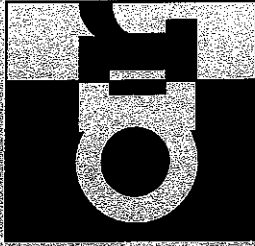


**More than the Sultan's treasures,**  
Istanbul also guards the crown jewels of Turkish poetry.  
Come with us on a voyage of discovery up the Golden Horn!

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# ISTANBUL

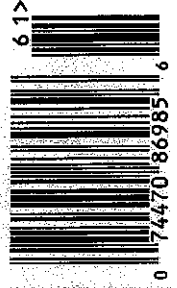
*and beyond...*

**Turkish Poetry**

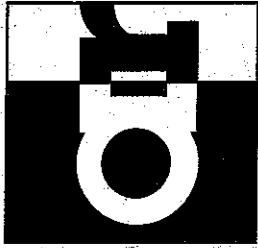
*edited by*

**Jeffrey Kahrs & Mel Kenne**

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Spring/Summer 2006



**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

Volume XII, Issue Number 2

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*Istanbul...* The very name speaks of distances, seems to demand an ellipsis trailing off into emptiness. A crossroads of cultures since prehistoric times, the city has one foot in Europe and the other, across the waterway of the Golden Horn, in Asia. On a taxi ride you whiz by the massive red and white walls of ancient Constantinople. Shopping on a busy street, you pass under a towering stone aqueduct from Roman times. You cool off underground amid the columns of a vast Byzantine cistern, where fish have lived in darkness so long they have gone blind. You almost go blind from the glitter of gold in the Grand Bazaar. Take a Turkish bath where sultans and viziers have luxuriated. Domes and minarets of ancient mosques constellate the landscape. Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace....

How could there *not* be poetry in such a place—and how could we in the West be blind to it for so long? The ruins of Troy are not far from here, where a clash of civilizations on the Turkish coast inspired the first great epic of Western poetry. From Homer's Troy to Yeats's Byzantium, poets have been haunted by this land ever since.

This issue of *Atlanta Review* takes you to the epicenter of Turkish culture, the place where East and West have met and mingled, made love and war, for thousands of years. Many thanks to our editors Mel Kenne and Jeffrey Kahrs, and the many Turkish poets and translators who have made this ground-breaking collection possible.

To put you in the proper mood for poetry, we begin this issue with a nice moonbath. Then we'll ride our camels out into the Sahara, discover the nearly-extinct double abecedarian, shed a dolorous tear with Poor Dolores, and, at the end of the day, tune in to the wavelenght of blissful sleep using our "immaculate contraption." Welcome, in short, to a simply amazing issue of *Atlanta Review*!

Dan Veach  
Editor & Publisher

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## Moonbath: a Lullaby

Tonight the moon is a perfect pearl,  
 a seed floating in each eye as you gaze  
 up into earth's softest sunbath,  
 photons fresh in from a lunar landing,  
 but weary of miles, ninety-two million out  
 to the iron-rich seas and glassy meadows  
 of a four-billion-year-old crater-pocked rock  
 and back to earth. Are you sleepy yet?

Tonight the moon is a snowfall,  
 light as particles drifting over your face,  
 your eyelids heavy, fine muscles letting go.  
 Can you feel the motes sifting down  
 through the stratosphere's filmy clouds  
 and landing at last on your inner arms?  
 Tonight's moon is a tarnished mirror,  
 a high whole note the coyotes call to,

their blind instinctual throatache unspooling.  
 It's a waterfall tired of its rainbows,  
 turning everything earthly to smoke  
 and ashes, the day's flock of angels  
 finding your body celestial enough to rest on.  
 Can you feel them alighting on long hairs  
 and fine ones like mist on grasses?  
 Breathe in, and each cell drinks

its drop of moon dew, white fire gently  
 warming and cooling exactly as prayed for.  
 Tonight the moon is a birch leaf  
 afloat in the solar wind streaming past us  
 toward Pluto and thimming to nothing  
 like the song of joy (remember it?)  
 welling up in your limbs, as they sail out  
 into deep space now, buoyant with sleep.

*Margaret Holley*

# Faustian Hour

If you knew  
the number of days left to you, would they seem  
any more precious than these last days of summer,  
when sunlight floats down through red oaks  
to splash ghostly leaves over the walls,  
when crickets continue their soft sleighbell song,  
and you arrive at this late Friday afternoon  
with enough time on your hands  
to make your Faustian wish  
that it never end?  
Pete is asleep on the couch,  
his mother is reading aloud to herself in her room,  
and cathedrals of light enclose them  
in a pause as long as your nearly held breath.  
If you knew you had  
another fifty years, or a mere two weeks, or less,  
would you fill them with counting down,  
these hours that are now filled with unknown future  
and blessed light?  
Would you,  
as oak leaves dance on the wall, and Mother's voice  
drones on, and Pete lies completely still, could you  
fill the rapidly shortening time with any more  
awareness, any more prayers than now  
enwreath that sleep?  
Light without noon's brilliance, crickets without  
July's heat, dusk without any urgency  
to the piles of paper—no, you think, there is no  
more gracious hour  
for letting endings simply be  
forgotten, as the oven aromas of tarragon

and lamb arrive in the brain, that symphonic organ  
now fully steeped in the pink and copper light  
of a day that is going to burn immensely  
and forever.

*Margaret Holley*

## Moving Out

Air astonished at emptiness,  
feeling around for the old impediments,  
finds only open-minded space, wall-to-wall leeway,  
leaf-shadowed radiance falling on creamy carpet  
combed with vacuum paths.

The blond wood bookshelves  
wearing their lemon wax and nothing else,  
their tonnage gone, echo with voices I know by heart—  
Spinoza: *There is no hope without fear*  
*nor fear without hope*—

and bare walls offer themselves  
to the watercolors of eastern and western skies.  
*Empty and be full. Wear out and be new.* Lao Tzu.  
What tethered me to earth—spider silks  
and dust—has been wiped away,

each gold dust cloth folded full of gray fur,  
each clinging tendril of philodendron carefully  
detached. Complete erasure of all traces!  
I'm almost incorporeal by now—all my  
closely pencilled, yellowing pages

threshed and trashed or trucked away,  
only memories remain to abbreviate it all, and they  
depart with me at the click of the front door lock,  
leaving the plea staked in the front lawn:  
Buy my bones, my sunlit heart.

*Margaret Holley*

## Sahara

Tell me that there is  
a place, far  
from the huddled ring  
of urgent green,  
where sand washes  
the long edge of the sky.  
I will let desire carry  
me, like a camel,  
over the scorched hills  
into the dunes beyond—  
leave behind the crowded  
oasis, raucous with need,  
to travel pace by pace  
across blazing grains  
there where the salt-sharp sun  
allows no hiding.

And when at last the night  
smoothes in like a tide,  
a glittering caress,  
I may lie down

while the dunes beneath me  
sift like shadow waves,  
believing I may waken  
in that place

where the heart may draw  
its full breath—  
its full breadth—  
and need no other water.

*Jennifer Highland*

## I Thought I Could Be More

I thought I could be more  
than just speck among specks,  
a piece of the day's moments,  
like that cricket among crickets  
whistling its one note  
in the garden above.

Yet here I sit  
desiring nothing  
on cool stones  
where brook water pours its  
endless smooth sheath  
from pool to pool,  
water and air defined  
by a few circling needles  
and darting striders  
denting the surface with their feet.

The shallow bottoms are grainy  
with slow, dark life  
and there the  
caddis fly larva  
reaches exploring arms  
from its tubular house,  
soft body enclosed  
in bits of leaves  
flaking bark  
detritus of the water-bottom.  
Nosed by tiny, whiskered fish  
it rolls and creeps.

The sun soaks down in  
measured drops  
between the leaves  
to where I crouch,  
my face turned downwards,  
thinking: I, too, could live  
wrapped in the small things  
of the day

hemlock needles  
shadowed moss  
sparrow chatter  
grains of feldspar  
ripple of light reflected  
on the birch's leaning belly

my soft body drinking;  
naked and entire

*Jennifer Highland*

## We Drink Wine

We have loved others before—  
once made grand toasts, quarreled,  
left crystal in shards—now we search  
for wood, amber, the sweet smoke  
on our tongues followed by a rich  
bellow of laughter, a thirst for dance  
and sway, for momentary grace,  
the languor of drunken comfort.

We have become zealous of taste  
so we may comprehend this ardent  
ache in our mouths, the burn  
in our limbs drawing our bodies  
to the danger of new-found embrace.  
We raise our glasses to this rightful  
need, a flavor we know  
has grown from seed to fruit to age,  
and to a night we name ours.

We drink wine to prime  
the palate for the dark bud  
of a kiss, swallow it with our sad pasts.  
Let this love be our last as our lips  
meet silently in the language of forgetting.

*Karen Carissimo*

## The History of Vanilla

Need something to lull you to sleep?  
This could be the sedative you long for,  
hedge against loneliness, antidote  
to grief, the bean of your desire.  
Discrete at wrist and neck, keepers  
of the secrets of vanilla. Listen and doze:  
Totonacos, Aztecs, Hernando Cortez.  
Whisper his name. Precious plunder  
of Spain. With cacao, elixir rich and noble.  
Drift into dreamy exotica, Madagascar,  
Mexico, Tahiti. Picture the orchid, hand  
pollinated, the dangling fruit. Rootlets  
attached to trees and vines. You unrooted,  
rootless, uprooted, always on snooze  
alarm. Latin root: *vagina*. Diminutive  
of *vaina*: sheath, vagina, pod.  
Pods bundled in blankets, laid in the sun,  
wrapped back up to sweat  
overnight as you so often do.  
Repeat and repeat until properly cured,  
until the slow, gentle recirculation  
of menstruum moves through your beans,  
until you're pure. Pure vanilla extract,  
perfect for anything you crave, savory  
soups and sauces, vanilla-seared scallops,  
lamb peppered and roasted in creamy  
bourbon vanilla, ice cream bean-pricked.  
Soporific of your dreams. A kitchen,  
an island, a man, the two of you making  
*crème brûlée*, the air laced with fragrant  
oily liquid, the ripe pod in your hand.

*Diane Lockward*

## Heart on the Unemployment Line

It's a good heart,  
in the midst of the matter,  
not dangling on anyone's sleeve.  
Previously left in San Francisco.  
Experienced being wrenched and hung out to dry.  
No daws peck at it now.  
Works hard, never skips a beat, shows up on time,  
even with throbs and aches, even when sick.  
Four-chambered pumping machine the size of a fist.  
Pumps its store of blood each day,  
always in circulation, making its rounds.  
Team player, cooperates with capillaries,  
arteries, and veins, all blood-saturated.  
A versatile heart, innocent or evil,  
sweet or bitter, light, heavy, full, faint, or dear.  
Systematic, keeps to a schedule.  
Once stolen by a nimble-fingered thief, high  
on a hill, later returned.  
Occasionally stays up late playing cards,  
enjoys the shuffling, the quick flutter,  
being held in someone's hand.  
Grows fonder during absence,  
pours itself out, likes its cockles warm.  
Always at the center of things—artichoke,  
palm tree, head of lettuce. More reliable than the brain.  
This heart won't burn, arrest, attack, or fail.  
Once was dropped and broken, sutured by Time.  
Never taken a bullet though something like a knife moved through it.  
Even in grief, it keeps on beating.

*Diane Lockward*

## Poor Dolores

Dolores wears her melancholy well.  
It drapes in languid folds along the lines  
of her long thighs, a satin black expanse,  
an extravagant expense of sulks and sighs.  
Each tear becomes a diamond as it dries.

Each man who meets her longs to lie beneath  
the weeping willows of her hair, and hopes  
to glimpse the woodland nymph that crouches there.  
Shadows tremble in her collarbones  
like shallow cups of sorrow, sweet and rare.

Other women weep and no one cares;  
their ugly snuffles only irritate.  
When funerals and tumors slow them down  
their bosses yell at them for being late.  
They stand in stalls and flush to hide their cries.

Dolores, though, is differently configured.  
Around her hanging head, white butterflies  
flutter in a sympathetic halo.  
Of all the maids that mourn with heaving breast,  
poor, poor Dolores does it best.

*Rose Kelleher*

In the doctor's office, while Svetlana draws my blood, we talk. Today it's about computers.

*I bought this ring on ebay she tells me. It's an old engagement ring. She shows me the small diamond*

*set in platinum, a delicate spray of tiny diamonds on each side, token of love from someone—*

*in another century perhaps—to someone else. Who were they? Was it anger, indifference, poverty*

*theft, that let this ring fall out of the family circle to land in cyberspace?*

*I long to know, but never will. The locket, the lock of hair the packet of letters tied up with ribbon*

*and saved in the attic are things of the past. Today invisible networks keep everything moving. Svetlana*

*caps and marks each vial of blood. We say goodbye. Out on the street I walk uptown. I go with the flow.*

*Joan Stern*

In the movie that tells a story of the past, a man in a fedora looks you right in the eye. He smokes as he talks in Tommy gun bursts. At ringside, in a nightclub, on the docks, he means business.

The woman beneath her velvet cloche will cut you down to size with a glance. She draws her words like thread through a button and ties them off in tight, sure knots.

If they love, this man and woman, after she has slapped him, after he has held her helpless at arms length, they kiss long and hard as if they might never see each other again.

They kiss as if they know we are watching, each in our own comfortable darkness, longing to see how things were certain once, before we were born and baptized hatless, into a wilderness of color.

*K. Burris*

## Where the Mouse Was

White tile gleams, scrubbed clean  
by daylight, bleach, and paper towels.  
No vestige remains, no whisker or tooth.

Its legs were splayed, tiny toes  
and fingers spread wide as eyes,  
surprised when the hammer fell.

Black tail marked the kitchen floor,  
its rigor exclaiming in sudden shout,  
outrage, betrayal, disbelief—

"I died for cheese!" No more  
midnight snacks by a cabinet's crack,  
the nervous skirt of refrigerator door.

No menus left, no treasure maps  
to cookie crumbs and popcorn kernels,  
the fugitive grape that rolled

beneath a stove's squat black shadow.  
No exits wait in baseboard corners.  
Nothing will brave darkness tonight

in the quietest hour, to pause and listen  
for the faucet drip, the furnace grumble,  
the ticking of the coiled clock.

*K. Burris*

## For the Walgreen's Christmas Eve Crew

I have cursed you and will do so again  
for sticking price tags over directions  
on my poison ivy lotion, for misshelving  
the buy-one-get-one-free 64 oz. Gatorade.  
I have cursed your polyester vests that fit  
like grocery bags folded too many times,  
your crooked name tags, your programmed  
statements of appreciation for my business.

But, tonight I bless you. It's Christmas Eve,  
and no place else is open, open and brightly  
inviting for those of us without companions.  
My wife walked out two weeks ago, and I cannot  
bring myself to finish the tree with tinsel.  
It comforts me to know you, too, are stuck  
inside fluorescent haze and hum,  
while those you love go on without you.

I have come to buy three wax logs  
because I need to build a fire, a hearth,  
something warm to tend. I stand  
too long in the aisle marked "Seasonal,"  
hoping my mood will pass.

The night janitor approaches, catches  
my heel with his mop. "I'm sorry, sir,"  
he mutters, but before he can finish, I say,  
"No, forgive me, please, forgive me,"  
and in that extra plea I hear the voice  
of a man on his knees begging too long,  
too loud, a man on his knees lost  
in prayer to false gods when small talk  
at the dinner table might have saved him,  
a man on his knees unable to rise  
from beside the plastic crèche  
on sale for 7.95.

*John Pleimann*

He comes every day, in his crushed-emerald cape, flashing in front of the kitchen window, quick as a thought, and just as elusive; one blink, and he's gone. Try to show him to your mother, who's come by for tea; she doesn't turn quickly enough, doesn't see his throat, red as a stoplight, doesn't see him dart in and out of the bee balm, honeysuckle, trumpet vine. Her skin is thin as a folded roadmap; she's setting off on a new journey. The tea trembles in its porcelain boat. She is getting ready to board a great white ship whose sails are already luffing in the wind; the hawsers creak and groan, the crew is ready to cast off. But she is still casting on, yarn the color of spring grass, yarn the color of heart's blood, knitting afghan squares for the homeless. She sips her tea. He flickers back into view, takes a long sweet drink. He signals *stop*, then *go*; *stop*, then *go*, both directions at once, confusing semaphores that spark and crackle in the brilliant, merciless sun.

*Barbara Crooker*

Imagine them going ahead  
into the afterlife,  
warming it up, like the first guests  
at a cocktail party  
They slip their insubstantial bodies  
into elegant attire  
as they down drinks of ether  
and dance  
to the rhythm of the spheres.

The night they spill into  
is always warm, the music fine  
the party lingering til dawn.

When one of their companions departs,  
it's never to die  
but to be born—to enter the thick darkness  
of the womb  
set foot on the green earth.

But, quiet now,  
as they lift their glasses, make a toast  
to the guest of honor  
who has not yet arrived,  
but rests deep in her sunken pillow  
about to rasp  
her final lungful of air,  
before stepping out of her costume of skin  
into a gown of stars.

*Danusha Laméris*

## What Trees Dream of

This one thinks, let me be the slender bow  
of the violin. Another, the body of the instrument,  
burnished, the color of amber.

One imagines life as a narrow boat  
crossing water,  
a light mist of salt on the prow.

And still another—planed down to planks,  
then hammered into shelter  
voices vibrating through the rafters.

We do not notice their pleasure,  
the slight hum of the banister  
beneath our palms,

The satisfaction of the desk  
as we tap our pens, impatiently,  
upon its weathered surface.

They have ferried us  
across rough seas  
to lands that smelled of cinnamon

housed our senators,  
who pace the creaky floors, debating,  
carried arrowheads to pierce our enemies.

We have boiled their pulp, pressed it  
into thin, white sheets of paper  
on which we describe all of the above in great detail.

And when we die  
they hold our empty forms  
in bare cedar

until the moment—and how they long for this,  
when we meet again in the blackened soil  
and they take us back

in their embrace, carry us  
up the length of their bodies  
into the glittery, trembling movement of the leaves.

*Danusha Laméris*

## Stone

Let my pen refrain  
from violating this stone  
by turning it to stir  
a creeping metaphor  
or polishing its surface  
to reflect my image  
or fitting it to a coursing  
of chiseled rhetoric  
or hurling it to the wild  
to scatter my demons.  
Let this stone lie  
artless and mindless  
adamantine and enduring  
after I pass.

*Roy Shepard*

## Judicious Counsel

*My dear Son...*

*To one who has a taste, the Poets serve to fill up Time  
which would otherwise pass in Idleness, Languor, or Vice.  
You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket.*

Take it from a no nonsense man,  
a Puritan purged  
of superfluity and pointed  
to chief ends. Poets  
matter.

Doomed to Paris without Abigail  
weary of wordplay  
with courtiers, he reached  
into his waistcoat, pulled out  
Milton.

While from Braintree Abigail sent news  
of prices, politics  
and nearer to his need  
apt bits of Homer courtesy  
of Pope.

Adams knew the Yankee in himself,  
his deference to use,  
his terror of the moment's  
emptiness. A verse in time  
redeemed.

Then take it from a no nonsense man,  
his son at Harvard,  
poets may improve  
the vacant hours even save  
the day.

*Roy Shepard*

## The Distance

My mother read me poems before memory,  
so maybe that's when it began,  
the certainty that seemed already in  
place at the time of my first memory—  
or at least the two coincided exactly:  
the earnest sound of her voice reading  
fell like rain on the unmoving  
earth of my conviction that poetry  
was the highest object of humanity.  
It was shocking, how she allowed spaces to fall  
between the living words—spaces that started small  
but lengthened to such silent immensity  
that a poem became the distance  
between what we must say and what we can.

*Anne Pierson Wiese*

## This Is the Century

This is the century in which we will lose  
the waltz. There will be one or two more  
generations who know how, who have learned  
in their youth to swoop and twirl in close  
two-person circles, each small circle spinning  
within the larger circle of the room, the whole  
revolving with the unerring glint  
and pace of antique clockworks, as if for the space  
of the dance one might after all command  
time. Then there will be a generation of those  
who remember, who can describe in uncertain  
terms how it looked—or might have looked—in much the same  
way as we recall the looped and serified script  
in birthday letters from great grandparents.

Then those things will be gone. What use pinking  
shears when no one sews? Knowledge of how to grow  
vegetables by the moon will be superfluous  
soon. But if it's not one thing it's another.

Why do we so stubbornly adhere  
to what is already lost? The forms and signatures  
of the ages change with or without us.  
Dictionaries begin to be obsolete  
the minute they're printed—and you could say  
we do the same. Loss is what we live on.

Yet, walking into a crowded room we still hunger  
to know who's ranged with whom, who's alone  
against the wall, who might answer us if we spoke,  
or who even exchange a glance—wordless but absolute.

*Anne Pierson Wiese*

## Co-authors

Unbeknownst to the poet  
carrying his plastic bag of trash  
out to the curb for collection,  
his most fervent reader, most avid fan,  
and the greatest living scholar  
on the subject of his collected works,  
published and unpublished,  
is the trash man,  
who, on Tuesdays and Fridays,  
stops in front of the poet's house  
and, rather than tossing  
the poet's bag of trash into the compactor,  
reverently places it inside the truck  
for later excavation and examination,  
culling from its contents the garbage-stained  
crumpled-up pages of poems in progress,  
first drafts, revisions, revisions of revisions,  
final version yet to be edited,  
then edited through more drafts,  
revisions and revisions of revisions;  
and the trash man saves them all,  
lines them up in proper chronological order  
so he can see the act of creation  
from concept to completion  
and all the steps in between,  
which explains why, on those rare occasions  
when the poet makes contact with the trash man,  
one dropping trash off as the other picks it up,  
the trash man will sometimes  
say a word, use a turn of phrase,  
something vaguely familiar, suggestive,  
that causes the poet,  
back at his desk a few minutes later,

*Ron Self*

to change a word or two,  
revise yet again a poem  
he and, unbeknownst to him,  
the trash man, are working on  
writing together.

[a double abecedarian]

Zooks! What have I done with my anthologies? I'll need a year of sleep after writing my millionth review (with aplomb). XX bottles of moonshine litter my bedside table like arsenic. Why no liting iambs in contemporary poetry? Only dead, vermin-ridden prose riddled with autobiographical treacle. Under my bed, the skeleton of Browning. I use his broken-off tibias as walking sticks. For hundreds of scenic miles I drag sensitivity, & marvel. Content must be pounded into a rich risotto of form—evident rhyme scheme & equal stanzas. I quote Keats: "Gasp! I'm dying!" Were he as prosperous as J. P. Morgan, he may not have suffered so. These days, a black-out of good taste, a dimming of metrical etiquette, a dismal nerve of postmodern surrealism, whatever that means. I'm mad! I raise one of Browning's femurs in revolt! I've a notion, ladies & gentlemen, that our language has crumbled into kindling—a few tiny sparks, maybe, but no thick log to keep joy in prosody truly alive. Meantime, I'm just about up to "Q" in my encyclopedia of literature: Quixote, etc., but still I gather hives hunting hopelessly for my beloved poetry anthologies. God knows Browning would have understood—what a saint. Five finger bones claw the floor under my bed, searching. You entertain such a relic, you pay the price—each knuckle a shiv digging for inspiration in the floorboards, scraping shallow crosses into my skin as I slumber. I should lock him in a box! But then nothing would remind me of my own bones—O my awaiting death—the only theme suitable for a poetry buzz.

Mike Dockins

Like a giant half-cooked lobster escaping the pot he climbs sideways off his boat pours a bucket of water over his head and sea-legs it to the bar, gulps cold drinks the barkeep standing on a box hands out. Water and sweat rivulet his naked chest plaster yellow hairs above and below white shorts make a circle around his worn sandals under the *kafeneion* awning where two cousins' afternoon chat is now a shattered *tête-à-tête*.

Undaunted, we commend his bravery crossing the Ionian Sea alone in a small sailboat while our eyes devour this Norse god our ancestors would beg to chisel in marble and does he know a walk down the pier and the city is his the locked shops, the yawning streets. All the short, dark people are asleep in their underwear on top of sheets, toes in upturned surrender and if one should arise to widen shutters imagine his shock at the sight of a red-shouldered blond bull whose head almost brushes the balconies. Will one dump cooling water on him passing beneath?

*No, let the rest of his dead fish skin sizzle.  
How else can barbarians learn not to go out until seven?*

Beyond his shadow at the bar  
a *petargós* splashes in tranquil blue  
alights for a heartbeat  
leaving not a speck on the rocks  
not even a print in the sand for seawater to loll in.

Georgia Syribey

At a Wishing-Spring on a Turkish Mountainside  
Miles Above the Black Sea

Stop to see whatnot tied  
to trees and bushes, a ragged clutter.  
In its midst, water emerges  
from rock. Stare at that thin, falling stream—  
its syllables a sound  
only an ear drawn close could hear.  
A creek below takes this spring's quiet  
into its clatter, the creek then taken into a river's  
plunging noise farther down.

Be wearing what's frayed or tattered.  
Tear off a thread, a scrap.  
Or the bit of string forgotten in your pocket. Use that.  
Headband, handkerchief—  
tie whatever you can to an empty twig  
leaning near the spring.  
Then cup your hands under the flow, bow to drink.

Far below, another salty throat  
swallows the sweet water  
a river gives up, at last.  
Be ocean-lucky. Make your wish.

*Paulann Petersen*

*International Feature Section*

# ISTANBUL

*and beyond...*

*the poetry of Turkey*

*Edited by*

**Jeffrey Kahrs & Mel Kenne**

## Enter Turkish Poetry! *Bayurum!*

During my thirteen years spent teaching at private universities in Istanbul, I've been fortunate to have met and befriended a number of poets, scholars and translators who are deeply committed to the study of Turkish poetry and to its translation. Because they are dedicated to internationalizing a poetic tradition that has suffered great neglect in the West until recent years, they, along with the poets they've studied and translated, deserve great thanks for making this special Turkish poetry issue of the *Atlanta Review* possible. As a poet and teacher, I can only offer a few general comments based on my study of their work and my own experience reading and translating Turkish poetry with the essential help and guidance of my friend and co-translator, Saliha Pakar.

Two questions arose as I considered what to include in this brief introduction. How much does the average American reader of poetry already know about Turkish poetry, and how much does she or he need to know to appreciate as fully as possible the poems in this selection? I'm assuming that the answer to the first question is "not a whole lot," and that the answer to the second one is "enough to understand why the Ottoman poems in this selection are so radically different from poems of the Republican era, and how this change occurred." A list of selected readings follows for the reader who is interested in delving more deeply into the intricacies of Turkish poetry.

One answer usually leads to at least one more question. A crucial one that arises and might serve as a starting point toward an overview of Turkish poetry is why dedicated readers of international poetry seem to know so little about this poetry. How has it happened that one of the oldest and deepest of the world's poetic traditions has suffered such neglect for so long?

Walter Andrews begins his introduction to *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* by asking this very question. Later on in the essay he says,

"It is all but impossible to convey to present-day audiences in the West how wide-spread, how important, how meaningful poetry, especially lyric poetry, was to Ottoman culture. For us, poetry is a peripheral art; for them it was *the* central literary activity without rival or peer. Poets and would-be poets abounded at all levels of society.... Poets routinely left collections of many hundreds or even thousands of poems, and almost everyone, from the ruler to the peasant, from the religious scholar to the rake and drunkard, aspired to be a poet."

Andrews declines to offer any simple answer to the question why a society whose heads of state commonly wrote poetry—Mehmet the Conqueror and Süleyman the Magnificent were accomplished poets, and more recently, former prime minister Bulent Ecevit, a poet, translated Eliot's "The Waste Land" into Turkish—failed to capture the attention of European scholars and translators. Andrews suggests, however, that it did not serve the interests of Europeans to see their enemy of long standing, their "other," as having qualities that might belie the popular image of Turks as savage warriors. This is a complex issue that deserves more study.

More importantly, the mood of indifference and neglect has reversed, and the last fifteen or twenty years have witnessed a long-belated blossoming of Turkish literature in English translation. It may be that the growing interest in Eastern culture in the West over the last few decades, along with the popularization of the poetry of Jalal Al-Din Rumi and the novels of Orhan Pamuk, has provided impetus for an upsurge of interest in the poetry of this region. Credit is certainly due to the Turkish studies programs that have proliferated in recent years in America, England and Europe. Somewhat ironically, the first book of Turkish poetry that I read was an edition of Talât Sait Halman's translations of the poems of Yunus Emre, the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic, lent me by the Turkish dean of students at my university. It was published by the Turkish Studies press at his alma mater, Indiana University.

Then again, perhaps it is Turkish poetry itself that has sparked an interest among readers and translators who have discovered its uniqueness. My own experience upon first reading modern Turkish poetry was electrifying. I felt as if a psychic door had been opened that allowed me to step out of myself and into a world simultaneously strange and yet so familiar that it was, in a way, like coming home. My whole view of poetry and the writing of it changed almost literally overnight. That may be one reason I've remained for so long in Turkey.

What struck me might have been the characteristic that poet-translator Murat Nemet-Nejat, in his recent *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*, calls *eda*, an intrinsic quality of Turkishness that is related to the Sufi tradition and is inherent in the Turkish language itself as an essential manifestation of the Turkish soul. Nemet-Nejat constructs a fascinating argument that this quality remains a constant in Turkish poetry regardless of time or movements; yet the modernist movements in Turkish poetry were subjective responses by generations of poets to changes occurring at the center

of their psychic milieu: Istanbul. As the theme of the city became the focus of nineteenth and twentieth century modernism in Europe, so has Istanbul had a magnetic effect on modern and contemporary Turkish poets. After all, this ancient imperial city has long been known as "the city of poets."

Certain similarities between the development of Turkish poetry from the Ottoman to the Republican periods and the evolution of modernism in Europe, England and America are evident on a glance at Ottoman poetry and the poetry of the 1930s, written by the first generation of poets to reach maturity in the Republican era. Just as poets farther west were breaking away from strict metrics and traditional forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so were Turkish poets of the early years of the twentieth century searching for new forms of expression. Yahya Kemal Beyath and Ahmet Haşim were major innovators of this period. However it was the explosion of "new poetry" during the Thirties by the *Garip*, or "Strange," school that made the radical and definitive leap to Turkish modernism. The effect of this movement, also called the "First New," on Turkish poetry is reminiscent of the explosive break made by Spanish poets of the twenties and thirties from their own formalist tradition.

The Turkish poet who galvanized this movement was Orhan Veli Kank (1914-50), whom Nemet-Nejat calls "the lightning rod of Turkish poetry," and claims that "every ensuing movement starts with an attack on him." "The First New" was composed principally of Orhan Veli and his friends Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday, members of the first generation of poets to begin writing after the language reform initiated by Atatürk, with the Turkish adoption of the Latin alphabet. Perhaps the reason why every movement starts with an attack on Orhan Veli is that he and the other "First New" poets so thoroughly broke away from the past, on the one hand embracing French poetry and on the other disclaiming metrical concerns or conventional figures of speech. Literary critic Orhan Kocak recounts a story of Mehmet Cevdet Anday's about an incident that occurred when the young poet was in the army. At a social gathering he found himself reading a poem before a colonel with a strong distaste for literature. Afterwards the stunned colonel asked the young man what it was that he had just heard. When the poet replied that he and his two friends had purged their poetry of meter and rhyme, the ecstatic colonel roared, "I've got it! Bit by bit you're going to abolish poetry." Orhan Veli later proclaimed his wish even "to dump words," and his poetry draws its power from a language that has been stripped down to basics—any wrong or

inessential word would obviate meaning in the poem and consequently its *raison d'être*.

What then was left to be said, and if anything was—how?

One might see the main thrust of "The Second New" movement, composed of poets writing from the Fifties to the early Eighties, as an attempt to build a new aesthetic on the ruins of what the "First New" had so thoroughly razed. In an essay on the movement, Orhan Kocak, spinning off Harold Bloom's theories in *The Anxiety of Influence*, believes that because the poets of this period lacked "precursor poems" with which their own could interact as a means of achieving coherent identity, they were continually forced to re-invent their poetic identities by writing phoenix-like poems of exigency. As a result, he says, poems of the "Second New" characteristically instill in their readers a sense of imbalance that is as seductive as it is disturbing. Their strength and beauty arise from this trait which imbues them as well with their defining tone of resonant "newness." Important poets in this movement are Ece Ayhan, Cemal Süreya, İlhan Berk, Atilla İlhan, Edip Cansever and Turgut Uyar. As the nature of "The Second New" remains a very complex and sticky subject even for Turkish literary critics, I'll step back from it (if my foot isn't already wedged too deeply in my throat) and move on to Turkey's most internationally famous poet.

As a young man Nâzım Hikmet (1902-63) studied in Russia, where he became a committed Marxist who wrote poetry in a style influenced by Mayakovsky and other Russian futurist and revolutionary poets. While many in Turkey today hail Nâzım Hikmet as the country's national poet, during his lifetime he was persecuted for his political views and spent about eighteen years in Turkish prisons. When he was at last released in 1952 at the age of fifty, he was threatened with military duty in eastern Turkey, which, because of his age and a heart condition, would almost certainly have been a death sentence. In desperation he fled the country, exiling himself to the U.S.S.R. He died in Moscow of a heart attack in 1963. Even though Nâzım Hikmet was stripped of his Turkish citizenship after fleeing, his books have since become wildly popular in Turkey, along with musical settings of his poetry and productions of his plays. Yet the facts that his citizenship has not been restored and that his body hasn't been repatriated by his country attest to the lingering ambivalence felt for him by many politicians and others with strong nationalistic views. Nâzım Hikmet was a great love poet, whose love was inseparable from the sadness engendered by those years spent far from his home in Istanbul. Many of his most poignant poems convey the heartbreak of his exile.

- c as in just
- ç as in chain
- ş as in shape
- i, î as in eat
- ı, I as in ilk
- ö as in earn
- ü as in yule
- ğ only lengthens the sound of the vowel it follows
- â as in *ahh*, the circumflex accent lengthens the sound of the vowel

### Suggested Readings on Turkish Poetry

- Ash Dîvan: Selected Poems of Enis Batur*, ed. Salihâ Paker; trans. Endres, Savcigil-Endres, Paker, Kenne, Coşkun and Tamplin. Forthcoming from Talisman House Publishers, 2006.
- Nightingales and Pleasure Gardens*, ed. Talât Sait Halman and Jayne L. Warner; trans. Talât Halman. Syracuse University Press, 2005.
- The Age of the Beloveds*, Walter Andrews. Duke University Press, 2005.
- Beauty and Love*, Şeyh Galip; trans. Victoria Holbrook. Modern Language Association of America Press, 2005.
- In the Temple of a Patient God*, Bejan Matur; trans. Ruth Christie. Arc Publications, 2004.
- Selected Poems by İlhan Berk*, ed. and trans. Önder Oğcu. Talisman House Publishers, 2004.
- Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*, ed. Murat Nemet-Nejat. Talisman House Publishers, 2004.
- Human Landscapes from My Country*, Nâzım Hikmet; trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk. Persea Books, 2002.

I'll refrain from commenting on the living poets included in this selection and let readers come to their own conclusions about how Turkish poetry has developed in the wake of "The Second New." But it is worth mentioning that Enis Batur, one of the most prolific and highly respected poets in Turkey today, begins his poem "Ars Poetica" sardonically: "They said my poetry wasn't anything special, / like Wallace Stevens's, like no one's, / maybe just 'a persistence of the Second New,' / viewed possibly as 'the Third New itself'—." And so the poetic beat in Turkey goes on, with great vitality, as more and more books by exciting young poets are published each year. It's unfortunate that some of the best of this lot still haven't been translated; others have, however, and are included in the selection that follows.

To conclude this introduction by returning for a moment to its title, the word *buyurun* is commonly used in Turkey to invite a guest into one's domicile, workplace, office, or just into one's presence. Shop owners often use it to invite passersby in to see their wares. So, as Turkish poetry makes an entrance in the pages of the *Atlanta Review*, may you find yourself entering a rewarding new world of poetic experience. *Buyurun!*

Mel Kenne

Istanbul, January 2006

#### Notes

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- Kocak, Orhan. "Our Master, the Novice: On the Catastrophic Births of Modern Turkish Poetry." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 566-598.
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*Living Poets of Turkey*, trans. Talât Sait Halman. Dost Publications, 1989.

*Contemporary Turkish Literature: Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Talât Sait Halman. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982.

*Human Landscapes*, Nâzım Hikmet, trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk. Persea Books, 1982.

*Yunus Emre and His Mystical Poetry*, trans. Talât Sait Halman. Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1981.

*The Penguin Book of Turkish Verse*, trans. Nermin Menemcioglu and Fahir İz. Penguin Books, 1978.

*The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin and Other Poems*, Nâzım Hikmet; trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk. Persea Books, 1977.

*Quatrains of Holland, Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca*, trans. Talât Sait Halman, Cem Yayınevi, 1977.

*I Am Listening to Istanbul: Selected Poems of Orhan Veli Kanık*, trans. Talât Sait Halman. Corinth Press, 1971.

*The Moscow Symphony and Other Poems*, Nâzım Hikmet; trans. Taner Baybars. The Swallow Press, 1970.

*Fifteen Turkish Poets, 75 Poems*, trans. S. Behlül Toygar. İskender Matbaası, 1969.

*Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca: Selected Poems*, trans. Talât Sait Halman. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969.

*The Bird and I, Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca*, trans. Talât Sait Halman. New York, 1968.

*Köroğlu: The Singing Bandit*, trans. Barbara Walker. Random House, 1968.

*Selected Poems*, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı; trans. Behlül Toygar. İstanbul, 1962.

*Beyond the Walls: Selected Poems, Nâzım Hikmet*; trans. Ruth Christie, Richard McKane and Talât Sait Halman. Anvil and Yapı Kredi Presses, 2002.

*Where Are You, Susie Petschek? The Poems of Cevat Capan*; trans. Michael Hulse and the poet. Arc Publications, 2001.

*The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. Peter France. Oxford University Press, 2000.

*Twelfth Song*, Hulki Aktunç; trans. Leland Bardwel, et al. Poetry Ireland, 1998.

*Water Music*, Lale Müldür; trans. Leland Bardwel, et al. Poetry Ireland, 1998.

*Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Walter G. Andrews; trans. Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black and Mehmet Kalpaklı. University of Texas Press, 1997.

*A Blind Cat Black and Orthodoxies*, Ece Ayhan; trans. Murat Nemet-Nejat. Sun and Moon Press, 1997.

*Poems by Karacaoğlan: A Turkish Bard*, trans. Seyfi Karabaş and Judith Yarnall. Indiana University Turkish Study Series and the Ministry of Culture Joint Series XIV, 1996.

*An Anthology of Turkish Literature*, ed. Kemal Silay. Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1996.

*The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance*, Victoria Holbrook. The University of Texas Press, 1994.

*Poems of Nâzım Hikmet*, trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk. Persea Books, 1994.

*The Poetry of Can Yücel*, trans. Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar. Papirüs Yayınları, 1993.

*Voices of Memory: Selected Poems of Oktay Rifat*, trans. Ruth Christie and Richard McKane. Rockingham Press and Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1993.

*The Poetry of Yunus Emre, a Turkish Sufi Poet*, trans. Grace Martin Smith. University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 1993.

*Modern Turkish Poetry*, edited by Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar. The Rockingham Press, 1992.

Shadows of another place rise.

Shadows with voices:

a peddler who hums as he walks,  
a Turkish song, a lamentation,  
horns, a train,  
a call to prayer

A muezzin cries out

among shantytowns and sunflower stalks.

I pray to a sun, to an emptiness  
that surrounds it, to a cotton boll.

What of old men with carved features,  
artwork chiseled into their cheeks  
by years of labor and a ruthless star?

What of stoic women draped in headscarves,

somber and sweating in humid air beneath a merciless sky?

There, in the sharpness of a high and sunken cheekbone,  
is an old masterpiece—a profile, sitting on the bus.

So is nowhere home—

not the temples and their golden gods

not the minarets that shine at night

not the crosses or the stars

or palm trees or pines

fig trees or olive trees

not the megamarts of our civilization

not the stripmall of our abandon?

Something wraps around like ivy,

like vines and crawlers

like seaweed around the tired leg of an old swimmer.

Shadows move into the westerly vision of the sun,

try to spatter into unfolded form.

But these succulents are the facets of a dry land.

*Deniz Perin*

## Contemplation in the Sun

Have you considered  
the shape of the woman's back  
who picked the cotton that you wear?

How soft the cotton  
she wraps around her head,  
the little flowers on her skirt?

Have you thought  
she might have wrinkles from the sun?

That her hands may be coarse,  
her fingers swollen with stories  
woven by the years?

Have you ever seen  
how beautiful the glimmer  
in her eye when she laughs?

How old the cotton on her back,  
and when she washes her husband's clothes,  
how carefully she rubs the shirt  
whose fabric was picked  
by her own hands?

*Deniz Perin*

## Till Morning

Poets are worse than lovers.  
How I suffered in their hands.  
How can a person spend the entire night  
With a line?

Listen, can you hear  
The song on the roofs, in the chimneys,  
The ants carrying  
Their grains to their nests?

Can't I wait for the morning  
To send packing tired rhymes  
With the garbage man  
To the sea?

The devil in me says,  
"Open the window and scream, scream,  
Scream till the morning."

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

## Nice Weathers

These nice weathers ruined me.  
I resigned in such weather  
From the Department of Public Works.  
I got hooked on tobacco  
In such weather;  
In such weather  
I fell in love,  
Forgot to bring  
The bread and salt home.  
Always in such weather  
My sickness of writing poetry  
Reoccurred;  
These nice weathers ruined me.

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

## Don't Hear The Roar And See What Happens

Don't hear the roar  
Of pistachios opening up on trees  
And see what happens  
To you.  
Don't hear the rain coming down  
And see what happens;  
Don't hear the ringing bell, the human voice,  
Don't smell sea weeds,  
The lobster, the mussels,  
The wind blowing from the sea...

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

*upon reading that Hitler will devote himself to literature*

I wrote poetry all these years,  
Where did it get me?  
I'll become a gangster from now on.

Let all the thugs know;  
They're out of business.

Since I am taking the bread out of their hands,  
Let them take my place;  
There are vacancies in the literary field.

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

### My Shadow

I've had it carrying you around  
On the end of my shoe—  
We need some space for a while  
And to see other people.

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Jordan Davis*

### For Those Who Miss The Sea

Ships sail in my dreams,  
Glittering ships above the roofs;  
I'm poor,  
Longing for the sea for years;  
"I look, looking I cry";  
I remember seeing the world first  
Through the lips of a barnacle;  
The water green, the sky blue,  
The needle fish silky;  
Where the oysters cut me,  
My blood is still salty.

How we went to the open seas  
Over the white spume  
Like maniacs?  
The spume, which isn't hard-hearted at all,  
The spume, which resembles lips,  
The spume, fornicating with which  
Isn't a sin.

Ships sail in my dreams,  
Glittering ships above the roofs;  
I'm poor,  
Longing for the sea for years.

*Orhan Veli*

*translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat*

**Orhan Veli** (1914-1950) was one of the founders of modern Turkish poetry. In 1941 he collaborated with Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday on a volume of poetry, *Garip* ("Strange"), which marked the "First New" movement (see introduction). As a translator, he rendered many works of French poetry and a number of Japanese haiku into Turkish. He published the literary journal *Yaprak* (*Leaf* or *Folio*) for 28 issues before dying at the age of thirty-six from a cerebral hemorrhage caused by a fall.

Two slashes at the he-goat's throat  
and the foredeck of the boat  
was splashed with spurting blood  
which ran off into the sea below  
and spread like a rain cloud  
in the dirty harbour water.

Cokes all round for the workers  
who tipped the boat into the water.

Then they skinned the goat  
and divided up the meat.

The new-named boat motored out of the harbour  
with its bows glistening red in the sun,  
its life on the sea begun.

*Richard McKane*

*Richard McKane*

I dance for I am alone  
I dance for I must atone  
for the burnt stubble field  
I dance for I must yield  
my seed into the storage pit  
and thresh the age-old wheat  
and dance again each harvest  
I dance I dance lest  
the rain should not come next year  
I dance out of faith and fear  
I dance for the green thrust  
of nature amidst the barren dust  
I dance for the fig's milk-white sperm  
the pomegranates red and firm  
under the month-making moon  
I dance for man's truth should soon  
be planted in earth's womb  
and spitting dust and tomb  
the regenerating seed should sprout  
spring and blossom out  
in the image of creation  
I dance I dance for nature's elation

The *Harman Dalı* (Harvest Branch or Threshing Branch) is a slow dance  
which originates in Southwestern Turkey in the Muğla Province.

## the smart thing to do

we're walking the boardwalk there's a row of benches facing the sea, which is gray-white, the color of the clouds, the seagulls watching a storm front build, their shoulders hunched against the wind if the place where the wings join the body are shoulders where we will grow wings in the life to come

in the café across the street the men are watching a small tv one waves at us, a student i teach english to we are not at war, a man in military dress is saying maneuvers state of readiness certainly a threat would be answered no

we buy fresh bread, tomatoes and olives, and two kinds of cheese to lay out on our table you grill the lamb while i unpack then step out for coffee freshly ground, about which we argue briefly, since it is expensive and i won't be able to use it up

the shop is warm and bright i get the kind of candy that you like, and the proprietor's children point and giggle not for grownups he hushes them

the local news is airing clips from cnn, the english murmuring in the background while the anchor reads contradicting, leaving things out

it is not an accurate translation? christian news network - this from the brother-in-law - you see, lies into lies they make then a sudden commercial interrupts and everyone understands

back home, i bring up staying, let it drop dessert is delicious and we watch the fire for a long time we could call back our students wait and see

you fling open the shutters and stride to the balcony i follow you over the wine-dark sea: no movement the fishing boats are moored the enemy's islands shrouded in mist

*Alpay Ulku*

## Neslihan

We are in a quiet Turkish city of pale stone and orange roofs—most likely once a fishing village. The morning is cool as though it spent the night stretched out on the sea's bottom. All the tables in this restaurant have been taken by natives and tourists wearing sunglasses and bright colors. While lighting cigarettes or sipping tea from tulip glasses, they reorient themselves, change their bearings, until every chair is facing the water. I'm reminded of the Spanish *girasoles* following the sun. They gaze at the Aegean as though looking out on a field of the honored dead, as if taking in a drive-in movie, or remembering their first home. I'm the only one who hasn't recalibrated his view because sitting across from me is a woman with gray-green eyes more beguiling than the sea.

*Vincent Cxyz*

## Chimera

Here is where the Chimera crashed, on this bald gray slope,  
between Kaş and Antalya, on the southern Turkish coast.  
Sailors could see flames burning forever  
from what, close up, look to me like campfire sites  
but with no wood. Blackened rock. The breath  
of the earth on fire, one flame warming the tea pot  
of the fellow at the refreshment booth. Some ruins  
down hill a few yards, where monks once fed tourists  
from Byzantium. The breeze is cool. The flames hot.  
My body has carried me up the steep trail  
this one time only. "Me"—and within my personality,  
the usual mixed-up monster, something  
permanent? I will never come back here again, I think,  
as the wind cools me, as the flame scorches  
the rock mouths of the gray slope. Somewhere overhead,  
before history, in an air battle, Belerophon,  
riding the winged horse of poetry, slew the Chimera  
that should never have been. So now flames burn  
that won't go out, leaving these flickering dots  
on the hillside, where pieces of its wreckage fell.  
Poor monster, colliding with a flying god,  
then shattering into sparks, into constellations  
that (according to the above-mentioned allegory)  
the curious can interpret for millennia.

*Alan Feldman*

## Drinking

A great Turkish poet,  
or at least a great poet who lived  
in Turkey (for he wrote in Persian)  
once said: "Being sober is not living."  
This has occasioned much commentary,  
but it is my belief that he drank copiously,  
albeit in a disciplined fashion,  
and the wine he speaks of should not be  
interpreted metaphorically,  
though he may have felt that through it  
he approached God. He was, after all,  
a charming and honest person who wrote  
affectionate letters to his daughter-in-law.  
As to the distinctions Jew, Muslim,  
Christian, they meant nothing to him.  
In this book let him be praised.

*John Ash*

*a gazel to bâkî (the sixteenth century sultan of poets)*

somewhere someone made a serious mistake  
my tongue's not up to rejecting it  
nor my strength enough to put it right  
marooned like a downcast parrot  
i'm lost in conversation  
with my inner defeat

One gets to the age when the women  
aren't around anymore

the brunettes are suddenly abstinent  
the blondes are distant

the tawny ones unfaithful

no sleep, no respite anymore

i cut a dangerous love from the whole cloth of imagination  
an exceptional beloved

i'm deep in conversation with her

oh so vivacious

so brilliant

her glances so marbled

from the voids cypresses pour out

moonlight into the darkness

the love-poem singers are muted

the musicians played out

and i thus until the dawn

converse with a reclusive dulcimer

there's no poet left in the land, no poetry either

the collections are all forgotten

the rhymed romances torn to shreds

oh sultan of poets, oh bâkî

i let unbelievable rhymes fall from the stars

ta-tum-ta ta-tum-tum-ta

in conversation with your spirit

*Attilâ İlhan*

*translated by Walter Andrews*

*Bâkî (16<sup>th</sup> Century)*

so drunk and wasted  
from having tasted  
a cup of this darling's love  
the sun is bouncing  
from wall to wall  
as it roams above

when it saw your musky locks  
the deer dropped its musk to the ground  
and there in the dust

at your feet the pure musk  
humbly bowed itself down

afloat on the rosy wine you see  
the many eyes of destiny  
don't think they're bubbles that appear  
in the goblet there  
and here

what matter if the police of fate  
now and again

these two berate

both kebab and wine unblended

were caught as they say

bloody handed

in the end by loving's pain

wretched lovers all are slain

and drunkenness

we know will keep

to its conclusion in a sleep

oh vile wheel of destiny

of you bâkî

is finally free

thanks to the sultan

blessed by fate

who shelters fortune

at his gate

The rose-stem arouses no passion  
Like your body's slender grace  
Blooms no rose in bowers of paradise  
Like the rose of your face

The ring of your curl  
Took your lip's tiny mole  
Into its embrace  
As though an infant Jesus  
Lay in Mary's arms

The image of your lip, your eyes  
Have ruined my eye  
That drunk and senseless lies  
Wine in its goblet dancing

If I watch your beauty  
May your eye not rage  
Even a king's decree  
Cannot forbid this to eyes

No wonder the world is filled  
With scents of roasting meats  
Today my heart is grilled  
On the hearth of torment  
Your glance strung the bow of your brow  
Concealed its arrow and lies in wait  
Nearby another, like a gazelle,  
Nestles heedless in its bed

A rim of tiny hairs

Rings your lip  
What heavenly stream is this  
Whose banks are ever grown  
With hyacinth

Though they had dug my grave  
The fountain of life

Were I to kiss the lips,  
Would yet flow for me, oh Djem  
Of that Jesus-breath  
Stealer of hearts

**Bâkî** is the pen-name of a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman poet born in Istanbul in 1526. The son of a low-level mosque functionary, he rose through the educational system to a high position during the reign of Sultan Süleyman. Bâkî became the confidant of the Sultan and was acclaimed as the Sultan of Poets in his day. He is recognized as the master poet of the golden age of Ottoman literature. He died in 1600.

**Cem Sultan**, the youngest son of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, was born in 1459. When his father died in 1481 and his brother Bayezit II ascended the throne, Cem gathered an army and marched on Bursa, where he was acclaimed as sultan. When his forces were defeated by Bayezit he fled to Egypt and then took refuge with the Templars in Rhodes. The Templars brought him to Europe as a hostage-guest, where he was said to have had a torrid love affair with the chatelaine of a French castle in which he was housed. The Templars later turned him over to the Pope and he became a favorite in the court of the Borgias. He was later poisoned—it is said, at the order of the Pope—in Naples in 1495. Cem was a noted poet and left a large collection of lyric poems.

The rose a flame

Rosebush a flame

Garden a flame

Stream a flame

For lovers made of salamander-stuff

The tulip-bed aflame should be enough.

Even now, oh Saki,

Ignite a cup with flames of wine

For the hand of one who holds my heart;

Who came in a rage to the party

And flames here still

Like the candle of the gathering

The sweet breeze has blown up flames

From my eye's bud of hope

The lightning-bolt of spring

Has set afire

The rose-bed of my expectations

As your lovers sigh—Aaaaah!

Imagining what it might be

To long for your dark mole

In the black night of separation,

The heart aflame casts out

The burning stars as alms.

When you are gone, oh moon,

Even the flower-beds

Speak to me of Hell—

The tree's a flame

Sapling's a flame

Leaf and fruit a flame.

You who are the lantern

That lights the feast of my exile,

Are dressed in fascination—

For the moth of my heart,

Union a flame

To wait a flame

Galib! As your pen runs hotly

Swiftly turning about the page

The earth's a flame

Time's a flame

All that's drawn

Or designed

A flame...

**Seyh Galib** was born in 1757 to the family of a Mevlevi dervish poet and scholar. He was a brilliant student and compiled an extensive collection of poetry while still in his early twenties. At about the same time he completed his most famous work, the mystical narrative poem *Hüsn ü İşk* (*Beauty and Love*, now available in an English translation by Victoria Holbrook published by the MLA), which is widely considered the greatest original work of the late Ottoman mystical tradition. Afterwards he turned to the life of a dervish adept and eventually became the master of the influential Mevlevi lodge in Galata. He died in 1799 at the age of 42.

**Walter G. Andrews** is research professor in Turkish and Ottoman literature at the University of Washington and co-director of the Ottoman Texts Archive Project on the web. His books include *Poetry's Voice Society's Song* (University of Washington Press, 1985), *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (with Mehmet Kalpaklı and Najaat Black, University of Texas Press, 1997) and *University of Washington Press, 2006*) and *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (with Mehmet Kalpaklı, Duke University Press, 2005).

## Istanbul at the Periphery

There is nothing here you haven't seen before:  
water the cobalt blues and anemone  
greens of medieval glass illuminating  
our Lady of Chartres; water the hues  
of a mussel's royal interior shucked  
and tossed near driftwood on the Oregon coast,  
the avenue for sale, its side streets murmuring  
recessed mysteries, underground transgressions  
not mentioned in the twenty-first century's dry light.

The storks live like dodos in the tall stressed trees,  
their radical cries ricochet off walls  
that cradled the Sultan's sullen kids.  
They scream their conversations like parrots  
in Iguacu, sick of migration the city  
is a prison they're resigned to adore.  
They gad about not like birds,  
but dreams of birds in a boy's hallowed eyes.

The Drag Queens are detached and embossed  
as any beauty in a San Francisco  
pleasure dome. Their eyes sparkle  
like Christmas lights, the same sadness  
at the periphery. Techno pumps  
the house like a pot-holed highway a gypsy's  
wagon. The melons jump  
and sometimes fall.

In the distance lights saunter along  
the Golden Horn. Nothing is quiet  
at night but distance. In spite of everything  
a lone man below sings high in his throat.

It is a song about losing his soul, his girl.  
He doesn't mind modernity at play  
above. He passes under the bar  
on the belly of a song and the blind giant hears  
nothing but the frenzied thrust  
of its own arrhythmic heart.

The woman with a cigarette and fruit plate smokes  
and speaks of inequity and the West's double dealing:  
"you can't change the rules just when we've learned them,"  
she quotes, she laughs, and the seagulls, weird sisters,  
cackle in kind as they circle the tower  
that smokes in Autumn like a gun aimed at God.  
The Genoese are seagulls that haunt the millennia.

Or the student: bootleg photocopies  
in his borrowed bag, Mevlana and Decon-  
struction on his restless mind. An avenging  
angel with an attic smile he wonders  
why he's so alive in a city of millions.

He delays the silence with words.  
The city pulls its ringed fingers  
from its leather pocket. And when  
the hand guts the heart and eats it  
like a plum it is a sudden sweet  
feast, uncalled for, unaccountable,  
except in tales told in the far Northwest.

*Kim Fortuny*

Istanbul, 2004

*Genoese Merchants* from Genoa built Istanbul's famed Galata Tower.  
Istanbul's *seagulls* have remarkably loud and almost human voices.  
*Mevlana* a Sufi order whose devotions include improvised music and  
whirling dance. The Mevlevi monastery is near the Galata Tower.

"I want to be famous," she smiles,  
and her eyes trace the arc that lines  
her dome. "I want the world,"  
(over the new blonde moon, the waxing  
slice) "to know me."

And then in Fatih girls are  
on the free line. The forward pumps  
a ball towards a hoop that opens  
to clouds of immaculate cotton.  
Her teammates whirl on the blacktop  
in inflated coats. They are not  
like Dervishes or Dallas Cowboys  
but like ambiguous bodies  
running for the fun of it in the warm  
afternoon, their brown heads scarved  
in white light.

Before desire. Before  
the body shocks their dreams  
of hollow light. These are  
their salad days.

The West, with child at fifteen,  
shakes its head at human  
bondage, shudders at fashions  
of another's indispensable knowledge.  
Running for the fun of it she stumbles  
on the fringes. Our bodies, our battlefields,  
are theatres of shame. The ecstatic  
rhythms of the living deity  
chant "Freedom" sing "Choice."

"I want the world to know me."  
And the camera looks (we look)  
into the open eyes of the androgynous  
who making a play for the world's  
love doesn't know that it,  
my dear one, may deceive.

I am a being with edges.  
And virginity would have been swell if his odor  
had not entered my memory like mote-  
riddled light in church, if his flesh  
had not grazed my forearm, (my forearm,)  
in those concentric circles that turn  
and turn to this day.

Our bodies are battlefields says the literature.  
The forward shoots and misses.  
How does one score with so many  
clothes on? The point precisely,  
my lamb. There is hazard in exposure  
my dear ones. Be careful what you wish for.

*Kim Fortuny*

Istanbul, 2004

Beat your innocent children,  
 get them used to punishment young;  
 in a world where there's more punishment than crime  
 beat your children.

If their eyes are wider than the skies,  
 get them used to blinkers, like horses;  
 if they learn to give instead of take  
 slap their hands hard.

Is anything more precious than life?  
 Your native land?  
 Can friendship be eaten or drunk?  
 And love—what use is love?

*Gülten Akin*

*translated by Ruth Christie*

The one knocking on the doors is I  
 the doors one by one.  
 By your eye I can't be seen  
 the eye can't see the dead.

Since I died at Hiroshima,  
 it has been 10 years.  
 I am a seven year old girl,  
 they don't grow up, dead children.

My hair blazed first,  
 my eyes caught fire, roasted.  
 Into a handful of ash I was transformed,  
 my ash was swept into the air.

From you for myself there is  
 nothing that I want at all.  
 Not even candy can I eat—  
 a child burnt like paper.

I am knocking on your door  
 Aunt, Uncle, give your signature.  
 That children not be killed,  
 and that they may eat candy.

*Nâzım Hikmet*  
*translated by Amy Grupp*

**Gülten Akin** (b. 1933) Turkey's outstanding woman poet. She studied law and worked as a barrister in several small Anatolian towns. She now lives in Ankara. In the words of Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar, "She has a calm, strong voice, deeply embedded in the sinewy language of ordinary people, in the sad and joyful songs that form the treasury of Turkey's folk culture." (*Modern Turkish Poetry* edited by Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar, Rockingham Press, 1992.)

## Summer Rain

A summer rain rained into me  
full grapes crushed on my panes  
my leaves' eyes were dazzled

A summer rain rained into me  
silver doves flew from my drops  
my soil ran barefoot

A summer rain rained into me  
a woman flung herself into my streetcar  
her white calves wet

A summer rain rained into me  
as it started it stopped  
the heat remains in its former place,  
on the dull rails, rusty and thick

*Nâzım Hikmet*

*translated by Amy Grupp*

*Nâzım Hikmet* (1901-1963) was born in Salonika in the Ottoman Empire (now Thessalonika in Greece). He studied at the Turkish Naval Academy and at Moscow University, and returned to Turkey in 1924 a committed communist. His political affiliations and activities resulted in his frequent imprisonment in Turkey, and he spent more than the last decade of his life in exile. Besides being a political revolutionary, Hikmet is the father of Turkish free verse. His poetry, collected in eight volumes and periodically banned in Turkey even after his death, spans an amazing variety of styles, forms, and subjects. He is the most famous of the modern Turkish poets.

## Some Days

*Dil 45 (III - 245)*

The grand summer belonged to the garden,  
was it yours only?

The sea came into the living room,  
started to play with the cats.

The plane tree branches melt in the air.

The sky is underfoot

and plays with the water from the tap.

Get wet in this game,

feel the water-made hollow

in the marble fountain.

It's daytime, a handful of light,

to drink from cupped hands.

*Oktaç Rifat*

*translated by Richard McKane*

*& Ruth Christie*