

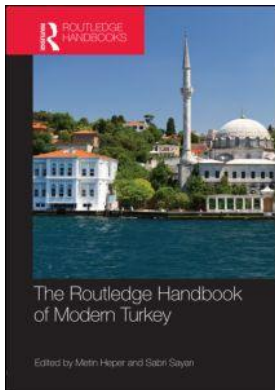
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THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF MODERN TURKEY

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8

LITERATURE

Talât S. Halman

In the recorded history of the Turks, spanning 13 centuries, literature has been an abiding passion. For most of them, art meant literary creativity until the modern age. Although literature holds a place of pride in today's Turkey, it has to share the limelight with many other genres including visual and plastic arts, music of all types and traditions, cinema, and television, as well as such more recent and engrossing inventions as the Internet.

Out of the ruins and ashes of the Ottoman Empire, as the cliché often goes, the Republic of Turkey came into being in 1923. From the outset, the Republic emphasized that the Turkish nation belongs to the Islamic community as well as Western civilization and that its literature must serve the nation in its Western orientation. The literature of the Turkish Republic has achieved this dual objective, but, thanks to its versatility, it has functioned, with impressive accomplishments, in other spheres as well.

Revolution, innovation, and Westernization were the driving forces of the Turkish nation in the twentieth century. In the transformation of sociopolitical structure, economic life, and culture, the men and women of letters have served not only as eloquent advocates of progress, but also as catalysts, precursors, pioneers—and creators of brave new ideas of innovation.

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. Its themes and concerns have included nationalism, social justice, the search for modernity, Westernization, the revival of folk culture, economic and technological progress, human dignity, mysticism, pluralistic society, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic ideals, the hero cult, populism, Atatürkism, proletarianism, Turanism, Marxist-Leninist ideology, the revival of Islamism, humanism—in fact, all aspects and components of contemporary culture.

Turkish literature is among the world's oldest—and youngest—literatures. Its creative tradition, according to the claims made by numerous scholars, dates back to times before Christ. It is commonly accepted that its legacy of written works spans 13 centuries.

In their long history, the Turks have gone through more changes than most nations, and yet—paradoxical as it may sound—they have preserved most of their basic cultural traits. Throughout the centuries they lived as nomadic tribes, built small and large states in parts of Asia, created the Seljuk state in Asia Minor and later the sprawling Ottoman Empire, which endured from circa the end of the thirteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and finally

established the modern Republic. At different stages of their history, Turkic communities embraced shamanism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and other creeds until most of them accepted the Islamic faith more than 1,000 years ago. Their language, one of the world's most regular in grammar, and most agglutinative, has used five separate scripts: Köktürk, Uyghur, Arabic, Cyrillic, and (since 1928) Latin.

The Turks brought into Anatolia their folk poetry and tales from Central Asia and kept them alive in the rural areas, sustaining the genre's creative force until the present. The inception of oral narratives was marked by a "national epic" commonly known as the "Tales of Dede Korkut," consisting of 12 interrelated stories of nomadic life, battles, and love. This epic serves also as a rudimentary chronicle of the Islamization of the Turks coming into the Anatolian peninsula, where, for close to 1,000 years now, they have been sovereign. Their oral and written literature during that millennium has been shaped and inspired by Islamic culture and Arabo-Persian literature. Although extensively influenced by their vocabulary and orthography, intellectual norms and aesthetic values, sounds and symbols, metrics and metaphorical devices, the indigenous characteristics of Turkish culture remained alive, so that it proved impossible for that culture to be fully absorbed into the dominant Islamic civilization of the region.

The Seljuk era (from the 1040s to the closing decades of the thirteenth century) and the Ottoman age (from the end of the thirteenth century to 1922, including five centuries of the empire, one of history's most enduring and expansive) gave to literature, especially poetry, the prime place in cultural creativity along with architecture, music, and visual arts. From the outset, Islamic mysticism (Sufism) functioned as the wellspring of spiritual inspiration in addition to the conservative values of orthodox Islam (Sunnism).

The eleventh century witnessed the emergence of such masterworks as *Divan ü Lûgat-it-Türk* (Compendium and Dictionary of Turkish), an encyclopedic compendium of Turkish linguistics and poetry, and *Kutadgu Bilig* (Knowledge of Happy Governing), a mirror for princes in 6,500 rhymed couplets. A legendary figure is Nasreddin Hoca, who presumably lived in the thirteenth century although it is almost impossible to authenticate his life. His tales and quips have been vibrant among Turks for many centuries, as they still are today.

Yunus Emre (d. ca. 1321) was the wellspring of Anatolian Turkish folk poetry, and remains its paragon. In his spirituality and social consciousness he was influenced by the great mystic poet Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207–73), who lived in the Turkish heartland but wrote in Persian. Yunus Emre is best known for quintessential Turkish verses and devotional hymns written in syllabic meters and a simple style. He once cautioned against effusive language: "Too many words are fit for a beast of burden." His message to the rural masses is direct and forceful, full of love and humanism:

I am not here on earth for strife,
Love is the mission of my life (p.7).

–

I love you in depths beyond my soul (p.20).

–

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 (p.21).

(Halman, 1981)

In the Ottoman state, the educated elite, led by the sultans (many of whom were accomplished poets themselves), produced a huge body of verse, commonly referred to as *Divan* poetry, the

hallmarks of which included refined diction, abstruse vocabulary, euphony, romantic agony, and dedication to formalism and tradition, and the Sufi brand of mysticism. Prose, although not held in high esteem by the Ottoman literary establishment, accounts for some excellent achievements, particularly the massive travel book of the seventeenth-century cultural commentator Evliya Çelebi (1611–ca. 1685). *Divan* masters achieved an impressive passion expressed with gripping power—from self-glorification to self-abnegation, from anguish to ebullient joy, from fanatic continence to uninhabited hedonism. Sufism, as the soul’s yearning to merge with God, served as an integral component of this poetry. In the hands of many first-rate practitioners, the *Divan* tradition produced a corpus of exquisite lyric and mystic verse.

A prominent figure, Fuzuli (1494–1556) is still regarded as a master especially on the strength of his masterpiece *Leyla vü Mecnun* (Laila and Majnun), a narrative of star-crossed lovers (in close to 4,000 self-rhyming couplets) in which he made a philosophical and dramatic exploration into worldly and mystic love. The *Divan* tradition engendered an impressive number of long narratives in verse.

Baki (1526–99) achieved fame for his splendidly crafted lyrics and stately dirges, and Nefî (1582–1635) became noteworthy for his vibrant *qasidâhs* (panegyrics) and lost his life because of his clever invectives against some powers that be. Nedim, who died in 1730, was the poetic voice of an Ottoman age of revelries (1718–30) when he rhapsodized about the empire’s capital city (Istanbul) and the joys of love.

The last master of *Divan* poetry was Şeyh Galib (1757–99), who, in addition to a superb collection of lyric poems, produced a magnum opus entitled *Hüsn ü Aşk* (Beauty and Love), an allegorical narrative of passionate mysticism. Although *Divan* poetry continued until the early years of the twentieth century, it lost its vigor and finesse after Şeyh Galib.

The oral tradition, in addition to the early *Dede Korkut* tales, which recount the Turks’ heroic exploits, produced a large body of legends and stories. Its principal achievement is folk poetry, composed by minstrels and troubadours, who voiced in a spontaneous, sincere, and simple language the sensibilities, yearnings, social protests, and critical views of the uneducated classes. Utilizing Turkic verse forms and syllabic meters, often extemporized and sung to musical accompaniment, replete with assonances, alliterations, and inexact rhymes, folk poetry harped on the themes of love, heroism, the beauties of nature, and, at times, mysticism. This autochthonous tradition cherished the poems and songs of such itinerant bards as Pir Sultan Abdal, Karacaoğlu, and Köroğlu (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), and Dadaloğlu and Seyrani later.

The nineteenth-century littérateurs inherited the classical and the folk traditions, but turned their attention to the literary tastes and movements of the West—particularly of France and, to a lesser extent, England. The Ottoman state, beset by military defeat and atrophied social institutions, embarked upon a process of transformation usually referred to as Westernization. In 1839 the Tanzimat (reforms) period started to introduce legal, administrative, educational, and technological innovations. In this age of Europeanization, literature was a pioneer. Ziya Pasha (1825–80), Şinasi (1826–71), and Namık Kemal (1840–88), and their followers, introduced new poetic values and styles as well as importing new genres, that is, novels, short stories, journalistic writing, dramas for the legitimate stage, essays of criticism, and the like.

Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan (1852–1937) expanded the horizons of poetry and drama with his erudition in Eastern and Western philosophy. He, according to E.J.W. Gibb (who published in the early twentieth century a massive six-volume *History of Ottoman Poetry*), inaugurated “the true Modern School of Turkish poetry.”

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 stood squarely against the traditional conception of man as a vassal to God and 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, in an acute social conscience.

The Turkish venture into the realm of European-type fiction started in the 1870s. The prominent poet Namık Kemal produced two novels: *İntibah* (Vigilance), which cautioned virtuous people about dissolute living and wicked deeds perpetrated against them, and his second work of fiction, *Cezmi*, which shows better writing skill, and was the first Turkish historical novel. An early pioneer was Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844–1912), remarkably prolific with scores of novels and collections of short stories. He 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. Among fiction writers of this period, special mention should be made of Fatma Aliye Hanım (1862–1936), credited as the first female novelist (as well as feminist) of Turkish literature.

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

The first truly refined Turkish novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love), came from 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 storyline strong, with characters well delineated and dialogue vivid. Published in book form in 1900, *Aşk-ı Memnu* arguably could vie with some of Europe's best novels of the time.

When the Ottoman state collapsed after more than 600 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. The hold of Islamic thought and institutions over the nation was somewhat diminished; secular education replaced Qur'anic instruction, and the government stressed nationalism as the official ideology, declaring religious allegiance and practice a stumbling block to progress. The legal system adapted the Swiss civil code, the Italian penal code, and German commercial law. Perhaps the most difficult reform of all, the Language Revolution, was undertaken in 1928, and since then it has achieved a scope of success unparalleled in the modern world. The Arabic script, considered sacrosanct as Qur'anic orthography and used by the Turks for a millennium, was replaced by the Latin alphabet. A massive effort, still maintaining its momentum, has effectively purged the language of the vast majority of borrowings from Arabic and Persian. Atatürk's "new Turkey," which he defined as a "republic of culture," seemed to uphold the statement made in 1913 by Abdullah Cevdet, an influential intellectual: "There is no other civilization: Civilization means European civilization, and it must be imported with its roses and thorns."¹ Although the sweeping reforms did not extend into the rural areas, 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, 1923–38; transition to democracy under İnönü, 1938–50; further democratization under Menderes, 1950–60; junta, coalitions, caretaker cabinets, and multiparty parliamentary governments since 1960, interrupted by military takeovers in 1971 and 1980 and an indirect intervention by the military top brass in 1997) have been marked by the thrust of literary modernization. Today's Turkey is religiously homogeneous in population (more than 99 percent Muslim) and integral in political and

administrative structure—yet pluralistic, full of inner tensions, a battleground of traditionalists versus revolutionaries, Islamists versus secularists. Its literature is vibrant with ideologies, with a feverish search for values old and new, for diverse styles and tastes, for elements that can be employed to revive the traditional national culture, and for significant borrowings from the West as well as from other traditions.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the most vital debate of Turkish literature has been between the proponents of art for art's sake and the advocates of commitment to realism and social causes. Mustafa Kemal himself exhorted young poets to “write poems with a purpose.” The advice was heeded by each generation of writers after that, giving rise to patriotic verse in abundance on the one hand, and to socialist realism on the other. Especially from the 1950s until the 1980s, there was a massive output, in all genres, depicting the plight of the lumpen-proletariat. However, surrealism, neo-symbolism, theater of the absurd, stream-of-consciousness techniques, hermeticism, black comedy, and obscurantist verse also flourished.

Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944) intoned a mystique of Turkish nationalism: “I am a Turk: my faith and my race are mighty.” Ahmet Haşım (1887–1933), under the influence of French symbolists, combined striking fiery imagery with melancholy tonal effects to create his lyrics of spiritual exile (“We ignore the generation which has no sense of melancholy”; *Melâli anlamayan nesle âşına değiliz*), articulated a view that summed up a fundamental aspect of classical poetry, and adumbrated the credo of the neo-surrealists of the 1950s and 1960s: “The poet's language is constructed not for the purpose of being understood but to be heard; it is an intermediary language between music and words, yet closer to music than to words.”²

Mehmet Âkif Ersoy (1873–1936), 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 of the Turkish national anthem that he wrote.

“I am,” wrote Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884–1958), “the future with roots in the past.” He was the much-acclaimed neoclassicist who produced, in conventional forms and meters, meticulous lyrics on love, Ottoman grandeur, and Istanbul's natural attractions.

Among the dedicated revolutionaries in twentieth-century Turkish poetry, Nazım Hikmet (1902–63) ranks highest. A modernizing force since the early 1920s, he remained significant in aesthetic and political terms. He launched and popularized free verse under the early influence of Mayakovski. A communist, he spent many years in Turkish jails, fled to the Soviet Union in 1951, and died in Moscow in 1963. His poetry fuses social protest and a lyricism full of rhythmic effects and ingenious onomatopoeia. Much of his large body of work laments social injustice, complains of the oppression of the masses, and yearns for revolutionary change. He also composed many tender love lyrics.

Turkey's romantic revolutionary produced a prodigious amount of poetry, many plays—conventional as well as avant-garde—which have been staged not only in Turkey but also in the Soviet Union and numerous European countries, and several inept novels. His *Human Landscapes from My Country*, a sprawling, episodic verse saga of the twentieth century, composed in 17,000 lines, is often touted as his *magnum opus*. His real masterpiece might well be *The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin*, published in 1936. A moving account of the rise and fall of a heretical sect that preached an incipient form of communism in the early fifteenth century, it contains some of the most poignant poetic narrative passages ever written in the Turkish language.

Nazım Hikmet's innovations, although they struck a responsive chord in poetic tastes throughout his life and after his death, by no means established a monopoly. Most of his contemporaries pursued different courses: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1905–83) wallowed in the anguish of his own soul; Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel (1898–1973) combined neoclassicism with urbanized versions of folk verse; Ahmet Muhip Dırnas (1908–80), and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar

(1901–62) specialized in simple lyrics of genteel sensibilities expressed in tidy stanzaic forms and the traditional syllabic meters. Asaf Hâlet Çelebi (1907–58) introduced his own iconoclasm in surrealist poems that gave the impression of somnambulist writing with intimations of erudition.

The early novels of the republic depicted the disintegration of Ottoman society, ferocious political enmities, and the immoral lives 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 woman intellectual of that period and advocate of women’s rights, Halide Edib Adıvar (1882–1964), produced sagas of the War of Independence, psychological novels, and panoramas of city life. Her novelistic art culminated in *Sinekli Bakkal* (1936), which she originally published in English under the title of *The Clown and his Daughter*.

The harsh realities of Anatolia provided fertile ground for the literature of engagement after World War II. Sabahattin Ali (1907–48) was a pioneer of forceful fiction about the peasant’s trials and tribulations. Two books, both published in 1950, *Bizim Köy* (A Village in Anatolia) by Mahmut Makal (b. 1930) and *Toprak Ana* (Mother Earth) by Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca (1914–2007), exerted a shattering impact on political and intellectual circles by dramatically exposing abject conditions in villages. The first is a series of vignettes by Makal, a teenage peasant who had become a village teacher after graduating from one of the controversial Institutes for Village Teachers.

In the mid-1950s a brave new genre emerged—the “Village Novel,” which reached its apogee with Yaşar Kemal’s *Memed, My Hawk*. Yaşar Kemal (b. 1923), is one of Turkey’s world-class novelists. His impressive corpus of fiction, written in a lithe, virtually poetic style, ranks as a truly stirring achievement.

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 style is predominantly lyrical, and dialogues record local dialects with an almost flawless accuracy. A pessimistic tone pervades much of village literature: its delineations are bleak even when occasional flashes of humor or a glimmer of hope or descriptions of nature’s beauty appear. A great strength of the genre has been its freedom from the rhetoric that has marred much of the poetry of social protest. It often testifies to the dauntless determination of the peasant to survive and to resist—sometimes through rebellion—the forces of oppression.

A growing body of fiction about the urban poor shares the strengths of the village novel—engrossing plot, effective narration, realistic dialogue—but, like much of the literature of socialist realism throughout the world, both types suffer from lack of psychological depth and subtlety.

Satirical fiction is dominated by Aziz Nesin (1916–95). In more than 80 works, Nesin provided a strong indictment of the oppression and brutalization of the common man. He lambastes bureaucracy and exposes economic inequities in stories that effectively combine local color and universal verities. 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.

An awakening of interest in Ottoman history, after several decades of neglect, gave rise to a massive semi-documentary novel by Kemal Tahir (1910–73), *Devlet Ana* (Mother State), a saga of the emergence of the Ottoman state in the late thirteenth century, and several excellent works of drama by A. Turan Oflazoğlu, Orhan Asena, and others. The Turkish War of Independence has continued to fire novelists’ imaginations since the 1920s.

In sharp contrast to realist fiction, a group of authors, some well versed in English and French, produced stream-of-consciousness fiction heavily influenced by James Joyce and William Faulkner as well as by the French *nouveau roman*. Their works depict psychological crises in lyrical, and sometimes turgid, styles. Some of them offer tragicomic scenes of modern life by means of a decomposed language. The principal themes of modern fiction all over the world also characterize the Turkish *nouvelle vague*: dehumanization, moral disintegration, absurdity, lack of heroism, ennui, futility, hypocrisy.

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” (Emiroğlu, 2003: 142). The movement did away with rigid conventional forms and meters, reduced rhyme to a bare minimum, avoided stock metaphors, stentorian effects, and 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.

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, the domination of free verse, introduced in the 1920s by Nazım Hikmet, became complete.

In the late 1950s a strong reaction set in against Poetic Realism. Literature of commitment came under fire in some circles. Getting away from the easy intelligibility and the surface simplicities of the poetic realists, a group of younger poets proudly championed obscurantism and “meaningless poetry.” Soon, Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday also departed from their earlier commitments: the former took up neo-surrealism and the latter the poetry of intellectual complexity.

A new generation initiated obscurantism, continuing from where Asaf Hâlet Çelebi’s surrealism had left off in the 1940s. İlhan Berk, perhaps Turkey’s most daring and durable poetic innovator, who acted as an initial spokesman for the group (often identified as *İkinci Yeni*, “The Second New”), pontificated: “Art is for innovation’s sake.” Turgut Uyar’s line “on the shore of all possibilities” (from the subtitle of his book, *Tütünlük Islak*, 1962) summed up the automatic writing aspect of this new esoteric poetry, which was marked by such wild thrusts of imagination and distortion of language that some critics denounced it as “word salad.”

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. The best specimens have an architectonic splendor, rich imagination, and human affirmation.

In sharp contrast, village poets, standing *media vitae*, continued to serve their rural communities by providing enlightenment as well as live entertainment. The minstrel tradition, with all 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.

The forms and values of classical poetry, too, were kept alive by a group of highly accomplished formalists who clustered around a number of literary journals. Numerous individual poets, principally Hilmi Yavuz (b. 1936), skillfully modernize the aesthetic values of classical poetry.

Among the daring, and quite impressive, explorations into Turkey's own literary heritage have been those undertaken by Turgut Uyar, İlhan Berk, Edip Cansever, and Attilâ İlhan. Although these four major figures are highly individualistic and their works drastically different from one another, they have all acknowledged the need for coming to terms with the viable and the valuable aspects of the Ottoman-Turkish elite poetry. They have used not its stringent forms and prosody, but its processes of abstracting and its metaphorical techniques. İlhan Berk's aesthetics has occasionally striven to forge a synthesis of Eastern tradition and Western modernity. Attilâ İlhan, Turkey's most successful neo-romantic poet, also a major novelist and essayist, has attempted to recapture the milieu and the moods prevailing during the slow death of the Ottoman Empire. Uyar went further in adopting the classical gazel (a lyric ode with five to fifteen couplets rhyming as aa/ba/ca/da, etc.) with many variations. Cansever initiated a new aesthetics expanding the horizons of metaphor and melody in highly complex poems.

Standing outside of all groups and movements is Behçet Necatigil (1916–79), who produced refined poems of intellectual complexity with verbal capers and a subdued tone. Some of his poems could be described as cubistic. With a natural disdain for stereotypes, he created a private poetic universe of delicate delineations.

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. Rifat took up a fertile type of neo-surrealism, proclaiming that “poetry tells or explains nothing, because beauty explains nothing.” 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—“Odysseus Bound,” “Horses at the Trojan Gates,” “On the Nomad Sea”—sought a synthesis of universal culture, and endeavored to construct superstructures of ideas, myths, and legends.

The concern for world affairs was an absorption of many Turkish poets. Their motivation was ideological or humanistic; nonetheless, they commented on international events with telling effect. They poured out elegiac poems, along with indictments of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere, and moving accounts of tragedies in diverse parts of the world.

The most encompassing poetic achievement of contemporary Turkey belongs to Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca (1914–2007), the winner of the Award of the International Poetry Forum (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and the Yugoslav Golden Wreath (Struga), previously won by W.H. Auden, Pablo Neruda, and Eugenio Montale, and later by Allen Ginsburg, *et al.* His range is bewilderingly broad: metaphysical poetry, children's verse, cycles about the space age and the quest for the moon, epics of the conquest of Istanbul and of the Turkish War of Independence, aphoristic quatrains, neo-mysticism, poetry of social protest, travel impressions, books on the national liberation struggles of several countries, and so forth. Dağlarca has published only poetry—more than 100 collections in all.

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 Ağaoglu, Tahsin Yücel, Erhan Bener, Attilâ İlhan, Erendiz Atasü, İhsan Oktay Anar, *et al.*

In Turkey and abroad, Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952) stands as a compelling precursor of new dimensions in the Turkish novelistic art. His formula for success has been postmodernism plus some Turkish exoticism. In 2006 Pamuk was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the first Turk to win a Nobel in any category. Critics enamored of identifying models and influences have discovered affinities between Pamuk and Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, and Umberto Eco. On various occasions he commented that, for him, the Western novel should be taken as the creative work of Joyce, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner, and Vladimir

Nabokov—not Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck, who had been idolized in Turkey for their simplicity of style and language.

In Pamuk's work, one hears echoes from his numerous muses, including Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Thomas Mann, and Franz Kafka.

It would not be incorrect to assert that Pamuk is, at present, proceeding away from "influences" toward a *sui generis* art, toward a new synthesis as evinced by his "Museum of Innocence." In a sense, Pamuk's work *in toto* represents a fictionalized yet veritable chronicle of Turkish life and culture caught in conflict between East and West in Ottoman times, also in transition from traditions to modernization. His first novel, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* (Cevdet Bey and his Sons) was a Mann's *Buddenbrooks* type of work in three volumes that traced a family's life over three generations as well as the process of Turkish Westernization from the early twentieth century onward. *Sessiz Ev* (Quiet House), a Faulknerian tour de force, made a skillful fusion of modern and traditional novelistic techniques utilizing five major characters who narrate the story through their stream of consciousness.

The White Castle is another tour de force, about the intriguing interaction between a Venetian and an Ottoman look-alike who symbolize diverse aspects of East–West cultural tensions. *The Black Book* was hailed as a masterwork, especially in Europe and the United States, and solidified Pamuk's reputation. It masterfully depicted the mysteries of Istanbul and evoked the traditional values of Sufism. *The New Life* is a travel novel woven in a poetic style that deals with imagination gone awry, youthful despair, republican idealism thwarted. The success of *My Name is Red*, a powerful novel about miniature painters in the Ottoman capital in 1591, and of *Snow*, Pamuk's most patently political work, led to his Nobel Prize. *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, a beguilingly evocative description of his beloved and sorrowful city, enhanced his international prestige. His latest, *Masumiyet Müzesi* (Museum of Innocence), is avowedly a novel of love, marriage, friendship, sexuality, passion, family life, and happiness.

Pamuk's bewitching novelistic art will probably reach its pinnacle, assuming that he ultimately creates characters that can vie with the paragons from Don Quixote to Raskolnikov, from Madam Bovary to Bloom. If he can give life to compelling universal figures, the history of fiction might name him "the first great novelist of the twenty-first century."

A most remarkable development in the Turkish arts has been the explosion of theatrical activity and the strides taken in dramatic writing. Very few cities in the world have a broader spectrum of plays or more superior performances presented than Istanbul and Ankara. Turkish playwrights have turned out a wide repertoire, including village plays, tragedies in the grand manner, "boulevard" comedies, vaudevilles, poetic dramas, musical dramas and comedies, Brechtian "epic" theater, Edward Albee-like black comedy, modern versions of the traditional shadow plays, social and political satire, well-made family melodramas, and dramatizations of mythological themes and legends.

By the beginning of the third millennium, the literature of the Turkish Republic could justifiably boast of a prodigious creative energy and some impressive success in many genres. It has yet to reach the threshold of greatness. It is faced with some impediments: these could be summed up as *cultural convulsion* (cataclysmic changes in sociopolitical institutions, faith, and technology); the *language crisis* (a vast transformation, broader than the language reform undertaken by any other nation); a *critical gap* (despite some fine critical writing, especially by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Nurullah Ataç, Berna Moran, Jale Parla, *et al.*, Turkish literature still operates, by and large, without the guidance of coherent aesthetic theories of its own); *traditional lacunae* (the noticeable absence of philosophy, of the norms of tragedy, of psychological analysis in depth); and excessive *imitation* of models, movements, and major works that have evolved in the West.

Cemal Süreya's eloquent lines, written in 1966, embody the revolutionary experience, the disorientation as well as the optimism and the stirring search of the "new Turkey":

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

(Süreya, 1993: 125)

The dynamism, quality, purpose, diversity, and impact of modern Turkish literature seem impressive. There is a fertile versatility at work. Turkish literature has never been more varied nor more inclusive. Following many decades of conscious experimentation, questing for new values, acquisition of deeper literary and human insights, and stronger expertise in blending form and content, Turkish authors are creating an authentic synthesis of national and universal elements.

Notes

- 1 "Şime-i Muhabbet: Celâl Nuri Bey'in Geçen Nüşadaki 'Şime-i Husumet' Makalesine Cevab," *İctihad* 89, 16 Kânun-Sani 1329: 1979–84.
- 2 Introduction, "Piyale" (Chalice), entitled "Comments on Poetry," in *Bütün Şiirleri*, ed. Asım Bezirci, İstanbul, 1926 (republished in 1983), Cem Yayınları.

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