poet-musicians), and âşiks (troubadours). It uses Turkic verse forms, i.e., türkü, koşma, mani, destan, semai, varsağı. Unsophisticated and based on folk wisdom, it developed a serene realism, an earthy humor, and a mellifluous lyric quality.

**Turkic Values.** Popular culture in the Ottoman state, keeping alive the Turkic rather than the Islamic patterns of thought and values, also constituted a sub rosa system of deviation from the norms of the educated classes. Folk poetry came to typify and embody the gulf between the urban elite and the common people of the rural areas. It retained the Turks's pre-Islamic and nomadic values of and regenerated them in archetypal form. Written for (or composed) by ill-educated and often illiterate minstrels and troubadours, it had little susceptibility to or proclivity for the characteristics of Divan poetry, which boasted of erudition.

**Vernacular Language.** The folk poet probably had no sense of Arabo-Persian flavor of Ottoman culture; his concern was local and autochthonous, and for purposes of direct communication he used a simple vernacular immediately intelligible to his uneducated audiences. So the substratum of indigenous culture resisted the temptation to borrow from the elite poets who, in turn, were imitating their Persian and (occasionally) Arabic counterparts. In this sense, one could conceivably regard the corpus of folk poetry as a massive resistance to or a constant subversion of the values adopted by the Ottoman ruling class. It also gave voice at times to the spirit of rebellion against central authority and local feudal lords.

**Poets.** Anatolian minstrelsy produced such major figures as Koroğlu, the stentorian heroic poet of the sixteenth century; Karacaoğlu (seventeenth century), who wrote lilting lyrics of love and pastoral beauty, Âşık Ömer and Gevherî in the eighteenth century, and Dadaloğlu, Dertli, Bayburtlu Zihni, Erzurumlu Emrah, and Seyrani in the nineteenth century.

**Moods.** The moods of folk poetry ranged from tender love to angry protest. For instance, the closing lines of an old anonymous mani (quatrain) inquires:

There's the trace of a gaze on your face  
Who has looked at you, my darling?

And in the nineteenth century, Serdari bemoans:

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

Folk literature produced a large corpus of stories,tales,allegories, fables, and riddles.

**Folk Drama.** The common people's dramatic imagination nurtured the Karagöz shadow plays. It is significant that in these plays the two principal characters, Karagöz and Hacivat, respectively represent a folksy, good-hearted simpleton and a foxy, foolish blabbermouth who tries to simulate urbane speech.

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

## 19TH CENTURY

### ***OVERVIEW : Occidental Orientation***

#### ***Reforms***

EUROPE STOOD IN AWE OF THE OTTOMANS, who crushed many states and conquered vast territories, going, as patriotic Turks will proudly point out "all the way to the Gates of Vienna "

The Ottoman Turks, proud of their faith and conquests, felt superior to the West until decline set in. From the seventeenth century onward, there were defeats at the hands of European powers, deterioration of morale and official institutions, and eventually the armed rebellions of the empire's non-Muslim minority. The Ottoman ruling class gradually became impressed with Europe's growing strength and technological achievements. The Renaissance had wielded no influence on the Turks. The printing press was not introduced to Turkey until the third decade of the eighteenth century, nearly 275 years behind Europe, and the first newspaper in Turkish came out in 1831. The political and ideological impact of the French Revolution was felt decades later, and the Industrial Revolution and its effects eluded the Turks for an even longer time.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the shrinking Ottoman Empire had started to turn to the West for ideas and institutions. After a series of limited innovations in the military, administrative, educational, and technical fields from the eighteenth century on, the Ottoman elite plunged into an extensive transformation usually referred to as "Westernization". In 1839, the Tanzimat (Reforms) Period was ushered in: legal, administrative, and cultural changes were introduced in quick succession. Literature was both a concomitant to and a major catalyst of these changes. The conservative religious establishment waged all-out war against Westernization, however. Cautious reformers recommended a synthesis of Eastern culture and Western technology: *ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente frux*. But progressive intellectuals pressed for extensive changes patterned after European models. The decline of the Ottoman Empire reached a critical point by the middle of the nineteenth century. Younger Turkish intellectuals started seeking the empire's salvation in technological development, political reform, and cultural progress fashioned after European prototypes.

New genres, adopted from Europe, gained ascendancy: fiction, drama for the legitimate stage, journalistic writing, the critical essay, and others. Translations and adaptations accelerated the Europeanization of Turkish literature. Young poets came into contact with European aesthetic theories and values. Although *aruz* was not abandoned, Turkish poets experimented with forms, rhythms, and styles. A reaction began to set in against excessive use of words of Arabic and Persian origin.

#### ***Poetry***

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

Poetry acquired a social awareness and a political function in the hands of some poets who endeavored to gain independence from external political domination. Ziya Paşa (1829-80), Şinasi (1826-71), and Namık Kemal (1840-88); emerged as literary advocates of nationalism. Recaizade Ekrem (1847-1914) and Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan (1852-1937) echoed the French romantics. The latter, a prolific poet and author of numerous verse dramas, gained stature as a ceaseless innovator. His poetry covered a wide range of topics and had a philosophic bent as well as a dramatic impact.

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

The poetry of the Tanzimat Period and its aftermath had the imperative of revamping its forms, style, and content. It also assumed the task of giving voice to civil disobedience. Its practitioners, despite censorship, often acted as provocateurs and agitators for reform and social innovation and as propagators of rebellion against tyranny.

Poetry became a standard-bearer for such concepts as justice, nation, reform, sovereignty, modernization, freedom, progress, and rights. Şinasi challenged the sultan's absolutism by recognizing Grand Vizier Reşid Paşa as a kind of

constitutional authority. Praising Reşit Pasha as a new type of leader, he asked "Is it any wonder that you are called the apostle of civilization?" and referred to the grand vizier as "the president of the virtuous people." Şinasi assigned a new kind of legislative authority to him: "Your law admonishes the sultan about his limits" Tanzimat poetry also introduced critical views of the Islamic world, as in an excerpt from Ziya Pasha's famous lament:

In the land of the infidel, I have seen cities and mansions,  
In the dominions of Islam, ruin and devastation.

I have seen countless fools condescend to Plato  
Within the Sublime Porte, that home of divagation.

A traveler on this earth to which we're all condemned,  
I have seen governments and their houses of assassination.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu)

Ziya Pasha produced a long satiric poem, many parts of which his contemporaries committed to memory and Turks still widely quote:

Those who embezzle millions are ensconced in glory  
Those who filch pennies are condemned to hard labor.

How could a uniform make a base fellow noble?  
Put a gold-lined saddle on him, the ass is still an ass.

Pardon is the privilege of the holders of high office ;  
Is the penal code used only against the meek?

The fiction, drama, and journalistic writing of these literary figures were less a substitute for poetry than an extension of it. Their articles and novels were read with greater interest, and their plays had a stronger impact because these writers were, first and foremost, famous poets.

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

Tanzimat brought into Turkish poetry a brave new substance—an explicitly formulated political content. Patriotic poets, in particular Namık Kemal lashed out against the sultan and his oppressive regime. His poems were richly rhetorical pleas for freedom and justice—as in the kaside(ode) "To the Fatherland":

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

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

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

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

How you bewitch us, liberty, for whom so long we strove,  
We who are freed from slavery are prisoners of your love.

Beloved hope of days to come, how warm your presence is,  
And how it frees our troubled world from all its miseries!

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

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

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

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

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

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

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

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

In another poem, Namık Kemal reiterates these themes:

A soldier's proudest medal is his wound  
And death the highest rank a man can find  
It's all the same beneath or on the ground  
March heroes march and fight to save this land.

Namık Kemal, having established his fearlessness, also gave vent to his fury against the oppressors:

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

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

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

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

**Tevfik Fikret** (1867–1915), a prominent poet in later decades, combined in his poetry both the concept of "art for art's sake" and the function of spokesman for protest and civil disobedience. He propagated a novel view of man and society. Standing squarely against the traditional orthodox and mystic conception of man as a vassal to God, he regarded man as a vassal to God, he regarded man as having an existence independent of God. Tevfik Fikret placed his faith in reason over dogma, in inquiry over unquestioning acquiescence, in science and technology. He oscillated between romantic agony dominated by despair and an acute social conscience.

He defended the proposition that right is far stronger than might and that the people's rights will ultimately prevail:

If tyranny has artillery, cannonballs and fortresses  
Right has an unyielding arm and an unflinching face.

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

One day they will chop off the heads that do injustice . . .  
We have seen all sorts of injustice . . . Is this the law?  
We founder in the worst misery . . . Is this the state?  
The state or the law, we have had more than enough,  
Enough of this diabolical oppression and ignorance.

His assaults on malfeasance and profiteering were equally vehement:

Eat, gentlemen, eat, this feast of greed is yours,  
Eat till you are fed and stuffed and burst inside out.

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

The villain who takes pleasure in trampling a nation  
Owes to a moment of delay all his jubilation.

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

Faith craves martyrs, heaven wants victims  
Blood, blood everywhere, all the time.

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

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

Drip from the ravens circling at your head?  
Unhappy motherland, tell us, we ask you,  
What evil deeds have caused your suffering?  
Drip from the ravens circling at your head?  
Unhappy motherland, tell us, we ask you,  
What evil deeds have caused your suffering?

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

In the so-called Constitutional Period, which started after 1876 when the first Ottoman constitution went into effect (although it was abrogated within a few months), Eşref (1847–1912), the most biting and exciting satirist of the time, struck hard at the sultan and his entourage:

O my sultan, this country nowadays is a tree  
Its branches get the ax sooner or later.  
What do you care if our homeland is lost,  
But at this rate you may have no people left to torture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Serdari's contemporary Ruhsatî complained:

There is no justice left, cruelty is all.

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

Alas, poor people's backs are bent,  
We are left to the merey of commerce.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soldier, for these hallowed lands, now on this land you lie dead.  
Your forebears may well lean from Heaven to kiss your forehead.  
How mighty you are, you safeguard our True Faith with your blood;  
Your glory is shared by the braves of the Prophet of God.  
Who could dig the grave that will not be too narrow for you?  
If we should bury you in history, you would break through.  
That book cannot hold your epochs with all their rampages:  
You could only be contained by everlasting ages.  
If I could set up the Kaaba at the head of your pit  
And carve on it the inspiration that stirs my spirit;  
If I could seize the firmament with all the stars within,  
And then lay it as a pall over your still bleeding coffin;  
If I could hitch spring clouds as ceiling for your open tomb,  
Hang the Pleiades' seven lamps in your mausoleum,  
As you lie drenched in your own blood under the chandelier;  
If I could drag the moonlight out of night into your bier  
To stand guard by you as custodian until Doomsday;  
If I could fill your chandelier with dawn's eternal ray,  
And wrap your wound at dusk with the sunset's silken glory—  
I still cannot say I have done something for your memory.

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

I have spent years wandering in the East,  
And I've seen much—not merely idled past!

Arabs, Persians and Tartars, I have seen  
 All the components of the Muslim world.  
 I've looked into the souls of little men,  
 And scrutinized great men's philosophies.  
 Then, too, what caused the Japanese ascent?  
 What was their secret? This I wished to learn.  
 These many journeys, this far-reaching search  
 Led to a single article of faith.  
 It's this—  
 Do not go far for such a quest,  
 The secret of your progress lies in you.  
 A nation's rise comes from within itself,  
 To imitate does not ensure success.  
 Absorb the art, the science of the West,  
 And speed your efforts to achieve those ends,  
 For without them one can no longer live,  
 For art and science have no native land.  
 But bear in mind the warning that I give:  
 When reaching through the eras of reform,  
 Let your essential nature be your guide—  
 There's no hope of salvation otherwise.

(Translated by Nermin Menemencioglu)

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

### ***Fiction***

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

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

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

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

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

When the ideal of “art for art’s sake” gained strength with the establishment of the Servet-i Fünun group, the turn of the century witnessed the appearance of the first truly refined Turkish novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) by Halit Ziya (Uşaklıgil)(1866-1945). This well-constructed novel depicts the life and the tribulations of a prosperous Istanbul family. Its narrative technique is gripping, its story line strong, with characters well delineated and dialogue vivid. First serialized in a daily newspaper, it was published in book form in 1900. *Aşk-ı Memnu* can arguably vie with some of Europe’s best novels of the time. Halit Ziya authored several other major works, *Mai ve Siyah* (The Blue and the Black, 1897), and *Kırık Hayatlar* (Broken Lives, 1924), mostly about human suffering.

A year after *Aşk-ı Memnu* appeared on the literary scene, another major talent, Mehmet Rauf (1874–1931), published a psychological tour de force entitled *Eylül* (September, 1901).

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

Attaching themselves to the rising star of fiction, numerous late Ottoman authors—principally Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864–1944), Refik Halit Karay (1888–1965), Halide Edib Adıvar (1884–1964), Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974), and Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889–1956) produced easily readable works whose characters are identifiable and whose dialogues in the simple vernacular. Güntekin’s *Çalıkuşu* (1922; The Autobiography of a Turkish Girl, 1949), about a young woman who works in the rural areas as a schoolteacher, became a sensation and remained a best-seller for many decades. Güntekin and the others dominated the fiction of the early decades of the republic as well.

### ***Drama***

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

A one-act farce, it ridicules the custom of arranged marriages. This was a very advanced

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

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

After İbrahim Şinasi's pioneering work, Ahmet Vefik Pasha (1828-91) and Âli Bey (1844-99) offered Molière adaptations; Ali Haydar (1836-1914) and Şemseddin Sami dramatized myths and legends; and Ahmet Mithat Efendi, following in Şinasi's footsteps, turned out many plays exposing the folly of antiquated social mores. These playwrights were acutely aware of their functions to educate the public, introduce progressive ideas, criticize social and political institutions, and satirize the types who were responsible for backwardness—for example, the religious fanatic, the bureaucrat, and the rabid conservative.

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

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

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

Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan, one of the dominant figures of Turkish poetry and literary Europeanization, owes much of his fame to the plays he wrote between 1872 and 1918. His early plays were melodramas steeped in sentimentality. Of his twelve tragedies, ten are in classical or syllabic verse either in full or in part. Rhymes and the metric structure give the diction of these plays a forced and contrived quality. The plots are based on intrigue, impossible loves, heroism—all depicted in romantic terms—and often set in cultures and periods unrelated to the Turkish experience: Assyrian, Arab, Mongolian, Greek, Macedonian, and so on.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were action packed for Ottoman Turkey—domestic strife, independence struggles, limited wars, emergence of a new constitutional

regime, party politics, World War I, the Dardanelles campaign, occupations, national liberation. In culture, the period was one of quest, ideological discords, Europeanization versus Islamic traditions. Literature served as the voice of conflicting ideas and ventures.

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

Other notable groups included the Nev Yunaniler (Neo-Graecians) poets and novelists, principally Yahya Kemal Beyathı (1884-1958) and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who incorporated into their work many themes and aesthetic values from the Greek and, to a lesser extent, Roman traditions. Emerging as an alternative and in opposition to the Nev Yunaniler, another group embraced the heritage of the entire Mediterranean basin and sought to create a synthesis of the West and the East. They called themselves Nayiler, literally "Reed-Flute Players," but figuratively "Virtuosos of Music." Making melodiousness a prime creative asset, they stressed the ideal of "inner harmony" through Yahya Kemal Beyathı's influence.

The closing decades of the Ottoman state witnessed an abundance of translations and adaptations from Europe. This period was also the heyday of polemics and criticism. With great energy, the stage was set for the revolutions that the young Republic of Turkey would launch.

## 20TH CENTURY

### 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 Grunebaum’s observation that “literature has always been the art of the Muslim world, masterpieces of painting and architecture notwithstanding.”

Poetry, or literature in general has been the quintessence of Turkish culture until modern times and a most faithful mirror of socioeconomic realities in Turkey since the inauguration of the Republic. Virtually all of the salient aspects of Turkish life, politics, and culture have found their direct or indirect expression in poetry, fiction, and drama, as well as in critical and scholarly writing. The themes and concerns 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.

### *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 somnambulist 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 he 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 *Köröğlü*, 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—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 b a b). 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 Dilmener's scathing drama of innocent people brutalized by capitalism and imperialism; from striking village plays by Cahit Atay and Necati Cumalı to an Albee-like black comedy by Melih Cevdet Anday; from Aziz Nesin's modernized version of Karagöz, the traditional shadow play, to Refik Erduran's Shakespearean tragedy about Justinian the Great; from a musical drama by Turgut Özakman and Bülent Arel depicting city youth to A. Turan Oflazoğlu's towering tragedy in verse about the Ottoman Sultan İbrahim "the Mad"; from Orhan Kemal's prison drama to Orhan Asena's dramatizations of history and legends.

A remarkable talent emerged in the closing decades of the twentieth century—Memet Baydur (1951–2001), 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, *Kalpakkıllar* (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 *Istanbul: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 Özyalçınar (b. 1934),Orhan Koçak (b. 1948), Feridun Andaç (b. 1954), Semih Gümüş (b. 1956), Füsun 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 Kiřot'tan Bugüne Roman* (The Novel from Don Quixote to Our Day).

Dilek Doltař (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.