

## INSIDE CONTEMPORARY TURKISH LITERATURE: CONCERNS, REFERENCES AND THEMES

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### ÖZET

Modern Türk edebiyatı ile ilgili bu genel çalışma, akademik ve yoğun bilgilerle dolu olmaktan ziyade tanıtıcı bir özet mahiyetindedir. Yurt dışında çağdaş Türk edebiyatına ilgi duyanlara hitap eden ve modern Türk edebiyatı hakkında çok genel ve özet bilgiler sunan bu çalışma, son dönem Türk edebiyatında sıkça işlenen kimi temalara ve ön plana çıkan bazı edebiyatçılara temas ettikten sonra yabancılara ait kimi edebî metinlerde Türklerin nasıl ele alındıklarını da yüzeysel bir biçimde irdeler ve örneklendirir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** modern Türk edebiyatı, Türk romanı, Türk şiiri, Türk tiyatrosu, Türk öyküsü.

### ABSTRACT

This general critical inquiry into contemporary Turkish literature is inclusive rather than exhaustive and focuses on a number of concerns, themes and repeated references to Turkish social relations. After noting earlier developments in Turkish literature, this article then proceeds to examine these repeated references, themes and concerns of modern Turkish authors, poets and dramatists and their texts. Turks in other literature is another topic for consideration, followed by a final section that concludes with the referencing of modern Turkish literature.

**Keywords:** modern Turkish literature, Turkish novel, Turkish poetry, Turkish drama, Turkish short story.

### Introduction

This article focuses primarily on modern or contemporary Turkish literature. The selection of texts included in this critical study is inclusive, but not exhaustive; it does focus on a number of well-known or popular texts in Turkey. Whether these texts form a canon of Turkish literature is disputable. The idea of any literary canon is contentious and such debates remain beyond the scope of these pages. Nevertheless there is case to be made for a core number of texts which

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### ***Turkish Studies***

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

arguably form a hub of modern Turkish literature. Turkish literary history provides a point of departure for this inquiry.

The history of Turkish literature can be categorized into subdivisions by beginning with Early (pre-Islamic) Turkish literature, then Pre-Ottoman literature, Turkish Folk poetry, Turkish Islamic Mystical poetry (Sufism), Turkish Classical (Ottoman) poetry (or *divan edebiyati*), the Transition Period (the Tanzimat School, 1860-1895), the Servet-i Fünûn School, 1896-1901, the Nationalist School, 1908-1923 (or 1940), the Independents, and onto contemporary Turkish poetry, short story, novel and drama.

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 the typology of Turkish literature has covered a wide canvas, from Sufism to social(ist) realism, from romance to ideological invective, from metaphysical apprehensions to *léttrisme*, from didactic writing to nostalgia, from neoclassical trajectories to futuristic speculation. What a good many of the texts share, however, is a concern with life in Turkey and equally important the citizen's place within Turkish society. Non-pragmatic discourse or imaginative literature in modern Turkey then is underwritten by this unifying principle; a platform of understanding suffused with cultural modernization themes at times, and at others the experiences, traditions and "Turkish way of life."

Although the novel has been gaining ascendancy in contemporary Turkish literature, thanks in part to the writings of Yaşar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk at home and abroad, fiction in Turkey continues to share the spotlight with poetry; the latter with its authentic traditions of *poesia d'arte* and *poesia popolare*. To a significant extent Patterson's observation concerning Turkish poetry in the 1950s is relevant today: "*The Turks are much less affected by the common man's antagonism to poetry, or thought, or human awareness, than we [West] are, and we can learn much from their example of a truly modern and truly popular poetic art.*"<sup>1</sup>

Both literature and poetry then continue to animate intellectual and popular circles. The most influential communist, for example, was not a statesman or businessman, but the poet Nâzım Hikmet.<sup>2</sup> Writers

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence E. Patterson, "Contemporary Turkish Poetry", *The Poetry Book Magazine*, 5: 3, (1953), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Much of Nâzım Hikmet's poetry was written in free verse; the poem *Açların Gözbebekleri* (Pupils of the Hungry) introduced free verse into the Turkish language for, essentially, the first time. Although his work initially exerted little influence, due largely to censorship and several years in prison, over time and in such books as

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

in Turkey have also played an important part in helping disseminate Chinese, Islamic (within an Arabo-Persian context), and eventually European-American influences.

Turkish literature does not have a wide audience outside of Turkey with the above noted exception of Yaşar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk. Occasionally, however, a Turkish writer is spotlighted in the Western media for usually falling foul of Article 301 of the Turkish penal code. The latest novelist to be arraigned for “insulting Turkishness” is Elif Şafak with her work *The Bastard of İstanbul* in which she castigates the treatment of Armenians in 1915. This angered the nationalist lawyer Kemal Kerinçsiz, the lawyer behind December 2005’s trial of Orhan Pamuk which was dropped on technical grounds. This did not stop ultra nationalists from smashing his windscreen and attacking foreign observers.<sup>3</sup> At her recent (2006) trial she was acquitted by the Chief Judge İrfan Âdil Unca. In her defense she said: “*My ideal is cosmopolitanism, refusing to belong to either side in this polarized world... Ambiguity, synthesis: these are the things that compose Turkish society.*”<sup>4</sup> International criticism of Article 301, especially from the European Union (EU) has been rebuffed by Ankara and during 2005, 88 writers, cartoonists etc were arrested in relation to “insulting Turkishness;” 45 by September 2006 according to the translator of Pamuk’s *Black Book* (into English), Maureen Freely of Warwick University, United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of this contentious law, the literary development of the Turkish Republic can be seen as, according to John Kinsley Birge in his 1956 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Literature*, “...two great tap roots... as one root drawing sustenance from the language and unwritten literary traditions of the citizens of Turkey ... the other root is down in the great books of the world’s literature.”<sup>6</sup>

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*Simavne Kadısı Oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı* (The Epic of Shaykh Bedreddin, Son of Judge Simavne, 1936) and *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları* (Human Landscapes from My Country, 1939) he developed a voice all together fiery, defiant, and subtle.

<sup>3</sup> Nick Birch, “Novelist on Trial for ‘Insulting Turkishness’”, *The Guardian*, (September 21, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Elif Şafak quoted in Nick Birch, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Freely quoted in “News Hour”, *BBC World Service*, (October 12, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> John Kinsley Birge quoted in Oğuz Turkkkan, *Turkish Literature*, (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2003), p. 57.

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

### Repeated References and Themes

*There Bolu forests are straight ahead  
Take a love stroll early in the morning  
Don't be bashful, our subject is geography –  
Salâh Birsel<sup>7</sup>*

Repeated references and themes are the primary focus of this critical inquiry into contemporary Turkish literature. These themes and repeated references form part of (re)presentations of the inner life of Turkey: its people, history, institutions, regions, cities, villages (“Village Novel,” *Köy Romanı*), culture(s) and not least ideas. As theme *solidarity* (*dayanışma*) is very common in a number of texts, some are concerned with the solidarity of neighborhoods, family etc and also with the solidarity of the working class citizens of Turkey who are (re)presented and imaged in a variety of contexts. For example, in the context of industrial strife in Latife Tekin’s *Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları* (Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills) where a shanty-town community becomes the centre of the world: “*The chemical workers gave their tent away to the workers of the light bulb factory and their banner – ‘We Support You’ – was hung on the factory wall. There was a united shout of ‘Long Live Strikes!’ Then they lined up shoulder to shoulder to dance. The men of Flower Hill joined in too, shaking their shoulders. The children clapped, the women pointed at the dancing women workers and giggled and pinched one another.*”<sup>8</sup>

There are repeated references, in the form of binary (*yapıştırıcı*) opposites, to *East/West* (*Doğu/Bati*), including Turan Oflazoğlu’s essay “Gelenekten Yararlanma Sorunu” (“Making Use of Traditions”): “*What do we understand exactly today by “the West” and “the East?” Are we to be referred to as Easterners, as opposed to Westerners? If so, what, pray, do we have in common with the Indians, the Chinese, and the Japanese? Is there a country, a community by the name of “the West?” It is true that the Ottomans, during their age of splendor when they were self-sufficient, used to refer to Europe simply as Frengistan (the land of the Franks), convinced that they were stronger than any of the European countries and had even imposed this belief on some of them; so much so that*

<sup>7</sup> Salâh Birsel, “The Geography Lesson” in Talât S. Halman and Jayne L. Warner (eds), *A Brave New Quest: Modern Turkish Poems*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> Latife Tekin, *Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları* (Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills), (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1984), p. 51.

### Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

*most of the European thinkers who contemplated a world state would think of the Grand Turk, the Ottoman Sultan, as Head of State.”<sup>9</sup>*

Another repeated reference is to *modernity/traditionalism* (*yenilik/gelenekçilik*), found for example in the 2006 Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk’s writings –eg. repeated references to plastic bags (symbols of modernity) and minarets (as symbols of tradition) and repeated references to the *metropolis*. In Pamuk’s *Kara Kitap* (The Black Book), for instance, İstanbul appears as a proud city, with its vibrancy and difference; at other times it is described in this work as hopeless, with: hopeless crowds, dilapidated cars, highways made out of potholes, pictures of bottles and cigarettes, film stars, mounds of rubble, dust, mud and minarets devoid of calls to prayer. There are repeated references, moreover, to memories of left-wing days, dirty magazines, England, the police, chimneys, Bektaşis, references to inner meanings, dreams, conspiracies, white, true identity, being one’s self (obstacles to), Mevlevî, sacred texts, language, and ferryboats.<sup>10</sup>

Historical city sights are frequently referenced by some Turkish writers, including Müge İplikçi in her novel *Kalenin Bedenleri* (The Ramparts): “*We arrived at the Topkapı Ramparts. There was a flag to welcome us. That flag, faded a tone or two, was gently billowing atop the ramparts in the sweltering July sun... As a person claiming to have known this city for years, you’d crowded me into one of the shuttle-buses in Eminönü and said to the driver, ‘Here’s two fares to Topkapı.’ That self-confident aura of yours still persisted when you glimpsed the flag on top of the Topkapı Ramparts.*”<sup>11</sup>

There are also repeated references to *birth* (*doğum*) –eg. in Nihal Yeğinobalı’s essay, *Republic’s Child*, “*I am Born: a cold, drizzly night in early winter, about 9:30. In this outlying district (more rural than suburban) of the Aegean city of Manisa, Turkey, where electricity has not yet found its way, the lamps have long been lit. The bedroom door opens and her paternal grandmother Sıdika enters with the newborn, tightly swaddled Nihal in her arms. Not that the infant is properly named yet. The proud father Halil Asım, upon witnessing the safe birth of his second child, his second daughter, has resorted to his Ottoman-Persian Dictionary and is leafing through the pages in the*

<sup>9</sup> Turan Oflazoğlu, “Gelenekten Yararlanma Sorunu” (Making Use of Traditions), *Türk Dili*, No. 475 (July 1991), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> See Leonard Stone, “Minarets and Plastic bags: The Social and International Relations of Orhan Pamuk”, *Turkish Studies*, 7: 2, (June 2006), pp. 191-201.

<sup>11</sup> Müge İplikçi, *Kalenin Bedenleri* (The Ramparts), (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2002), p. 131.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

*lamplight, searching for a name befitting his new daughter in this volume which also provided his firstborn's name: Müzehher, meaning 'flowering, bearing and/or bedecked with flowers;'"<sup>12</sup> and repeated references to dialect, region and dress –eg. in Pınar Kür's novella *Bir Deli Ağaç* (Crazy Tree): "From a distance her uncle's style and dress could be mistaken for a gentleman's, but as soon as he opened his mouth he revealed his true identity - that of an Anatolian merchant who could not speak good Turkish or see why he should. Both of them enjoyed and even exploited the benefits of the big city, but they defended themselves against it in a way by not following an urban life-style. In spite of their prosperity it was important to them to remain untarnished and to steer clear of the vices of the big city -as important as increasing their wealth."<sup>13</sup>*

Death (*ölüm*) is referenced by other authors, as Ayla Kutlu's novella, *Mekruh Kadınlar Mezarlığı* (Cemetery of Fallen Women), testifies: "His name was Hamit. He was the husband of Aysad Bahu's granddaughter. He was almost fifty-five and had great-grandchildren... Inside he cries out: 'Come on woman, why don't you die.' The woman sitting beside Aysad Bahu and reciting from the Qur'an suddenly stopped. Hamit moved uneasily thinking that others might have heard him. Was she already dead? There is no protrusion perceivable apart from the elevation of the bedcover... The voice of the woman reciting from the Qur'an once more spread through the room. It was soft and sensitive. Two women came into the room and sat down silently. They started swaying back and forth in harmony with the music..."<sup>14</sup>

A concern for some Turkish writers, especially within the genre of the literary essay, is the relationship between the arts and the Turkish state. Sabahattin Eyuboğlu in his essay *Devlet ve Sanat* (The State and Art), writ pertinently on the subject and at one point asks the question: "why is the artist, the true artist, let alone having a say in the affairs of the state, often per-secuted and outlawed? Why have many of the artists we honor today been imprisoned, tortured or made to speak in hushed voices in the past? Two rea-sons come to mind immediately: First, those who govern the state do not really understand art and thus reduce it to their own perception of it; second, artists anxious about their own well-being have converted the public's, and hence the state's respect for art into cash value and have

<sup>12</sup> Nihal Yeğınobalı, *Republic's Child*, (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Pınar Kür, *Bir Deli Ağaç* (Crazy Tree), (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1981), p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> Ayla Kutlu, *Mekruh Kadınlar Mezarlığı* (Cemetery of Fallen Women), (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1995), p. 26.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

*contributed to the strengthening of those in power through their art.*<sup>15</sup>  
Edward Said puts it somewhat more succinctly: “What importance must the [artist] give to independent critical consciousness, an oppositional critical consciousness?”<sup>16</sup>

Repeated references to everyday life in Turkey runs across a whole swathe of contemporary Turkish literature, and includes references to the Tea Man (*çaycı*) and to *Food* (*yiyecek*), *Noise* (*gürültü*) and *Smell* (*koklamak*). Cezmi Ersöz’s *Çaycı Ali* (Ali the Tea Man) is but one example as he describes his favorite tea man, Ali: “The tea-man Ali at the newspaper *Güneş* (*The Sun*) was a person brimful of hope, dreams, joys and energy, just like the tea he’d bring to us in the small thin-waisted Turkish tea glasses, taking great pleasure in it all...His nose was slightly bent to the right. Like all clever people, he had a glint of sorrow in his eyes; however, this he knew well how to conceal...just at the moment we were about to give up all hope in both humanity and ourselves, Ali would appear with our tea, frosty piping hot ‘hare’s blood,’ plenty strong, steeped to a ‘T’ and trustworthy... Ali the tea-man hadn’t finished school, but like all other clever people without schooling, he was able to understand life with its secret subtleties and surprising traps much better than the rest of us...”<sup>17</sup>

*Youth* (*gençlik*) figures prominently in other writings, including the United Kingdom-based, Turkish-born author of *Children of the Rainbow* Moris Farhi’s novel, *Young Turk* (*Genç Türk*) where circumcision is noted in the first chapter, In the Beginning: “I was sitting in my room, dressed in the ceremonial white satin camise and hat, fighting my fear of the impending cut and wondering whether I would survive the assault on my ‘key to heaven,’ as Mahmut the *Simurg* describes the penis.”<sup>18</sup>

*Food, sounds and smells, birth, death, youth, city/countryside* (*şehir/kırlar*), *family* (*aile*), *neighborhood* (*çevre*), *nostalgia/history* (*vatan ya da yuva hasreti/tarih*), *community* (*cemaat*), *justice* (*adalet*), *protest* (*itiraz*), *affaire d’amour* (*aşk macerası*) and *affaire d’honneur* (*şeref meselesi*) are repeatedly referenced by a number of Turkish writers working in the genre of short stories, including Sevim Burak,

<sup>15</sup> Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, “Devlet ve Sanat” (The State and Art), in Azra Erhat (ed.) *Sanat Üzerine Denemeler ve Eleştiriler*, (İstanbul: Cem Yayınları, 1997), pp. 382-387. (First published in *Yeni Ufuklar*, October 1965).

<sup>16</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 326.

<sup>17</sup> Cezmi Ersöz, “Çaycı Ali” (Ali the Tea Man), in *İçime Gir Ama Sigaranı Söndürme*, (İstanbul: Gendaş Kültür, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Moris Farhi, *Young Turk* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), p. 13.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

Sevinç Çokum, Aslı Erdoğan, Cezmi Ersöz, Onat Kutlar, Ayfer Tunç, Gülten Dayıoğlu, Murathan Mungan, Feride Çiçekoğlu, Mahir Öztaş, Ayhan Bozfirat, Gaye Borahioğlu, Ferit Edgü, Bekir Yıldız, Sevgi Soysal, Salim Şengil, Zeynep Aliye, Feyza Hepçilingirler, Erhan Bener, Suzan Samancı, Ulviye Alpay, Nazlı Eray, Oğuz Atay, Orhan Duru, Peride Celâl, Leyla Erbil, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Buket Uzuner, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Tezer Özlü, İnci Aral, Talât Sait Halman, Habib Bektaş, Aziz Nesin, Tarık Dursun, Füzuzan, Cemil Kavukcu, Naim Dilmener, Haldun Taner, Perihan Mağden, Bilge Karasu, Sulhi Dölek, Zeynep Oral, Mehmet Zaman Saçlıoğlu, Şebnem İşigüzel, Tomris Uyar, Necati Tosuner, Zeynep Avcı, Ayşe Kulin, Fatih Özgüven, Hulki Aktunç, and Melisa Gürpınar.

The wider-ranging themes in contemporary Turkish literature cannot be reduced to one overarching meta-narrative. Rather the concerns of contemporary Turkish literature are multi-varied, although a number of discernable floating themes are clearly present. In Turkey today, lyrical poetry in the form of a short lyrical stanza is most popular; dramatic verse is not so widely known.<sup>19</sup> Unsatisfied desire and gentle melancholy through the passing of time occupy much Turkish poetic thought, along with a raft of poems on nature, imitative folk tradition and curiosity about experience.<sup>20</sup> Among the new generation Fazıl Hüsni Dağlarca's poetry is well received in Turkey, including his ode to Mount Ararat, as was the young poet Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, who died in 1956, and in the folk tradition there is Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu along with the "folk surrealists," the late Orhan Veli Kanık (eg. My Trouble is Different), noted especially for his poems on İstanbul, and Oktay Rifat (eg. The Window). Orhan Veli Kanık and Oktay Rifat led a revolution in Turkish poetry in 1941 with the publication of a small volume of verse (with Melih Cevdet Anday who died in 2002) preceded by an essay and entitled *Garip* ("Strange"). The authors explicitly opposed themselves to everything that had gone in poetry before in order to create a modern, popular art, "to explore the people's tastes, to determine them, and to make them reign supreme over art."<sup>21</sup> Another contemporary poet of significant stature is Munis Faik Ozansoy with his simplistic poems (eg. Enchanted Gardens and After Thirty Summers). During the end of the last decade a number of poets gained recognition by focusing on the national spirit and domestic society. Among these are the symbolist

<sup>19</sup> Oğuz Turkkay, *Turkish Literature*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Talât S. Halman (ed.), "Introduction", *Just for the Hell of It: 111 Poems by Orhan Veli Kanık*, (İstanbul: Multilingual Yabancı Dil Yayınları, 1997), p. 4.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

Arif Nihad Asya and the Folk school-influenced Fethi Tevetoğlu (eg. Our Peasants).

The novel and the short story as it is generally known in the West emerged in Turkish literature in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the *Tanzimat* School (1860-1895). Namık Kemal had remarkable success with his novels *İntibah*, a social melodrama and the historical *Cezmi*. Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem became well known for his short stories, for example, *Araba Sevdası* (Carriage Crazy), as did Sami Paşazade Sezai with his novel *Sergüzeşt* (Adventure). Two other Turkish authors to gain recognition with the *Tanzimat* novel, usually concerned with national and social problems of the day and the pull between traditionalism and new ideas, were Ahmet Mithat who published 83 novels and volumes of short stories<sup>22</sup> and Nabizade Nazım.

The ensuing *Servet-i Fünûn* period (1895-1901) coincided with Sultan Hamid's dictatorship and also produced two of the finest novelists of this period: the French-influenced Halit Ziya and author of *Mai ve Siyah* (The Blue and the Black) and *Aşk-ı Memnu* (The Forbidden Love), and the English-influenced realist Mehmet Rauf, author of *Eylül* (September). Hüseyin Rahmi (a protégé of the prolific Ahmet Mithat) was also a very productive author of this period. His novels usually deal with the theme of life in the big cities –eg. *Şik* (Chic), *İffet* (Virtue) and *Tesadüf* (Coincidence). Another prolific author to note here is the romantic Ahmet Rasim, author of *İlk Sevgi* (First Love), *İki Güzel Günahkâr* (Two Beautiful Sinners) and *İki Günahsız Sevda* (Two Innocent Loves).

The Nationalist School in Turkish literature actually began in earnest around 1870 and continues to this present day. One of its founders, Ahmet Vefik Paşa produced a well-received scholarly work entitled *Lehçe-i Osmanî*. Far more than a dictionary this text contains linguistic, ethnic and historic studies of the entire Turkish race, and it was influential in forming the ideas of historians and essayist, such as Süleyman Paşa, Ali Sûavi and Şemsettin Sami. Ahmet Hikmet Müftüoğlu, the short story writer and the poet Mehmet Emin Yurdakul were two of the earliest writers attracted to the new school. Using simple Turkish and employing the syllabic metric measure, rather than the Arabic *aruz* measure,<sup>23</sup> these writers became some of the principle standard bearers of Turkish nationalism. Indeed, Mehmet Emin penned

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> The folk-inspired "syllabist movement", *Beş Hecceler*, emerged from the National Literature movement.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

what has become the nationalist poetic cry: “*I am a Turk, my race, my religion are great / My heart, my being are filled with fire.*”

There are important landmarks in the history of nationalist literature, including 1911 when the literary magazine *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland) was founded by Mehmet Emin and Ahmed Hikmet. It aimed at instilling a broad Türkism (*Türkçülük*) into its readers. Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Yusuf Akçura and Hüseyinzâde were also co-founders. A year later the same group formed a political, cultural and social club *Türk Ocağı* (Turkish Hearth). A parallel development was the establishment of the nationalist *Genç Kalemler* (‘Young Pens’) in Salonica. These nationalist writers were exclusively concerned with nationalist literary matters and its founders Ömer Seyfettin and Ali Canib Yöntem and two later members, Ziya Gökalp and M. Fuat Köprülü were to become prominent figures in Turkish literature. Ziya Gökalp had a tremendous effect on Turkish literature and is known as the father of Türkism as he helped the school to cover in depth philosophical, scientific and literary topics from a nationalist perspective. In literature nationalists dissolved the centuries-old division of Folk, Mystic and Divan and a truly national Turkish literature, in both form and vocabulary, was finally created.

Gökalp’s major work, *Principles of Türkism* is the gospel of Turkish nationalism; it explores all phases of Turkish life in the context of advocating modernization and Westernization without loss of national identity. The leadership of Gökalp, whose publications included *New Magazine* and *Little Review*, was complemented by the scrupulous research into Turkish history and literature by Fuat Köprülü.

The Nationalist school in the 20<sup>th</sup> century first gained momentum in fiction under the writer Ahmet Hikmet Müftüoğlu, author of a collection of short stories entitled *Çağlayanlar* (Cascades) and imbued with national themes, ancient legends and people from both the city and village.

As the nationalist school grew, a further group arose: the “Independents”; a diverse school of poets, some of who joined the nationalists. Foremost amongst these is the poet Mehmet Akif who wrote the Turkish national anthem and a deeply moving poem on the Unknown Soldier of World War I. Distinctive for its startling imagery and strength of feeling, this poem became most celebrated in Turkey:

*You, who for this land have fallen on earth,  
The souls of your forefathers bend on your forehead.*

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

*How can we find a tomb great enough to be a cradle  
for your slumber?*

*If I said let us bury you in history, it would be too  
small.*

Another poet of stature in this school is Ahmet Haşim (eg. *Storks By Moonlight*) and the celebrated Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, who blended Divan poetry, traditional Turkish culture and modern European conceptions of art to produce some of the most impressive Turkish poetry ever written, especially in his modern poetry which uses flawless Turkish. A good example is his poem written in the *aruz* measure, "The Flight." Halid Fahri Ozansoy, Orhan Seyfi Orhon and Yusuf Ziya Ortaç were the other prominent poets from the Independent school. Within metric-measured verse the Independents in part sought to bring indigenous musical qualities to their poetry. However, one of the most powerful exponents of folk poetry using quatrains is Rıza Tevfik. His poem "Nostalgia for My Homeland" is a good example. Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel also became a cherished poet at in Turkey, especially later in his writing career when he turned to folk poetry.

Considered to be one of the greatest short story writers in Turkish literature is Ömer Seyfettin with his plain, simple prose based on the common speech rhythms of İstanbul and national themes; he drew his material from the Turkish people and historical events. Orhan Seyfi revived the Turkish art of writing fiction in verse for a time in his work *Peri Kızı ile Çoban Hikâyesi* (The Story of the Fairy and the Shepherd). Perhaps the most well received author of good Turkish prose is the Zola-influenced Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu with his hugely successful novels *Kiralık Konak* (Mansion for Rent) and *Yaban* (the Stranger). Refik Halit Karay has also earned a significant place in Turkish literature with his powerful characterizations, wit and epic atmospheres. The late, compassionate writer Reşat Nuri Güntekin is also a widely read author in Turkey, including his popular novels the translated "Autobiography of a Turkish Girl", *Dudaktan Kalbe* (From Lips to the Heart) and *Bir Kadın Düşmanı* (An Enemy of the Woman). Women novelists have also made a mark in modern Turkish literature, perhaps the most prominent being Halide Edib Adivar, with her focus on the Eastern Mediterranean woman. Her published novels include *Ateşten Gömlek* (The Shirt of Fire), *Zeyno'nun Oğlu* (Son of Zeyno) and *Sinekli Bakkal* (The Flyblown Grocer's Store).

More recent writers worthy of note are Aka Gündüz, Mahmut Yesari, Peyami Safa, Kerime Nadir, the Proustian A. Şinasi Hisar and

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

the short story writers Sabahattin Ali, Orhan Kemal, Sait Faik, and Haldun Taner.

Modern drama in Turkey was preceded by several theatrical movements, most namely religious observances in the form of pantomime, dancing and acting, *Kukla* (marionettes), *Karagöz* (the Shadow Play), *Meddah* (story teller) and *Orta Oyunu* (open-air performances). Modern theatre in Turkey came via French and Italian companies during the *Tanzimat* period. Namık Kemal had a great success with *Vatan Yahut Silistre* and in his play *Gülnehal* he attacked dictatorship. Another successful dramatist was Ahmet Vefik Paşa who translated the comedies of Molière. At the centre of modern Turkish drama is the outstanding figure of Abdülhak Hâmid, who wrote of the Moorish warrior who conquered Andalusia, *Tarık*. This play has been translated into many languages. Şemsettin Sami, Ahmet Mithat, Ebuzziya Tevfik and Muallim Naci were the most successful playwrights of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the introduction of the constitution in 1908 nationalists and young dramatists came to the fore –eg. Halid Fahri Ozansoy’s verse-drama, *Baykuş* (The Owl), Yusuf Ziya Ortaç’s Folk school-influenced *Binnaz* and the plays of the romantic poet Faruk Nafiz, including *Canavar* (The Dragon), *Akin* (The Raid), *Yayla Kartalı* (The Eagle of the Plateau). Musahipzade Celâl had success with stage comedies while the poet Behçet Kemal Çağlar used dramatic historical material to great effect –eg. Timur. More recent successful Turkish dramatists, successful in the sense that they and their plays have become widely known include Reşat Nuri Günetkin who died in 1957, and the writer for radio Cevat Fehmi Başkut.

#### Turks in Other literature<sup>24</sup>

“...to destroy the written word you need only a torch and a Turk” - Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

<sup>24</sup> For details of this subject see Battal İnandı, “Alman Halk Şiirinde Türkler (13.-16. yüzyıl)”, *DTCF Dergisi*, 36: 1-2, (1993); Yıldız Güllülü (Aksoy), *Onsekizinci Yüzyıl İngiliz Tiyatrosunda Türkler*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi (Unpublished PhD Thesis), (İstanbul: 1973); Berna Moran, “İngiliz Edebiyatı’nda Fatih Sultan Mehmed Hakkında Piyeler”, in *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler/Röportajlar*, (Ed. Seval Şahin Gümüş), (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), pp. 63-78; Kâmil Aydın, *Images of Turkey in Western Literature*, (Ankara: The British Council, 1999); Nevide Akpınar Dellal, *Alman Kültüründen Seçme Tarihi ve Yazınsal Ürünlerde Türkler*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2002); Onur Bilge Kula, *Batı Düşününde Türk ve İslam İmgesi*, (İstanbul: Büke Yayınevi, 2002); Özlem Kumrular (ed.), *Dünyada Türk İmgesi*, (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005).

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

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The lives of the citizens of Turkey form part of the stable diet of contemporary Turkish authors, dramatists and poets. Modern Turkish literature, however, contains literature(s) within in it. There are, for example, scores of xenophobic, extreme chauvinistic writings, didactic verse and outright propaganda. In the first of these foreigners are viewed with suspicion and in the case of Greeks and Armenians with downright hostility. But all literatures have these type of writings embedded within them. Regarding Turks, moreover, other literatures have invariably focused upon them in a negative light, including mainstream literary texts.

Europe's relationship with Turkey has been both fruitful and problematic, and frequently refracted through culture as well as politics. Turks are and have been characterized in a good many other literatures, including European literatures. Turks figure in a number of selected French, Scandinavian and Italian literatures, amongst others. Such Turkish references can be negative, but not every time. Turks are also an intimate and surprising figure in the English literary imagination in English Renaissance and post Renaissance literature which serves as a good historical example of Turks and Turkishness in Other literature. However, it was only with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) that any concrete relationship between the Ottoman Empire and England developed.

The fictional presence of the Turk in English literature is associated with Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare and Dryden; all draw upon a limited corpus of material to generate their overwhelmingly negative images of the Ottomans. In his play *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe gave his Christian public the Ottomans they really wanted to see. Marlowe depicted the 14<sup>th</sup> century king of Samarkand as a ruthless monarch, utterly without mercy, but endowed with the requisite courage and will to subdue the Moslem world of Turks, Syrians, Persians and Tartars. Bejazet is based on the historical Ottoman Sultan Beyazit. In a dramatic moment of Christian wish-fulfillment, the Mongol Tamburlaine puts the Ottoman Sultan in a cage and parades him around the stage. Rather than suffer such an indignity, Bejazet takes his own life by banging his head against the iron bars. Marlowe's main historical sources were the *Vita Magni Tamerlanis* (1551) by Petrus Perondinus and Pedro Maxia, whose *Life of Timur in his Silva* (Madrid, 1543) was anglicised by Fortescue in his *Foreste* (1571).

But 16<sup>th</sup> century images of the Turks were not all negative. Although they were always mentioned in texts as the 'other' or the adversary, their military tactics and nature of government were much

---

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

admired. As early as 1513 Machiavelli in *The Prince* extolled the wisdom of Turkish rule, colonizing a conquered country to maintain direct rule.

Shakespeare, writing at the same time, often exploited the common image of Turks as licentious, deceitful womanizers. But, in common with Machiavelli, he too allowed a sense of admiration for Turkish military prowess to creep in. In *Othello* one of the senators of the Venetian state recognizes the strategic expertise of the Turks, saying that the Turks are most probably bent on conquest of Cyprus not Rhodes: “*We must not think the Turk is so unskillful / To leave that latest that which concerns him first.*”

In Shakespeare in general, however, the Turks appear as exemplars of “unchristian” behavior:

“*What! Think you we are Turks or infidels? Or that we would, against the form of law, Proceed thus rashly in the villain’s death.*” (*Richard III*)

“*Wine Loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the Turk.*” (Edgar in *King Lear*)

“*Why, Tis a boisterous and a cruel style, A style for challengers; why she defies me, Like Turk to Christian.*” (Rosalind in *As You Like It*)

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, several translations of the Qur’an appeared, as well as lives of the prophet Mohammed and histories of the Turks. This was more to do with a curious interest in the exotic. Negative images of the Turks are seen in works such as the sermon of the famous preacher Isaac Barrow, “Of the Impiety and imposture of Paganism and Mohammedanism”, and Humphrey Prideaux’s “The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet”. Richard Knolles’ *Hystorie of the Turks* (1603) also reflected this sharp hostility. On the other hand and in the sphere of historical writing, more objective material was also beginning to circulate. Sir Paul Rycaut who had spent six years in Turkey produced a seriously informative work named *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire, Containing the Maxims of The Turkish politic, The Most Material Points of The Mohammedan Religion* (1668).

At the start of the Restoration period, Dryden projects the image of the Turk as a rude, ruthless, licentious barbarian, observing in his poem, *Astrea Redux*: “Such as he Meccan prophet used of yore, To whisper councils in their patron’s ear/And veiled their false advice with zealous fear.” Dryden’s *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) presents the Orient as a battleground; but this time it is the Mongol King’s sons that fight

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

with each other. In *Don Sebastian* (1689) the Muslim world is again described as cruel, tyrannical, and sensual. The Mufti, the highest authority among Muslims, appears as the comic character in the play. Nevertheless, Dryden uses the eastern element in his play to give it that exotic air that was popular at the time.

With the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the interest in the Middle East and Turkey increased. On a political level, the Turks no longer presented such a fearful threat. When the Karlofça Treaty was signed on January 26 1699, the Empire lost most of its European possessions, and Ottoman branches of influence in Europe began to wither. The empire's military forces were weakened by the wars with Austria and Russia, while the question of control of the eastern trade was causing major unrest in the Middle East. However, amongst the many writers dealing with specific Turkish themes we see a more authentic picture of the East emerging, for example in Lady Mary Wortley Montague's *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1716-18), where she wrote admiringly about the inoculation against smallpox used by the Turks for many years, introducing the practice to England and in Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759). The Turk also entered classical music in the West with performances, for instance, of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11, K.331, *Rondo alla Turca* (Turkish March), a piece that moves between a B minor/major tonality.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became easier and easier to travel: touring to the Middle East became very popular. The atmosphere of the "real" East in Byron's works, for example, have the grounded knowledge of one who has lived in and experienced the East before he wrote about it. But a more balanced appraisal of Islam and its prophet had to wait for Thomas Carlyle. Although not among his most popular works, his lecture "The hero as Prophet. Mahomet: Islam", given in a series entitled "Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History," argued that the stature of a hero depends on the number of his believers and the length of time he has been believed. Carlyle, however, spent little time on Turks.

### Conclusion

*"You will see Diyarbakır which smells of watermelon. Adana of cotton, Rize of tea, Aegean villages of bitter oranges, tangerines and lemons, and Ayvalık which basks in the aroma of olive oil and soap. You will enter Isparta amidst the fragrance of roses and see villages, towns and cities that reek of horses, mud, dust, humanity*

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

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*and fish, or are redolent with the smell of tobacco, grapes and wheat.”*  
Ferit Edgü, *Turkey: A Portrait*.<sup>25</sup>

There is at present a lack of research into the relationship between domestic political trajectories and fiction in Turkey. To what extent and how are they intertwined? How does modern Turkish literature in this sense compare with Russian or other European literatures? How does Turkish literature fit in with domestic political developments, say, from the 1950s until the mid-1990s? A run-down of these developments does not tie in with any literary schools or major literary genres: the Democrat Party in the *fifties* - characterized especially by a loosening of the secularist policies of former governments, brisk economic development, increasing financial reliance on the United States, and military assimilation of Turkey into the Western alliance; the *sixties* and *seventies* where the years of the “second” Turkish Republic after the introduction of the more liberal constitution in 1961 legalized future actions by the military in political matters. These years also represent intense ideological conflict between left and right centered on capital and labor. The sixties closed with socio-political extremism, culminating in the military intervention by memorandum in 1971. During the 1970s millions of Turks migrated to Europe as industrial workers (especially to Germany). There is also the creation of a heavily protected import substitution industry; military intervention in Cyprus; intense left/right violence. The eighties to the mid-nineties, after the third military intervention in 1980, are represented above all else by the introduction of a military-inspired new economic policy aimed at an export-led growth and a free internal market; introduction of a new restrictive constitution in 1982; gradual liberalization from 1983 onwards. During the first half of the nineties socio-economic tendencies were not changed, formations of pre-1980 politics re-organized themselves and the structures assembled after the 1980 coup were gradually disassembled.<sup>26</sup> To what extent do Turkish literary (re)presentations of the condition of Turkey take the pulse of these political developments? To what extent have Turkish authors been “political witnesses of their age?” Arguably we can say, for instance, that the work of novelist Adalet Ağaoğlu’s trilogy of modernist novels collectively entitled *Dar Zamanlar* (Tight Times, 1973–1987),

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<sup>25</sup> Ferit Edgü, *Turkey: A Portrait*, trans. Talât Sait Halman, (Singapore: The Archipelago Press, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> This is a brief representation of a more comprehensive account of Turkish history constructed by Zürcher. See E. J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

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### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

examines the changes that occurred in Turkish society between the 1930s and the 1980s in a formally and technically innovative style.

According to Füsün Akatlı in her literary essay *Çağ Tanıkları* (Bearing Witness to an Age) the term is problematic: “to mention a few examples from Turkish literature, we might say that Orhan Kemal, Adalet Ağaoğlu and Attila İlhan bear witness to their age, while Bilge Karasu, Ferit Edgü, Hulki Aktunç, and Enis Batur etc. do not fulfill this responsibility. Are we justified, however, in saying this? I sincerely doubt it. I personally believe that one needs to formulate the basic question more accurately, namely, ‘What is the function of the artist?’”<sup>27</sup>

Another neglected area of research is Turkish “exile literature.” According to Feridun Andaç, in his memoir *Sürgünlüğün İzinde* (Following Up on the Exile), “exile has opened up a new field of sensitivity in literature. In the panorama of Turkish literature after the 1980s we can observe signs of this new sensitivity more clearly. And gradually, there opened up a whole new perspective that had been emerging for some time. In this period, along with Demir Özlü, some other Turkish writers like Nihat Behram, Ataol Behramoğlu, Oya Baydar, and Ömer Polat also went into exile.”<sup>28</sup>

Among the writers whom we can consider within the context of the literature of exile, “exile literature” due to their work and literary identities (ie. the self-exiled writers) are Feyyaz Kayacan, Aras Ören, Güney Dal, Fakir Baykurt, Yüksel Pazarkaya, Tekin Sönmez, Özgen Ergin, Dursun Akçam, Habib Bektaş, Gültekin Emre, Fethi Savaşçı, Sıtkı Salih Gör, Haluk Aker, Özkan Mert, Lutfi Özkök, Gürhan Uçkan, Tezer Özlü, and Aysel Özakin. And, as Andaç notes, “we need to research and evaluate the geography of Turkish literature... to follow up on exile. In my opinion, this will play an important part in establishing cultural and literary identities.”<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand contemporary Turkish literature is a multidimensional phenomena and one whose cultural and political characteristics need to reach wider audiences. Established Turkish authors such as Peyami Safa and Oğuz Atay need more of their works translated, just as Yaşar Kemal, Orhan Pamuk and other less well known authors have been (eg. Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Latife Tekin). This includes, in drama Memet Baydur, Aysun Babacan,

<sup>27</sup> Füsün Akatlı, “Çağ Tanıkları,” (Bearing Witness to an Age), in *Zamansız Yazılar*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Feridun Andaç, “Sürgünlüğün İzinde,” (Following Up on the Exile), in *Işık Ol Günümü Ağ*, (İstanbul: Papirüs Yayınları, 1998), pp. 82-83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

### **Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

Güngör Dilmen, Nazlı Eray, and Behçet Necatigil; those who have published novels, including Aysel Özakın, Öner Yağcı, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Ahmet Altan, Orhan Kemal, Erdal Öz, Derviş Zaim, Zülfü Livaneli, Nedim Gürsel, Selçuk Altun, Leyla İpekçi, Aslı Erdoğan, Yusuf Atılgan, Güneli Gün, Erendiz Atasu and Aras Ören.

Turkish poets too deserve a wider audience, finally, especially with regard to the post-1960s poetic evolution defined as the *Second New* (*İkinci Yeni*), which represents a significant breakaway from the poetry written earlier, especially in terms of language, meaning and structure. Post-1960s poetry can be categorized into movements or schools, according to Ahmet Oktay,<sup>30</sup> including the “prison poets” (imprisoned after the military interventions in Turkey of March 12 1971, but more particularly that of September 12 1980), socialist-realist poetry, Islamic idealist poetry at the close of the 1980s, the modernist resistance with its drift towards prose, and modernist-historicist poetry with its historicist emphasis on *Divan* rather than folk poetry. Translated contemporary Turkish poets include Hilmi Yavuz, Ülkü Tamer, Sennur Sezer, Kemal Özer, Ahmet Oktay, Murathan Mungan, Sezai Karakoç, Metin Eloğlu, Turgay Gönenç, Talât Sait Halman, the towering figure of Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca, Enis Batur, İlhan Berk, Ataoğul Behramoğlu, Salâh Birsell and Gülten Akın.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmet Oktay, *Çağdaş Türk Şiiri Üzerine Birkaç Genelleme* (A Few Generalizations on Current Turkish Poetry), (İstanbul: Yeni Press, 1990), p. 17.

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**Turkish Studies**

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature  
and History of Turkish or Turkic  
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*