

Saga

Poems from *East-West Dîvan* and Other Works
by Enis Batur



Translated By

Neil P. Doherty
Gökçenur Ç.
Clifford Endres
Selhan Savcıgil-Endres
Mel Kenne
Saliha Paker

Edited By

Clifford Endres
Saliha Paker

*in memory of Selhan Savcigil-Endres (1957-2019)
whose vibrant presence, hard work, and lively participation over the years in the Cunda Workshop,
especially the final sessions of 2016-2017, will not be forgotten*

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Witty Partition 13, Vol. II, 2021: “After Maurice Scève: Ten Versions, One Tribute”

The Punch Magazine, 2020: “Porphyrogenetos”

Turkish Poetry Today 2017: “Red” and “Burnt”

Translators' Note

Following its appearance in Italian and Persian in the 1990s, the poetry of Enis Batur has since been translated into many other languages but mostly into French. The first collection of his work in English was published in 2006 in the U.S.A. by Talisman House, Publishers. The English translations in *Saga* have their beginnings in the last annual meeting of The Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature in September 2016. The Workshop was initiated in 2005-2006 by Saliha Paker and colleagues from Boğaziçi University and Kadir Has University, with the financial support of the Turkish Ministry of Culture. Over the course of ten years it convened annually on the Aegean island of Cunda, off the town of Ayvalık, bringing literary translators from Turkey and abroad together with Turkish poets and fiction writers for intensive collaborative work. All six of the translators who worked on the poems chosen for *Saga* had been active and productive participants in the Workshop. Previously, Clifford Endres and Selhan Savcıgil-Endres, Mel Kenne, and Saliha Paker had also worked for many years on their co-translations for *Ash Divan*, so they were quite familiar with the aspects of form and style characteristic of Enis Batur's poetry. Maintaining continuity as a matter of principle, the translators, joined by Neil P. Doherty and Gökçenur Ç., carried on with their work on *Saga* over the years as a team. Generally they worked in pairs and were credited for the final versions of their translations after critiquing and proofreading each other's work as they focused on preserving the unity of tone and voice in these burgeoning series of poems. We must also note that at our first meeting of the Workshop in September 2016 (which, due to unforeseen difficulties also happened to be the last in the sequence of Cunda Workshops), our group was aided by some very valuable input from the poet himself, who took part in a number of the sessions. In one, we discovered to our surprise and delight that Enis Batur had composed the following poem for us, thus marking a truly memorable occasion.

Fairy

for Saliha

It seems that Neil, while translating "Poems
for the Last Person Singular," wakes during the night,
his wife, knowing he has got up from bed and
gone to his study, grows uneasy, while one of his hands
dangles in space the other strokes his long beard,
wouldn't I know, as a bearded man myself?
Talk then moves to ghosts, Saliha says she
would like to translate "Apparition," my piece
on the Büyükada Orphanage, I am telling Selhan
and Cliff a fairy story involving Beckett,
as husband and wife they sit, intensely engrossed
in my Maurice Scève poems, cold facts have
long since placed the mysterious Poet
of Lyon among the ghosts. On a whim,
I begin to talk of Yeats and Neil, impassioned,
flies to Ireland on the back of the *shee*,
I hear Gökçenur's voice reminding him that
I had once translated "When You Are Old."

Late that night I took *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* down from my bookshelf, while skimming through the *Sheehogue, Deene Shee* and *Marcra Shee*, the great Yeats himself appeared suddenly at the window opposite my desk—drawing my attention to a sentence of his on the island’s peasant beliefs: “fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved, nor bad enough to be lost.”—I almost leapt out of the wicker chair I was sitting in: I had not forgotten how one night thousands of years ago I walked out of my tent by the shore of Lake Tuz and while I was looking up at the sky, composed the very same sentence out loud.

Enis Batur

September 2-7, 2016.

Translated by Neil P. Doherty

Foreword

Almost twenty years have gone by since Enis Batur's poetry was first introduced to English readers with *Ash Dîvan* (2006, Talisman House, Publishers)¹. The broad array of poems in that critically acclaimed volume brought Batur to the attention of a growing English-speaking audience, and revealed in particular his energetic engagement with both Near Eastern and Western sources. In the meantime, his corpus of poetry has grown exponentially, offering an even wider scope for the verses of his maturity to flourish.

While the current volume comprises only a fraction of his ever-growing *oeuvre*, it presents some of the poet's most important recent work from East-West Dîvan (2018), his collection of "dramatic" poems². We have also included some of his outstanding lyrical poetry from various collections. The moving spirit of Batur's vibrant verse draws deeply on his vast range of disparate sources. Of major significance to him is what he calls, in his preface to *Ash Dîvan*, "my relationship to diverse poets with widely different poetics." The dynamics of this relationship, he goes on to say, have led him to channel his own poetry "in three separate directions: lyric, epic, and dramatic ... each genre following a different course..."³ Our translations in *Saga* offer readers a memorable taste of the poet's wide-ranging literary and cultural receptiveness and exemplify how it informs his art.

Batur's abiding interest in French and other European authors, which doubtless derives from his early education and academic studies in France, had, at the beginning of his career, led some Turkish readers to view his poetry as "alien."⁴ Were such an approach to be taken now it would overlook the poet's life-long, parallel engagement with Ottoman and modern Turkish literature, for in truth his sources range from such classical Ottoman poets as Bâkî, to the mystic bards of Anatolian folk tradition, along with the love balladeer Karacaoğlan, to modernist poets like Oktay Rifat, Melih Cevdet, Behçet Necatigil, and beyond.

In his acceptance statement on receiving the Turkish PEN Poetry Prize in 2024, Enis Batur declared, "My pursuit of poetry runs on a twofold path: On the one hand I engage with the verse of others, be they old or new, local or foreign — reflecting, writing, and striving to throw light on those who have been forgotten. On the other, I choose to stay utterly alert to subtle adjustments while crafting a poem in my own constellation; and I choose to continue writing in 'pure, undiluted ink,' at the risk of being read less widely."⁵ This credo is particularly significant in the way it draws attention to Batur's distinctive policy of integrating his creative work with his critical essays on Turkish and European poetry, which happen to be far more widely read than his poetry.

¹ *Ash Divan, Selected Poems of Enis Batur*, ed. Saliha Paker, Talisman House, Publishers, 2006. The title "Ash Divan" was chosen by the translators, Clifford Endres, Selhan Savcigil Endres, Saliha Paker, Mel Kenne, Coşkun Yerli, and Ronald Tamplin, with the approval of Enis Batur.

² The East-West Divan (Doğu-Batı Divanı, Dramatik Şiirler (1988-2018) is the general title given to the large volume of "dramatic poems," made up of seven collections, each named a Divan (the Ottoman-Turkish term for a poetry collection), and each bearing a different title.

³ *Ash Divan*, Enis Batur's introduction, "A Concave Conversation," p.6, p. 4 respectively.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ From Enis Batur's acceptance statement for the 2024 Turkish P.E.N. Poetry Prize (Enis Batur'dan 2024 Şiir Bildirisi," P.E.N. March 18, 2024. pen.org.tr

Batur offers a vision of the “East-West” as a hyphenated, singular literary-cultural concept that is broadly integrative and may be best explained by an analogy (in reverse direction) with Goethe’s *West - oestlicher Divan* (1819) and his unique perception of the “West-East” that underlies his translations of Hafez.⁶ For in Batur’s poetry, East and West, as well as past and present are welded into an organic whole, thus leading the poet far beyond the tired duality of an “East-West synthesis” or an “East-West divide.” Batur’s sensibility is in fact measured, selective, and woven seamlessly into the poems: there the classical or the historical references of the “East-West” can meet and converse with the modern or the contemporary on the same plane, a feature we see repeatedly in the poems of *Saga*.

While most of the questions that might arise in regard to the contents of the poems assembled here are addressed by the end notes, the longer poems merit some commentary relating to certain thematic and aesthetic concerns that emerge as leitmotifs in the context of the book’s poetic sequence.

In “Fear” we see the predominating notion of the poet as a sort of architect, “a creator of spaces: spaces of thought, motion, and imagination where readers can dwell and find meaning.”⁷ The poem is composed of memories—each within its own verse-space—that are triggered by a set of photographs taken many years before in the poet’s Istanbul office as he and two friends, an artist and an architect, discuss, among other things, the politics of Turkish poetry. When the subject of architecture arises, the Ottoman builder Sinan is duly invoked as the ultimate master of the form. In poetry, however, the building materials are less tangible. Here, past events are wedded to a chain of memories that ultimately coalesce in the figure of an arachnid-poet who spins a web of words to ward off mortality and loss. Yet if “Fear” ends in the poet’s personal anxiety, a general sense of angst pervades in “First,” “The Cave,” and “The Seraphim,”—the poems that follow “Fear”—and grows in intensity until it culminates in “Red,” the final poem of *Burnt Divan*.

“Red” begins with the cry, “My country is burning.” It pictures an apocalyptic state of affairs whose overtones reverberate with meaning for the political life of the country. Mid-way in the verse we discover that the narrator identifies with the Daidalos of Greek mythology. While known to be a wise, resourceful and inventive protagonist, Daidalos yet again fails tragically in “Red,” this time in a battle against the forces of destruction and chaos that are tearing the country apart. The poem ends in utter despair with Daidalos’ lament that “in a widening lake / of crimson and brown, “we’re sinking to the bottom.” Likening the hapless Daidalos to a figure in one of Goya’s “dark paintings” on the wall of the Prado, the poet—like Daidalos, a maker himself—positions mythology and art as the frame of reference for contemporary reality and its poetic mirror.

Incorporated as the final collection in a new, expanded edition of *Doğu -Batı Dîvanı* (East-West Dîvan), published in 2018, *Burnt Dîvan* appears to be emblematic of the end of a certain cycle in Batur’s poetry.

⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*. Complete, annotated new translation, including Goethe’s ‘Notes and Essays’ & the unpublished poems, by Eric Ormsby. GINGKO. Internet Archive; Enis Batur, “Batı Doğu Dîvanı: İki Işık Arası Küçülen Gecemiz,” (The West East Dîvan: Our Night Shrinks in Between Two Lights) *Smokinli Berduş*, Şiir Yazıları (1974-2000) pp.369-372, YKY Istanbul.

⁷ Enis Batur, Interview with Elif Tanrıyar, *Gazete Oksijen*, March 8, 2024.

“Saga,” the poem from which the present collection takes its title, is one of the most impressive poems in Batur’s East-West Dîvan. In its short but powerful prose prologue an elderly sage has a dream depicting *a globe dripping in blood*, and in anticipation of his demise he advises his disciple to *Take care of this earth beneath us, try to cover it at the very least with a looking glass*. In the verses that follow, a poet is on his way to visit the ruins of Sagalassos, the Hellenistic-Roman city in the Taurus mountains. Ancient history will overlap with the present day on the excavation and restoration site as the poet and the chief archaeologist meet and engage in conversation. On the subject of the fallen portrait head of Emperor Hadrian, the poet points out to his host the similarity of their vocations: *Any poet or writer who doesn’t stray from the core of literature is essentially an excavator. We must descend from the surface to the depths in order to find what we are searching for, and even if we don’t find it we must still experience the search... . Think of Memoirs of Hadrian, isn’t there an extraordinary work of excavation behind it?*” These words lead to the crucial question of how civilizations are periodically destroyed but are only occasionally restored. This plumbing of the depths emerges in and of itself as a major current of Batur’s poetry from the dramatic to the mystical. In “Saga,” it leads him finally toward his true object of interest in Sagalassos: the great Flavianus Neon Library built in Hadrian’s time and then restored by Julian the Apostate several centuries later.

Two shorter poems, “In the Library of Haghia Triada” and the tragic “Porphyrogennetos,” connect in some ways with “Saga”: both are grounded in the concept of the physical survival of libraries by means of which, this time, the Byzantine past finds its way into Batur’s deeply contemplative verse.

With its call-and-response *a capella* structure, “Poems for the Last Person Singular” flows in a series of stanzas, each accompanied by a haiku-like poem, that seem to act as oblique commentaries on both the preceding verse and the work as a whole. “Poems” must surely count as one of the most innovative of Batur’s later works, opening up to different voices and perspectives and resisting any final interpretation. Batur, in an interview,⁸ has described most of them as verses composed not at his desk but conjured up during the walks he also took abroad from 2007 to 2014. They seem to be haunted now and then by the pervasive spirit of a wayfaring mystic (a frequent motif in his poetry), who is aged, somewhat troubled, and nostalgic. The concluding poems— “Four Epilogues” and “A Lullaby for Kum (in bittersweet mode)” —at once echo what has come before and trace new paths through a labyrinth that is ever-reluctant to let go of the reader.

The sequence of poems in our collection ends with “Branchings Out.” This long poem presents a profoundly personal dramatic monologue that serves as the last testament to a poet’s lifelong dedication to the study of his art. It develops through a series of arguments by an elderly poet addressing a sharp younger critic whose book seems to have misinterpreted his work. The poet’s narrative that proceeds in a step-by-step response to counter the views of his critic, reveals the roots of his poetry, in which a significant yet hardly noticed leitmotif becomes more apparent: the mystical thread that ties in particularly with such cryptic poems (earlier in the sequence) as “Gushing,” “*SIgNe*,” and “Parable of Abdal of the Sea.” In the end, the poet sums up a history of his poetics by drawing attention to what he calls his “Tree text”: *That tree, / he explains, is formed of many trees: inklings of oak, willow, / horse chestnut, sycamore, magnolia—all in one*, evoking the mystical union that branches out from the creative heart of his artistry.

Clifford Endres, Saliha Paker, Mel Kenne

⁸ Enis Batur, Interview with Gamze Akdemir, *Cumhuriyet Book Supplement*, March 30, 2015.

Poems Selected for *Saga*

Fear

*Time in passing wipes out, blurs, diminishes time.
Can't remember which year it was, 1998 or 1999,
before that, or later. No question about the location, though:
it was my office overlooking Istiklal Avenue. Must've forgotten why
we had met: who could've got us to sit at the same table for what
I remember as a closed session on the triangle of Art, Architecture, and Poetry.
Our conversations were recorded, the "accident" that befell them
was revealed months later. Then, a compact print of thirty photos
mixed up with my papers came to light.
Who had taken them? Samih Rifat, perhaps—*



recordings deleted, a pocket in my memory
had saved whatever it would: in a top row
photo, last from the left, first from the right, why
is Turgut Cansever laughing as he listens to me,
I recall every bit of detail in the conversation.
The topic shifts to the Ertegün residence in Bodrum,
Ömer, leaning his face on his right hand, I with my cigarette
gathering ash all along, we listen, in pure attention,
to the story how that magnificent, double-winged mansion was erected,
much later I open a parenthesis—

had opened one: the summer of 1975, Hüsnü Göksel asks me
over to lunch at his home, son-in-law of the Ertegün family,
he was there in the crowd on the seafront when Münir Ertegün's
remains were delivered by the battleship *Missouri* in 1946,
to a country bewildered, with bright WELCOME lights
strung between two minarets of a mosque,
farther away, a sign pinned on a brothel wall,
“Welcome to the Sailors” in English,
students, intellectuals from the left demonstrating in protest—

Dağlarca writes his “*Missouri*” in those days,
an ill-starred poem that would find its way into his *Sivaslı Karınca*,
“You, a ship on the waters of my blue Istanbul,”
its haplessness obvious from the opening line,
since the poet only saw the object on the surface,
but failed to spot the massive, filthy hull,
the underlying substance of that voyage—another decade would go by
before Ece sets Fazıl Hüsni on the deck,
and with short intervals, keeps him under artillery fire—

1987, *Gergedan* days, in monthly *Kıyı-Bucak* conversations with Cemal Süreya, Ece once found a way to broach the subject: “The battleship *Missouri* split Turkey apart, in particular Poetry (Dağlarca's famous “*Missouri*” marked the date of the visit), but also Art (Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's *Missouri* painting), split it apart, right in the middle!”—an intemperate comment? Perhaps; but Bedros, who in fact had four works on the *Missouri*, two black sepia-like gouaches on paper and two oil paintings, he too, in a way, split apart the battleship right in the middle—

Ömer looks pleased with what I'm saying:
despite minor quibbles with Ece, he'd never let anyone find fault with him,
but the broad smile on Turgut Bey's face
has appeared for a completely different reason: after lunch
Selma Hanım had offered to take us around the house,
furnished lovingly with a personal touch
from top to bottom. As we were led through one salon after another,
and other rooms in succession, I was curious (who wouldn't be?) about
the ostrich eggs placed almost in every corner, so I asked, had no idea—

when stored, the yolk of an ostrich egg dissolves,
begins to rot, releasing a smell that drives out spiders. They run wild
in the summer heat of Bodrum, so it was Turgut Bey who offered
this solution to Selma Hanım, an arachnophobe—I, who have
thought of myself as an arachnid rather
than a human being for as long as I can remember,
tease the expert architect, half jokingly: “Enis Bey,”
he responds, “we've learned this from Sinan, our supreme master.
To keep the interior free of cobwebs in the Selimiye Mosque,
it was he who made use of ostrich eggs
that he'd come across in Orthodox churches.”
“Architects are all jealous creatures,”
I continue, teasing, “nothing man-made
has ever come close to absolute geometry
on the same scale as a cobweb”—

that very instant Turgut Cansever's smile freezes,
in the next photo or two, he has already commenced
affirming my statement with great solemnity,
trying to prove with various examples that every kind of order,
structure, every construct created in nature by God
is perfect, universal and complete.
Ömer and I, both thoroughbred unbelievers,
listen to him respectfully—

they're all gone now, it's my turn next. I look
at the photos, what moves amongst us now is
solid, indivisible silence, I plunge into time
like a fearless workman in a swirl, my head
a human head, my body with eight arms and legs,
not two or four, one end of my secretive silk
still attached to me, I'm spinning, yes,
spinning my weft between my chosen points—
how could I have known in 1975?—life had me
cross paths with an arachnophobe, at our bedside
now stands a huge egg with ecclesiastic stamp and seal,
I have no sense of smell, if I fear, it's only because
I might not finish weaving my fragile web of silk.

Translated by Saliha Paker

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in *E-WD (East-West Dîvan)* 2018

Burnt

Let my desk, afterward, not be cleared —
 this line, composed in Behçet's manner,
 you may take as the optative, or examine it
 inside out for intimations of the imperative:

In a documentary on his life I saw that
 when Cocteau died they left it as it was,
 his last writing desk: they caused nothing
 to be removed from its original place.

So, like that, let time be frozen in place. No,
 it's not that I want to take up where I left off,
 I won't be coming back anyway, of course
 my desk can be emptied and re-organized—
 the overflowing drawers, the surface clutter—
 but the texture shouldn't change, traces
 of me should stay: the ink stains, the stubborn
 circle left by that hot cup of coffee, and most
 of all, those small brownish-yellow spots—
 cigarette burns. If, yes, my desk was scarred
 through my carelessness, let it be known that
 the fire in my left hand was the mirror of my right.

Translated by Clifford Endres and Selhan Savcıgil-Endres

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

The Light

When Russell said, “It tends to be dark there,”
he replied, “I don’t like the light anyway.” Strange
for an Englishman to utter this, why ever would
a Viennese like the light? Sitting behind the taciturn
captain, on a boat floating through the fjords,
I keep my eyes fixed on the shore, a copy in my pocket
of the map he scrawled on a scrap of paper
in his novice hand. No one knows I’ve come
here to measure the light, so solitary have I become.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

First

Come and be my Jocasta—
if this be the ultimate sin let us
commit it together on the white calico
sheets you embroidered, let our juices
commingle with drops of blood,
and conceive then in spite of your age
and give birth to a son who will be
my brother; let him dream my first dream,
let him know my first darkness,
let this ominous lust pass
from me to you, from you to him.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

The Cave

My city was razed this morning. No
stone remains standing, no creature remains
breathing, we saw a pitch-black cloud
rise from the valley up to the sky,
my two daughters and I, we walked all day,
our merciless banishment leading us to, then
leaving us at the mouth of this deep cave.
The Lord willed that not one of us
would survive, supposing that when
our line expired the tar-like desires
that stuck to our insides would also
expire, and that my family would walk
the road to purity once again. This night
my elder daughter, naked and wet, will sit
where all the blood gathers in my groin,
tomorrow morning my younger daughter will
gallop a horse through my sleep—every
night, every morning the drunken flames
of a shared fire will mingle in our voices, our breaths,
and from this cave my sons and daughters
will disperse among the valleys near and far.

Translated by Neil P. Doherty

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

The Seraphim

The story your friend told might have
 actually happened, but it is not true.
 I, who have seen everyone, have not
 been seen by anyone for many a year:
 deep under plaster they buried my fragile
 face, the most mysterious angel of
 the East. But I heard every single fragment
 of sound, I felt every movement before it stirred,
 I never let it slip my mind that this city was entrusted
 to me. I know not how to sleep nor how to forget,
 I am the witness of all that has come to pass—
 at the very moment the *Independenta* crashed
 he believed dawn had broken in the middle of the night.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

Red

The country's on fire. I spent my life among those never-ending flames. My soul is branded, my mind's wreathed in smoke. I tried turning away, to no avail: no matter where I go, I can't escape the stink of soot in my nostrils. If only I knew the reason why: I sought, but couldn't find it. The haze has stunted the saplings I planted, my water-barrel's gone up in steam, each year the soil I till grows more weary, I'm a man, yes, but yet I brought forth a child, Icarus, regret's killing me. I was young, better times would come, I made myself believe. Right would wear the crown; instead, the wrong grew red-hot. The causes would one by one come to light; instead, the effects stole the show. At first I blazed a trail across the void before me: patiently, stubbornly, year after year I picked my way through the flames—exhausted now and terrified more than ever, I sink sluggishly down and down into my own pit.

Will the day never come
when this forest of flames will burn itself out?
I don't know. I know that I won't see it.
With a wild bird's sharp glance I rake the world
from the window of my attic retreat: macabre,
nothing but the macabre—as in that canvas
hanging on a wall of the Prado, belching forth
the same savage pain that weighs on us. In
one figure's features there's my own hapless face.
How is it we deserve an inferno like this?
What monstrous sins, what irretrievable crimes
have brought us here, on the opposite pan
of that merciless scale? Were this a nightmare
I'd be startled awake, my sweat drying. Were
it hallucination, or delirium tremens,
I'd endure the thirst. But it's none of these,
none: the mirror before me is spitting
raw, rude reality back at me: in a widening lake
of crimson and brown, we're sinking to the bottom.

Translated by Clifford Endres and Selhan Savcıgil-Endres

from *Burnt Dîvan / Yanık Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

Saga

“In my sleep I saw a globe dripping in blood. The rats gnawing on it were swollen, drowned in the blood they had imbibed. Dream is reality itself if you know how to unravel its language. In order to become wise one must live a long life, but I was born already half-wise. While all those I know, save one or two, pursued the things of this world, I devoured each of the books you see here, extracting their essence, almost reaching some state of perfection. Above the dome over our heads stands the real dome, but now it’s time for me to go. Take care of this earth beneath us, try to cover it at the very least with a looking glass. We will both disappear. These walls will crumble, this city will fall, perhaps no trace of all these letters will be left at all— if anything, only the light that oozes through your flaking mirror will remain, don’t forget: Life is short, there are many things to do, and chances are but few, ah, you have heard this before?”

It must have been the Geology Class.
Time, like some cudgel in a beehive —
the fluttering of my early youth

before my eyes: on one side of the scales
two cold lines like two cold nails from the *Four Quartets*
on the other the theory of relativity, Bergson, and

Heidegger's book under lock and key,
we thought Time the most important matter,
not yet knowing it amounts to nothing much

at all. Then we began to listen to
the lure of ruins. We hit the road
sometimes alone, sometimes all together,

and wandered under tall thin columns,
fancying ourselves little cosmologists
as we lay out at night on the stones of the agora

that had accumulated heat all day long,
there in the derelict rock tombs,
at the foot of granite blocks piled high

we followed in the tracks of the dark Romantics —

Among Piranesi's engravings my years passed,
haunted by a feeling of dread that I'd tumble into
the void were I to take a single step further.

All those shards I collected, the delicate tear bottles
I lined up side by side, the bits of stray broken marble
and the blood heavy and invisible

that dripped from exposed, snapped-off veins
onto my eardrum, I counted each of these drops
one by one, and in my faithless

tongue I uttered a prayer, begging for
a single pause, and so I took leave of my counterparts
and when I met them again,

where long converging roads come to a cross,
my phrases that for an age had performed a masterly dance
were left undone, now all that remained from where

I stood tongue-tied were a dark curtain,
a vast blackboard answering
to no chalk, and the last dregs

of a last night—I'd come to a deadlock.

Our faces frozen in a school photograph,
Mustafa in the observatory now, hanging
in the space between earth and sky, waiting

for a tremor; Ahmet with a torch in his hand
has pitched into the speckled tunnels of History;
Oğuz, constantly split between his passion and vocation,

two broken lines drawn on the same calendar;
under the light of Manuk's digital microscope
the stem cells tramp around—

and those who died young: İsmet, Levent, another
Ahmet: a plane rapidly losing altitude,
a malign tumor marching on the brain, dissolving the face,

hasty and greedy flames enwrapping the drapes:
These lives, those deaths: we never learned
who or what arranged them for us, even we,

the supposedly well-educated ones: *Amor Fati, De Arte
Moriendi, So Will This Too Pass?* if asked,
the question behind our ironic but cowardly answers

is probably waiting for its Godot.

All those formulae we solved and swallowed,
the hard math problems we became more tangled in the more
we untangled them, Grammar, Geometry, Bakî's secret ghazal

that we turned inside out day after day,
a series of essays on Freedom and Responsibility,
the World Map, the Historical Atlas, followed by

Gym Class, the long hours that raked our souls?
as soon as the break-time bell rang we'd rush
to a sheltered corner of the yard to smoke

an entire pack of Yeni Harman down to the last one,
approaching Isparta without any hesitation
I take the turn for Ağlasun,

The purple_signpost says Sagalassos 26
kilometers, suddenly the whispers of
the poplars grow, the wind awakens.

What is it exactly that brought me to this point?
At that moment the question dissolves in you: what, exactly,
me, period, I think more than anything that "exactly"

scatters like mercury the moment I touch.

— Ah, please forgive me. It was I who had your tent taken down, treating you like some suspect. Archaeologists in charge of excavations are put out by everyone, even the presence of our sponsors, the authorities, and the press sets our teeth on edge. Visitors, especially when they come with some undefined purpose but with a pass issued from on high, as you have done, well, the itch to inspect their every move is irresistible. One of my younger colleagues, who learned that you'd come here, was excitedly telling me about your writings, so I couldn't help blushing from head to toe and came to see you straightaway. How did you spend the night, not, I hope, in that sleeping bag?

— Oh, don't worry; it's pretty normal for both you and those in charge to act like this. Anyway even a sleeping bag is too heavy in this heat, I thought the tent would protect me from the sun but, you know, I haven't come here to holiday. Honestly I wasn't counting on meeting you, I'm a tad shy, I'd never have just knocked on your door. Think of it this way: if I'd arrived here in the fourth century, would they have let me stay within the city walls? In a way, the cold welcome allowed me to immediately find what I was looking for: the feeling of being a stranger in a land strange to me.

— Forgive my curiosity but did you have some definite purpose in mind when you applied for that pass?

— Spot on. You just mentioned my "undefined purpose," and that's it. I just wanted to revisit Sagalassos and see how the Flavius Neon Library stands now, before completing the central section of a poetry book of mine.

— Well, this is even more embarrassing! When my colleague told me of your affinity for Yourcenar this morning, I thought you'd come for the statue of Hadrian we'd found, but it seems that isn't what you're after.

— I came here a year before you unearthed that statue. But the sparks of this poem are older still. I'd almost taken the finding of the statue as an auspicious omen for me, but in truth, I'm not that kind of poet. While working on the text I went through many sources, especially your excavation reports of 1992 and 1993. As you see, we don't leave everything to djinns and faeries.

— Really? Only a handful of people, discounting the team and the authorities, ever read our reports.

— So we share the same profession.

— Ah, you're an archaeologist too?

— Any poet or writer who doesn't stray from the core of literature is essentially an excavator. We must descend from the surface to the depths in order to find what we are searching for, and even if we don't find it we must still experience the search. In fact it is indisputable that our styles, methods and bearings display some serious parallels. Think of *Memoirs of Hadrian*, isn't there an extraordinary work of excavation behind it?

— Absolutely. It is, in short, a stunning lecture on archaeology. I'm not much of a reader, you know, but that book has taken pride of place in my small library here for the past twenty years. I read it yet again last winter, and it reconfirmed all my thoughts and feelings.

— When the statue was found I said to myself, this is the most remarkable coincidence. A pagan god must've been charged with getting these two excavators to meet this man. The business of Life has helped me develop the odd theory or two, though none I think that any philosopher or scientist would take too seriously. This one here I call the cross-link theory, which is a chain of relations a bit like the logic behind the spinning of a spider's web. We create an order of chain rings which does not progress in straight lines and is not bound by Space or Time. When a poet starts to theorize, you never know at the bottom of which well you'll find him.

— You don't think science is any different? It would never cross my mind to scorn whatever support archaeology receives from other disciplines, but at times I can't help thinking there is a large dose of fiction behind some of these theories. What do you say to the suggestion that the real reason for the collapse of the Roman Empire was a virus in the water supply which gave rise to an outbreak of melancholia among the patrician class who lived in the better neighborhoods of the capital?

— Well, as an explanation that befits a poet's imagination it seems reasonable enough to me: a poetic element acting out a part in the death of a civilization would seem to make History a bit more palatable. If you ask me, the most sophisticated position mortals can assume is that which dwells under the sign of melancholy.

— Your words remind me of those pages reflecting Hadrian's thoughts as death stalked him: "Our broken statues will be mended." My blood froze, I remember, when we reached the foot of that huge mass, the statue...

— I know that part almost by heart. It starts: "Life is cruel, we know," and goes on: "But precisely because I expect so little of the human condition, those periods of happiness and partial progress, those efforts to begin over again and to continue, all seem to me like so many miracles which compensate for the immense mass of evil and failure, of negligence and error. Catastrophe and ruin will come; disorder will prevail; but order too will come from time to time. Peace will establish itself between two periods of war; the words *liberty*, *humanity*, and *justice* will here and there regain the meanings we once attributed to them. Not all of our books will perish; our broken statues will be mended; other pediments and domes will rise from our pediments and domes; there will be other people who will come to think and work and feel just as we have done. I count upon continuators, who will settle down at irregular intervals throughout the centuries to maintain this kind of intermittent immortality. If ever the barbarians gain possession of the world, they will be forced to adopt some of our methods; they will end by resembling us." If Hadrian's thoughts hadn't been somewhat close to this, then Flavius Neon would never have established this library in that same era.

— If he'd really thought this way, it might be said all that he had foreseen has come true.

— We know two thousand years passed like this. If not Hadrian, then another must have thought of all this. Many like me, who spend their lives shuffling between books become imprisoned in the other worlds they create, and find belief in the existence of a circular movement that still manages to forge ahead to be a sort of remedy. What the poet says is true, the content of every library is *time condensed*. Everything has already been thought, imagined and written; all that remains is for us to rewrite the same sentences in our own words.

— Libraries too are born of that wheel of repetition. You have seen those reports where I wrote that the Neon Library is a variant of the Celsus Library in Ephesus, that in all of those that survive, for example, in Limyra and in Termessos, a version of the monopteros theme dominates.

— Similarly they were built and similarly they fell into ruin. First an earthquake, then fire, and again an earthquake to polish the job off. When nature grows absent-minded, man is sure to undertake the job of destruction. Forever turns the wheel that has no need of the One God, or a heaven stuffed with deities.

— You're right, yes, because in that period the Library had acquired the status of a temple, which ultimately caused it to be burnt down. The gods couldn't protect it.

— Not even Helios, it seems. Today and tomorrow in this scorching heat I want to observe the arc of the sun as it passes over Sagalassos. To step, after seventeen hundred years, into the shoes of Julian who came to this city when his mother was killed. Let me confess, it wasn't Hadrian who drew me to this place, but that man who in the *Misopogon* said, "I am sure that among my peers it is I who have read the most," and added, "From holding pencils my fingers have turned to coal." Don't think for a second that beards are our only shared passion!

— I've never read the *Misopogon*, whatever I learned of it came from the letters of Libanios, who says that on the day Julian died, "My voice was lost, I was unable to write any more." Julian was, it seems, quite the figure. As a Christian, I can't pretend I have no issues with an emperor who persecuted the first Christians and vigorously upheld paganism. Yet when it comes to the Library everything changes. I'd like to tell you, if you've time, how he had these ruins rebuilt, and personally describe the extraordinary properties of the mosaic floor design he had Dioskoros, whom he brought here from Antioch, lay out. In Ağlasun we found an inscription which seems to indicate that he had close friends here. The tragedy is that after his death the Christians burned down the Library. Here, and in Ephesus and in Antioch, priceless manuscripts were burned to ash.

— How little humanity has changed since those days. Everyone is in a hurry to wipe away all traces of the other. Although we style these religions monotheistic, in truth they all possess different gods. We have only one sun, we derive not a thing from the other suns in the universe. What will be left behind, should it die?

— Are you...?

— No, oh no! I've been living in the depths of night for years. The road brought me here as I trailed after the smaller questions that lurked behind the great questions I could never find an answer to, and tomorrow it will blow me somewhere else. This wheel will keep turning till the sun inside me fades away. Yesterday, I watched it set from where we are standing now. I was so exhausted I lay down and must have fallen asleep, and in my dream I saw myself fording a river. I woke after midnight. I lay down on the earth, face up, wild grass brushing my cheeks, ants marching up my arm, sounds filling the body that a city dweller first takes for silence, with the landscape of the heavens stretched out before my eyes. Would it not be for the best if we'd never started these excavations, just left everything where it lies, if we accepted that all will be buried and, in due course, covered by earth and stone? What would be changed if we knew nothing of those things we dug up from the ground and placed in museum showcases?

— Even if one should take the place of the other, it's not possible to live without faith.

— I find the faithful to be right. Accepting that we are simply born and simply die brings down the walls of the senses and mind both, it blurs their boundaries, what we need are promises of some sort.

— What about you: why do you keep piling Word upon Word? Have you no faith, at least in yourself?

— My story is, like that of many others, a story of weakness. Forty years ago I couldn't find the strength I needed to squat by the wall that rose before me, instead I carried on, finding both wide and narrow escape routes. If you are inclined to dawdling and diversions, Life throws up bridges in front of you. I wrote poems, dreamed of my Book, and tried to earn the right to disappear. At times I'd laugh out loud at my delusions, but then I'd refill my inkpot. When I return from here I'll have lost two days but I'll have gained so much more. The river that disturbed my sleep last night is actually what carries me. It knows and decides where and how far I'll go.

— I should have left you in the depths of whatever night you said you'd been living in, but instead I knocked on your door.

— I'm glad you did. Anyway we've both got places to return to. Could you show me around the Library? In return I'll do an imaginary sorting of the books there. Long-forgotten poets and writers, words with all their letters deleted, pages that went up in flames, and finally, lines and sentences that we'd give anything to write the equal of today. Let these be the results of my excavation.

From north to south everywhere I traveled
I saw: the air dissolving whatever it touched.
And so I touched, ignoring the “Do not touch”

sign—touching is essential, hands,
fingertips feeling the stone, the wood, the bronze
is essential, palms grasping dimensions

and an instant exchange of heat
otherwise one cannot comprehend how the air
in its infinite power gnaws at everything.

From north to south into the squares I came
I saw: letters on obelisks, faces
of statues, embossed reliefs slowly

being wiped away in a blend of nitrogen and oxygen.
I read crowded stories winding along the
helical columns, allegorical tales spread over

the colorful stained-glass windows, silent history
engraved on stone, and a fear impossible
to overcome which had permeated a lion’s face:

Everything was scraped off, let it then be forgotten.

Nowadays genetic engineers use sensitive
devices to gauge the rate of memory loss,
I am listening to the radio,

the results of our research on brain tissue
will be a determinant factor
in the next century, says the voice

passing through the persistent static.
But I have run out of time to decode
myself, though not because of thoughts of

après moi le déluge, I know: for the future here
does not have a long future. Knowing the reason
for the storing and for the loss in my brain

will not be enough to change the flow anyhow,
the air that gnaws at everything will work
on my body with more efficient speed

while my flesh rots and falls apart
in unbearable stink, worms and maggots
will consume the substance at my core,

we have known this elaborate story for the longest time.

Most of the stories scattered over the
squares have strayed so far from their contents
that even if we know the alphabets

the ludicrous commentaries of the guides
do not suffice to relieve that desperate
feeling of being lost that accompanies us

as we travel down from north to south,
astonishment never waning on the compass:
our sense of direction does not bestow the ability

to grasp that time is displaced,
I pass, slaloming like a drunk from
one age to another, among styles and attitudes

without understanding when and why they
abandoned their lines and History gathers pace,
its poise from a rebellious pair of scales

swinging against discipline—
no one has ever known for sure if the truth
is the truth or not, later let us look,

and leave it: even while still living in the loop.

A moment comes when Life unravels behind you.
What is it that you call everything, many things and
many other things, when all you have touched

meets in all you have touched, the tottering,
insecure roof you failed to see, will collapse
on you, better had you died, but yet

you did not, a wounded mound of flesh
wrapped round a threadbare skeleton,
the smell of your own blood fills your nose,

for every ache in your brain your body
secretes another pain, and above all, your soul
torn to ribbons, you wait in vain:

for a hand to reach out and quench the lights,
for a force to free the howling you gathered within
but are reluctant yet to release—neither one

nor the other will come. You are
now a ruin that none would even dream of
visiting, a heap silent and still,

drained of meaning, stripped of spell.

They appeared at his door before dawn. The thought of the journey had so excited Dioskoros that he was unable to sleep, and so he arose early from his bed, dressed, and began to wait. The Chamberlain left those accompanying him outside, preferring to converse alone with him in the inner courtyard. As he could not take his own horse, another mount was chosen. A saddlebag to carry his tools was sufficient, his provisions had already been arranged. His guide was waiting outside the city walls and that is where they were taking him now. The road would take four or five days, and they were to keep their distance from other people. He was to follow closely the judgement of his guide, and was to make no attempt whatsoever to defy him. All of this was related in something close to the imperative mood and while this bothered the artist a bit he remained silent. “Besides,” said the Chamberlain, “Don’t waste your time trying to talk to the guide, he doesn’t know a word of our language.” Dioskoros remembers the feeling of being chilled to the bone on first seeing the man. His apparel resembled that of desert bandits, in the upright silhouette wrapped in the grey cloth he’d wound about his head and shoulders that left only the eyes visible, Dioskoros sensed a distinct impetuosity. Contrary to what had been foreseen, after riding furiously and apart from a few short breaks taking no rest, they moved away from the sea, and on the night of the third day they reached their destination. When they arrived at the foot of the mountains once more, their horses were about to expire. They stopped by a stream before the last climb to let the horses drink. From the corner where it was pinned to his right shoulder the Guide released the cloth on his head and, tracing two full circles in the air, unwrapped it. Dioskoros understood immediately that this was the emperor. He heard sounds splintering as on the mountain night fell.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

from *Dîvan Through Frosted Glass / Buzlu Cam Arkasından Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

Porphyrogennetos

A map of Prinkipo, printed in nineteenth-century England, bears the inscription “Mormora.”
 An island in the Marmara, at its eastern tip
 the rays of dawn roam across the porphyrean
 marbled walls of the rooms with several little princes
 and princesses, their future to be shattered
 in between the makers and breakers of icons.
 If Power awaits one of them—but which one?—
 for others scenes of horror are in order:
 eyes to be torched blind, hair to be razed,
 locked up in cellars half sunk in water,
 their bodies, penny-banks for all manner of pain,
 calling out in a chorus of pitch-black fate: who
 chose the flaming porphyrean color, and why,
 no one knows.

From the Louvre, a thick exhibition catalogue from
 three years back, a dictionary of Byzantium
 in three volumes published by Oxford University,
 heavy tomes of proceedings from symposia
 organized by Russian byzantologists or
 initiated by Whittemore: it was always my passion
 to fall in pursuit of a word: “Porphyre,” whichever
 of its layers I reach, a feeling swells up in me
 as if I’m descending into a dark, ancient mine long buried.
 My gaze, freed from the blind knot of veins
 weaving between my brain and body, opens out
 to the veined marble: light passing from the lonely sarcophagus
 in Haghia Eirene's inner courtyard, skips on the horizon
 as I sit on the western tip of the island—they knew all along
 that the sun would have to sink one day.

Translated by Saliha Parker

from *Dîvan Through Frosted Glass / Buzlu Cam Arkasından Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

In the Haghia Triada Library

Venice 1744, an edition of Euripides' *Opera*,
 below it, Plotinus, a Nuremberg 1738 imprint,
 judging by the seals, the first is from a monastery
 in Ravenna, the second was brought over by a monk
 from Mount Athos in 1896. Watching my wild gaze dart
 over the pale, bone-white ribs of the volumes, Stelio,
 the young librarian, guesses my real religion and faith
 lie in books. He reaches up for a thick, large-sized
 tome and pulls it out from its long-time resting place,
 an Old Testament, dated 1656, Canterbury,
 a triplex of texts flowing side by side in Latin, Hebrew
 and Greek, then a line catches the eye, I see Abel
 ready to kill his brother, that very instant,
 as if he could do anything at all about it,
 someone inside me leaps to his feet.

More or less everything must already be down in
 writing in these books piled up or shelved. What good
 were they, all those who wrote or read them, if,
 in our day too, one of two is bound to kill the other? If
 this hushed question were to fly off my lips, the young man
 who chose to spend his life among these books
 reaffirming his faith would probably walk away from me.
 I've trod through all those pages I read for years
 half in doubt or defiance. The light I found I can't
 show anyone; the crystalline tune I heard I can't
 let be heard again; the single mystery I hit upon
 I cannot reveal—for fear it'll step back into secrecy.

Translated by Saliha Parker

from *Dîvan Through Frosted Glass / Buzlu Cam Arkasından Dîvan*, in E-WD, 2018

Misopogon

Avoid all sleep and all talk —
The basic principles on which both the
Orator and the Sovereign agree are:
the importance of swilling wine, of overeating,
and of not speaking until required to do so,
throughout that freezing winter strict prohibitions
are enforced in the palace at Antioch
each night the crimson flames of countless
torches dance upon the walls,
ink flows quickly, and blood more quickly again,
only the angel of death, as it sees to its preparations
far off, tarries: for the world has time still.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

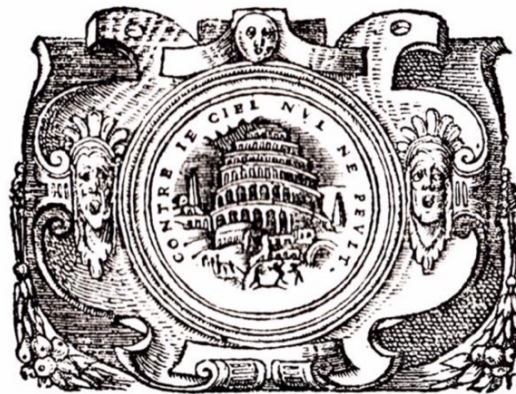
from Songs of the Dark Room / *Karanlık Oda Şarkıları*, 2020

After Maurice Scève: Ten Versions, One Tribute**I**

The April of your life is here, says my Master.
But is it so? True, my summers are long gone,
I'm a September now, in the yellow leaf,
a September's end, and soon as October
I'll be raining long and deep, my trees
stripped of their raiment, my flesh cool,
my dark clouds occluding the full moon.
Yet how if I were a bird, my wing a sword
over the void, feathers a compass fixed on
a new April: soaring through each season, me.

II

No one's ever reached the seventh heaven.
I've seen hands broken, small bones scattered,
faces withered, besieged by anguish. My tower's
not like that: no masters, no journeymen,
neither earth nor stone ever crossed my mind:
my words at the ready, from one line to
the next, shoulder to shoulder, step by step,
if I threw up one floor another collapsed
on my snow-white plot: the sheets piled up,
my tower rose, its blocks my blots of ink.



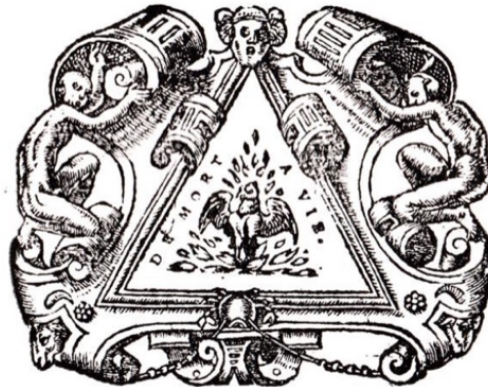
Enblem XIV: The Tower of Babel
'Against the heavens none succeed'

III

Left, right, front, back, tagged on every side,
I'm "it," caught and catcher both. Mind and ear
on the wind: be born, my love, grow up, come,
rock my body, roll my head, winnow me,
pluck me from the roof I'm nailed to, take me
somewhere deep in you: send my scrawny soul
to a place I've glimpsed but never known:
I'm the single rose for you, don't forget—
get high on my scent, let my thorn taste
your blood: stop, wait, melt in my ashes.

IV

The same instant Life and Death, the same instant
Fire and Water, one on top of the other:
ruthless your glances smiting my face, ruthless
those eyes that cast them: one, there's hope, a
warm breath swells my heart; next, despair,
I'm buried in darkness, my blood freezes, at
the same instant Dream and Dismay, at once
I see how it all was, and is—the same mirror:
you, rising on wings ablaze; on the handful
of ashes left by your flames, me. Phoenix.



Emblem XI: The Phoenix
'From death to life'

V

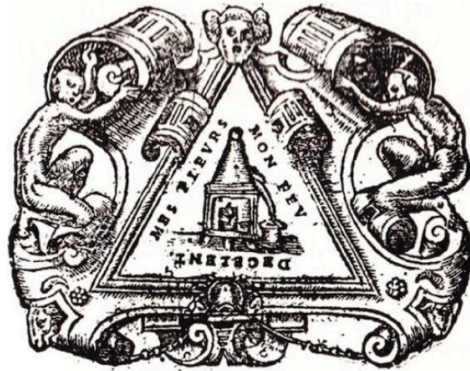
Happiness, pleasure, joy—these, O Orpheus,
were not my lot in life, my Master says, mine
is grief: the poison you added drop by drop
to my wine, the chemicals you slipped
into my food, the white-hot words marshalled
for the poems that scorched my fingers and turned
them black as coal. If only I could leave, go
where far distant lakes beckon—but look, I told
you: my deserts dog my footsteps, my hours
are filled with the white sand the storm stirred up.



Emblem XX: Orpheus
'Pleasure to others, agony to me'

VI

I was a child, I cried, I grew up, but I never stopped crying. I broke the rules, became old, dried up at last. Now what's left for me is collecting raindrops. In the end it all passes through the same alembic: parting, departed, people passing before the foot of time passing. I was a child, I grew old, my pure water pools here: each drop is like the next, each second like the next, my blood like an ink stain.



Emblem XXIII: The Alembic
'My tears my flame disclose'

VII

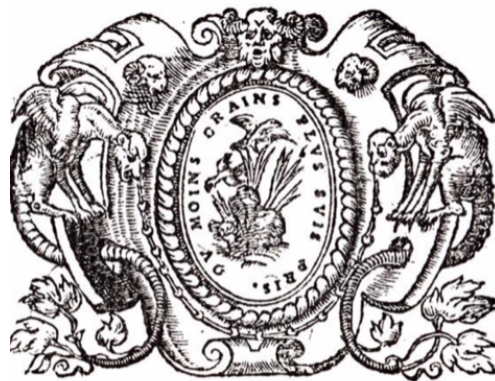
From the start I thought it was my end I fled—
I saw and knew nothing: I lost my head, ran
from plain to high pasture, foothill to mountain:
in the whirlwind of escape I could not tell
day from night, truly from start to finish
what I most feared was me. Time passed, leaving
my geography without plains, or peaks to pierce
my horizon: I can't go on if I would go on,
I can't go back if I would go back—I thought
it was from death: but it was to my doom I sped.



Emblem XVIII: The Deer
'Fleeing my death, I hasten to my end'

VIII

Read in this snare my last hour, my last minute,
my last breath: I could not help but fall prey
to the ambush I myself set. Here I stand,
hunted and swifter hunter, my own quarry,
past cure, on the brink of that mute blind world
I inscribed upon the void. Deaf to my voice
should I cry out, my hands on my throat
should I move, I wait for time to fill me
before it empties me—the book I wrote,
a covenant with the lines on my forehead.



Emblem XII: The Bird in Lime
'Captured by what I fear least'

IX

My Master, amazed at the peacock's splendor,
calls her earth's eye, a rose in earth's mouth, a
dimple in her cheek, washing her hair in clear
water: me, I'm a weeping willow, a bunch
of grapes, as pure as milk. Don't think I spread
my feathers out of pride: can there be a
more beautiful usefulness than my useless
beauty? Behold me, rest on my rainbow for
a moment at least: fix your eye on this eye,
let's meet eye to eye the life beyond our lives.



Emblem XXXIV: The Peacock
'He who truly sees himself, quells his pride'

X

All real poets know the truth of the saying
that sorrow's always nipping at joy's heels.
My happiness is like a butterfly's: should the
sun for a moment peep through my clouds,
in the next the firelight at my feet winks out.
I'm a pilgrim headed for the harsh land of
solitude: at home my wife weaves wool, my
parents unweave woe, worry feeds my friends.
Before me, bleak nights by candlelight: there
awaits the ache to exile me from myself.



Emblem VIII: The Woman Winding Yarn
'After long labour, an end'

For Maurice Scève with Gratitude

I don't know what binds me to you, or what's in
your *dizains* that brands my eye. Time divides
us, Earth rails against us, yet our words share
the ache of loneliness. Morning and night,
kernel and seed, the moment arrived when
I left you and clambered toward myself.
Wounded, I fell, fell again, and followed:
springs and winters traversed my pages, storms
scattered my handful of words, my poems turned
to water and ran, turned fire and burned, I turned to stone.

Translated by Clifford Endres and Selhan Savcigil-Endres

from *Who Are You Really* / *Neyin Nesisin Sen*, 2015

Gushing

Intense purple when approached from the west
when under it, a lush green umbrella,
walk eastward and it's sheer copper
engaging with light, or maybe light's the chatty one,
designated *fagus sylvatica purpurea*
it's like nothing you've seen since Byzantine times.
Drunk, entranced, the wind gusts up for it
with many a freakish touch the rain falls for it
to die away finally, draining itself by nightfall.

Translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne

from Songs of the Dark Room / *Karanlık Oda Şarkıları*, 2020

Variations on Karacaođlan Poems

from *Movements of Wings / Kanat Hareketleri*, 2015

The Shield

Like an apple her rosy cheek I've bitten
These curséd teeth, ah but they've bruised her it seems
In snow-white ink to my love I've written
At night she would come right to my bed in dreams

My cinder-eyed love I cannot flee your hold
In your fire, I have become both sword and shield
I've burned, unable to rise from these ashes, bold
Come, let's fare together to some other field.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

Sword

Come
you who smell of freshly cut grass
now
you who bear the scent of after rain
no
longer seen no longer smelled
yet still
you, surely a flower, smelling so
come
for me again once more once
more
come and be my bride
for
I am still a sword so straight and you
wide open
smell of its sheath just before battle.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

Ash Writing

I have become kindling and burned for you, my love
by the linden, by the chestnut, by the magnolia

I burned: of smoke, smell and fire
if only you knew the taste, my tongue a flame.

I have become coal for you, so burned am I
my hands are scorched, my face, a deep ruin,

neither water, nor earth could put out this fire
I have turned to coal yet again I burned.

I have become paper for you from the Armenian land
words and letters of fire walk on my flesh.

Shimmering I come, a phoenix risen from my ashes
the comma in your eye a sparkle for my song.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

Five Roses

I gathered five roses for you, My Love,
apropos of nothing, five red roses, of blood.
Five white roses, of milk, five yellow roses, of golden leaf,
of dawn, My Love, I gathered five pink roses for you.

Another hand-picked them, my hand,
so cowardly, knows only how to plant, how
to touch: every inch of your body is
my blazeland, my fingers, for you, five black roses

of coal. Of all the words I have chosen, touch, soil,
but paper white too, so vain somehow,
I walk on, a lament of my footprints on the snow
the thorns I've torn out: five pure roses for you.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. and Neil P. Doherty

from *Movements of Wings / Kanat Hareketleri*, 2015

Subjunctive Mood

Rule over all I have, but leave me my morning.
Let silence then pierce my rust-eaten soul,
a gesture, followed by another, let this perfect
mold of a thin and curled-up life condense,
and let me smash it, alone, all by myself.

Translated by Gökçenur Ç. & Neil P. Doherty

from Songs of the Dark Room / *Karanlık Oda Şarkıları*, 2020

Poems for the Last Person Singular**I**

a horseshoe tacked onto a red ochre
wall with two nails, I sidled up
and sensed from very far off
the vivid whinnying and the foam
and following that
a cloud of dust, the same fresco
reaching out to heaven's dome,
suddenly the sun comes through
one of the open windows.

*i am opening a parenthesis
on this station
someday someone will come and close it.*

II

the passing years have turned
my remaining days into a scrapheap
says the oldest of them all: no smell of grapes
left in those empty barrels anymore, bicycle
chains have rusted slowly here,
was it I who brought this faded saddlebag
back from the market, how long has the
table leg been rocking—in the house,
in the garden, on the narrow dirt road climbing to the
hilltop, everything is faltering: through me passes a weary
traveler who will alight at the last stop.

*a moon or a shark
sinking
behind the roof across*

III

the seasons bleed into each other
when one lives in the center of the city, each day
passes as if on a weather forecast—
a south-easterly is blowing, force two,
felt temperature 18°, the sky grey,
withdrawn into itself, evening will arrive one minute
late: yet no one frets over
crows cracking walnuts early
the lemon blooming prematurely,
soil thirsting for rain or the smell of
fireworks bursting forth from women.

yâr yel lel li yelelâ la la la
yele la li ten nen ni tene na na na

IV

sittin' on the dock of the bay,
exactly thirty-nine years have gone by,
watchin' the ships roll in,
my back propped against the
sun-warmed wall, I have begun to
whistle, just like Otis: wiyuy wuv wuvi wu wuy wiyu
my eyes lost in the distance, ever since
then that breezy tune's been on the tip of my tongue,
I never came back from where I'd gone

*in the maddened water flowing by me
the red speck flees quickly
a spinning ball of blood in the night's eye*

V

first, smoke appears in the emptiness, a fragile figure
of dance, just below, a roof of faded
tiles, below that again, I am drawing a house of stone
without paper, without pen,
the windows ajar, slight stirrings
in the gauze curtains and in the flames
on the stove: April has come and almost gone,
from afar I am building a house in the center
of the garden, I see myself at the head of
a well, walking out of the scene,
the shadow of the house is then rubbed out.

*a pensive Russian monk squats on my face
from afar a weary cloud in my eyes
the tobacco in my mouth mingling with grapes*

VI

drunk on the scent of linden, I traipse through the courtyard
in an unhurried act of disappearing,
the sun constantly flitting through the clouds,
as the shadows try on scales of thickness
it is not light or movement, nor heat,
but a smell that turns the maddened hand on
my compass: I'd display zero were I a clock,
a brain haemorrhage were I a barometer,
this is not life or death, nor fear,
if saving myself were my concern at this point
I would long since have fled to the streets.

*mistakenly
through the same open window
the butterfly's hopeless fluttering*

VII

a shibboleth on every tongue: in no dictionary
is the strigidae owlet to be found—
like so, like that, you have sat, free of any thought,
any dream, floating in the emptiness of the room,
were there a rope you'd grab it, if a name
came to mind would you call her—yet like so, like that,
you stand, the grass grows under your feet,
your clouded eyes let no light in, your frozen poise
evokes no figures, time has halted, this silence seems eternal,
like so, like that. . .

*sky and judas tree, grey and raven
on the fingers of a hand holding a brush
the flighty feathers of a troubled angel*

VIII

I am listening to the sound of the pulleys
from where I lie, a crabby clock ticking
in the wheels of the day, I am listening to
them from where I lie, a fly is buzzing,
it lands and rests a while, then takes flight again,
I am listening from where I lie, my life swinging
between recurring variances, from daybreak
to sunset, my blood never flowing in
the same color onto the cold white surface of the bath,
I am listening to the tiny crimson-red drops,
from where I lie.

*you want fire to rain down
from the heavens
you who once were afraid of the dark*

IX

had they gone, for it seems as though they had
withdrawn to winter in remote hollows and returned—
the tiniest tubers, the shyest calls
these, these the stirring harbingers of coming
spring, all a-sway—to the keen observer ripples
from the tips of the trees appear,
each day the sun creeps along the window
its curtain pulled, its shutter folded,
as life commences to lighten the load
that has been dumped on it,
the freshest of sounds descend to the street.

*i a blind man among a handful of words
a dagger among a handful of others
my pen in pursuit of the distant silence*

X

after the long rains
some from among us happened to go
and greet the sun, like sound
sleep the water had flowed
for weeks on end, the drops practiced
a tense, unbroken tune on all
eardrums, in our minds the sun
merged with a longing for silence
that would herd the clouds before it
sending them to the far side of the horizon
and toppling them down a fathomless cliff—
we, all of us, wanted the sun to be our god again.

*the flames swept away
the pages in my hand
a roll now of drunken ash*

XI

seems I was turning and tossing from side to side,
in my dream I was walking on
top of a high wall. The knee-deep
weeds, thick green, swaying after the
wind as if they were a living organism,
on the other side of the wall
lay a calm sea, like a section
of a dead organism from another planet,
in the depths of my sleep I was walking
without a single stagger between two lives,
I was turning and tossing from side to side
and shivering in my bed, it seems.

*snowyellow in the sky
a stench of rage on earth
and a restless fracture below ground*

XII

I write poems in the last person singular,
in the mornings, words light as a feather,
sounds barely audible, my eye all blood-
shot. The rest of the day passes at a leisurely
pace, but as evening arrives my heart
begins to beat again, the evening all blood-
shot. My true home, however, is the night:
from the bottom of a darkness
fastened onto sturdy posts painful scenes emerge,
when all are asleep I venture out,
the night cares not for outside nor in, my other
eye all bloodshot.

Four Epilogues

The dark dome of a winter's night,
they pass, snuggled up together,
under a black umbrella for two, I watch
them from the window of the fourth floor
—suddenly I notice, the rain, in fact,
has not yet begun, night has not yet fallen
the two bodies have not yet come to boiling point.
The moment they turn the corner and are lost
the image inscribed on my retina freezes:
had I seen or imagined them or had these two
familiar but forgotten spectres returned
after quickly devouring the years from the folds of my memory,
as I ask the first drops begin to fall.

A whole summer will slip by
before us—for do we not sit every day
in the same chairs
staring in the same direction
let a ship with an unknown flag
come from the open seas
let the drunken crew with their
fickle voices sing songs
in a language no one knows
let them share a drink with us that no one
has ever tasted, let it be worth
a summer spent waiting for them.

On leaving the city, his voice, as if it were
handing over some great secret, withdraws,
follow the railroad tracks for a few days—
a river will then appear before you,
slow down, always watch your back
following one of the banks—
the sun will gently fade, and
almost die away, follow the foxes' footprints
to keep yourself from getting lost—
when you reach the foot of the mountain, it will be night.

A Lullaby for Kum (in a bittersweet mode)

Slowly out strolling under the horse chestnuts
when with a thud one fell, I know, you're here.

Stripped of shell, that stunning fresh brown I touched
its light, its sound and smell, I know, you're here.

Time thrusts like a sabre into my body, blood restless
pain boundless, I've grown old, I know, you're here.

Slowly I'm descending the stairs, a flying carpet
of wet leaves, if I slip and fall, I know, you're here.

Stéphane, Walter and Muhsin: all the septembers snatched them
from me, but you, absolute gain, I know, you're here.

Translated by Neil P. Doherty and Gökçenur Ç.

from *A Capella / A Capella*, 2015

Remedy

Oh bird announcing the fall of night,
sleep now with me. In return
I proffer to you a parallel network
of dream: I will step down to the
shore, perch on my shoulder; I will light
a fire, wait just behind me; I will climb,
lead the way and trace the correct path
with your wings—but first, come and be
a soft remedy for this *insomnie*.

Translated by Neil P. Doherty

from *A Capella / A Capella*, 2015)

SIgNe

Straining and straining within, you
 want the clock inside you to crack,
 its pieces scattering in empty space
 to form an invisible whole,
 an unverifiable harmony,
 a roofed-in polysemy, inaccessible content, *SIgNe*
 squeezed in by time's teeth between ascent and descent
 you're a dithering particle of absolute indecision.

A salvo of accusations, just there in the mirrors,
 sightless Narcissus of the murky waters,
 at your heels, unhearing, follows Echo,
 the call for disparition from every forest.

Translated by Saliha Paker and Mel Kenne

from Songs of the Dark Room / *Karanlık Oda Şarkıları*, 2020

Parable of Abdal of the Sea

Do not presume I imagined myself Abdal of the Sea,
were I to appear at one end of the shore to wander off
on the water, never mind my hefty body, the sins
adorning my soul would line up first, then

all the guilt crowding my head would pull me down,
if none saw the boulders chained to my foot,
would it matter, I'd quickly sink—a neighbor
to the treasure-filled wrecks, that very instant,

above, a shadow would be left of me, I've kept it intact
from all kinds of evil, dirt or stain: do not presume
it was anyone but this friend to God, who wandered off
from just one shore to the other, let mortals decide.

Translated by Saliha Paker

from *Who Are You Really / Neyin Nesisin Sen*, 2015

Branchings Out

I'm up against the end now.
They're still talking to the doctor:
my lungs are burnt out, become two
small scraps of charred sponge: my heart
labors on like a worn-out pump; I know
nothing more can be done to keep my
hands from trembling—as ill luck would
have it, my brain, which I exhausted year
after year, keeps ticking right along with
never a skip, making them think. Maybe
it's just me, but they seem to resent seeing
their wheels spinning more slowly than mine
do at my age. . . . Yet I've long been ready
to go, is there any place left that I haven't
seen? For many years now I haven't worried
about how or to what extent the work I've
done will be appreciated when I'm gone,
if anything can be gained from old age, it's
this. To tell the truth, nothing anymore
seems to mean a thing, defeated hopes,
broken dreams, fancies swept away if not
by wind by flood onto a path of no return.
For the book you've written about me
I thank you, that big book of yours,
which my assistant, who, after spending
thirty years at my side has become
an irony machine, thankfully read aloud
to me for four days straight, with her
frequent stops, not to miss a chance, of
course, to poke fun at your work. I can't
begrudge her that small luxury, since my
eyes fail to make out even the large letters
and my poor hearing forces her to shout
while reading. Besides, it was she, and no
other, who collected and archived every bit
of writing about me during our thirty years
together; even if she doesn't know me better
than I do myself, the time came when she
had to remember everything better than
I could, maybe that's why she sees all
you've done as empty labor. I, on the other
hand, was excited by your point of view,
and comments. If I'm not mistaken, you're
a bit arrogant to see yourself as my superior,
as you do. You may be right, of course,
but true strength and power resides in not

letting it be sensed. When I was young
 I didn't think much of anybody, as I grew
 older I came to think less of myself, then
 came the day when I deemed important
 anyone who managed to put two stones
 together to get through such a challenging life,
 in truth, I never thought I'd live this long.
 For me old age has brought a different kind
 of haughtiness, the world laid down such a
 thick crust of scum inside me that I couldn't
 see why anyone should be afraid to go to Hell.
 At one point in your book you ask: "To
 what conception of the Art of Poetry should
 such a heedless, spiraling flow be connected?"
 I wouldn't know that, nor should I be expected
 to: I wrote and the wide stream of questions
 drew my writing into its bed and swallowed
 it while I looked intently into the water.
 I couldn't have given you or anyone else
 immediate leave to pour out your rules
 and laws. "How did he come to found this
 city then raze it, why was he so scared he
 hid behind the walls he'd erected, the crowd
 released from within, the silence filling
 the streets, from where did he rip and drag
 them out?"—the pathways leading out from
 me, time came, blended in with those opening
 up to me. The songs I crafted held no salvation,
 I knew. I was aware that the idols I sculpted
 would answer no prayer. Once I'd set forth,
 I couldn't turn back. Now, with a few poetry
 collections under your belt and advanced,
 if wild, Literary Theories, you rip loose and
 unravel what I've knit and framed. I know
 those bridges, I've crossed a few too. Having
 traveled a ways, I saw that I'd come once again
 to the same bridge, while walking from this
 end to the other one I realized that dialectics
 was an empty conviction. That's why you ask,
 will ask, "Which Art of Poetry?" to start
 your sentence: question, interpretation and
 exhaustion all interlocked like the sharp teeth
 of a merciless trap set to catch a wild beast.
That's the question, but isn't *this* the problem?
 When do we learn who the prey is, will the
 identity of the hunter be immediately revealed?
 All works arise from a complex order, no
 sooner do you have the result than an illusory

chain clangs within consciousness: have I got there yet? In the midst of this doubt stands fear, waiting and gnawing away. If words fail to line up on paper, they form knots in the throat. And yet, as Paul Claudel suddenly realized while observing his master, what's the Art of Poetry if not going up against that white obstacle thrust toward our faces? At twenty, I too crashed against it: suddenly the line grew a blade sharp as a cleaver before me, and I stretched out my neck beneath it: most of those around me writing poetry stayed blindly ignorant. I saw clearly at once from whence their daring sprang. Of those, only a few, pained, as I was, at being pushed up against the wall, continued their combat with the white: Oh, that pit made for only so many letters to be sat side by side! Within those walls drawn by order and measure, bereft of light and breath, and even more deadlocked after the "Crisis in Verse" of a hundred years before, we sensed that if we failed to shatter those golden laws of numbers, we'd strangle in our studies. Ten years went by before I came upon "The Lord Chandos Letter"—at first I broke all my pens, then I fixed them. Going from one turning point to the next one, I closely examined each detail that added more to the darkness in my head. Forgive me, I think you can't possibly imagine that period: obviously what's failed to strike you as a challenging option is to pursue a path against those readers who unquestioningly equated beautiful writing with the ornate image in a milieu that suffered any discussion of poetry only in proportion to the degree of sadness or passion it aroused in them. Yet I do recall an occasion when Melih Bey could bear it no longer: "At a time when it has become much harder to write good poetry," he noted in one of his pieces, "how is it that we come across so many poems written so easily?" I wonder if it is indeed the readers in every language who shape poetry and determine its evolutionary flow: can it be that once it's read, poetry is then written so, is still being written so—I always viewed the problem as just the reverse: when not to be read is

what's needed most for poet gentlemen who are able to take the risk and don't mind withdrawing into themselves for a short or perhaps longer time, moving on is at least possible: they'll either find something or get lost on the page. "As to the Book," if no house ever rises in the emptiness from my letters—life does hold other respectable options. That's how I moved on to my forties and fifties, as the winters turned toward spring and fall, I myself founded my writing. What does everything matter, I let everything pour into a key text: that you find my thoughts on poetry romantic, if not childish, I understand. As my assistant read out that section and at one point began to laugh, when I inquired why, she at first fell silent, and then, perhaps hoping to comfort me, said this: "I laughed because it struck me as strange that his sole means of support to counter your argument should be based on your own words." Since she's a stickler for correct sentences, you two would have butted heads on that matter too, if I'm not mistaken. But let's get back to the subject, I can leave off my usual crab-crawl—you thought me pedantic to have gone beyond *ars longa, vita brevis*, the necessity for which you saw as debatable: "If History pruned and pared down a sentence, it must have known something." A sentence of yours that I like: an elegant, indeed, a poetic proposition, while you could never rival Hippocrates, you still don't fall too short of his line. Yet to my eyes such elegance doesn't make your approach relevant: what may have paved the way to our Present Time and sowed the seeds of that ruthless future are those facile prunings of History. Do you know, after a certain age I cast off the intermediaries from my world, jettisoned the ballast from my library: the true texts are the same as prime numbers: in time others were added or deleted—and it's this that you foresee for my writing, if I'm not mistaken your book points to a shortcut for reading, there, in a way, you draw a moral from the brevity of life: your problem, your credo, is to weed all complexity from me, you must've reckoned that if only you could

plunge in a scalpel and crop that trunk, which so obviously and uselessly keeps branching out, thus reducing it to one or two main limbs, then everything would be so much clearer and plain to see. Intention, no doubt, is highly important in the course of such undertakings. Were you bent on making a stump out of it or on leaving it hanging: amassed and thus allowed to flourish? I can't say why, but on hearing your appraisals ringing in my ears the feeling swept over me that you were out to get even with me, I could only think how little time you needed to get tarred up inside—oh well, I guess I got it all wrong. Only you can conclude what's right, you alone can weigh out your true intent, I just felt that you got carried away—which is probably why you were unable to sense the ache in my Tree text: you couldn't pinpoint the exact spot, yet it's one of the hearts at the end of long, biographical capillaries you thought you had to muddle up: how could you miss seeing it as the simple and forthright working-out of a self-portrait? So you took it as a tree facing a lens, how could it have been anything other than a map of my writing rising from the ground? We first met face-to-face in the winter, I saw and knew it at once from afar: my face in the mirror a manifestation of letters. I circled it for days, touched its skin, and gave ear to its sounds. The light it consumed, the solid darkness it released when closely observed—not a word passed between us. Later on, I went back. I wrote. Carefully study it now, if it's slipped your sight, look and perceive: that tree is formed of many trees: inklings of oak, willow, horse chestnut, sycamore, magnolia—all in one—capricious words flowing out of a single surface can't be read at one sitting. Every poet is himself a bit of Abraham, and of Ishmael, more than just a bit. Call me what you will, no matter how many letters you use to spell my name, that's long been my home base, assured in its incertitude, remember here the alchemist's words: "You couldn't have come from the East, nor can you be headed toward the West: having sprung from the map of your disappearance, don't stop, vanish once again."

I'm up against the end now. My life, from start to finish, passed in birdsong. Asked now, I'd sum up by saying that everything might really have happened during a winter of sleep, if I say everything, yes, that's it, no more or less: I've never been heedless, if only I'd been content to see the scum on the earth's surface, but no, I didn't hold myself back from descending into the cesspits of History, pursuing shortcuts you rather pompously point out: crushed as I was between the purulent diction underlying the mask of big politics and the burlesque conceit of the petty, I felt ashamed of my own kind. You've noted in my travels a false backing away from ego, and on that I'm with you: I went off to rub my salt into other cities, that's true, and is why I sailed through clouds in pointless fears, but don't forget: each time, from every journey, I returned and locked away my unrest inside a few streets, a few rooms. So my map is closed-in, cramped, sparsely populated: I heard what was said of me and reached a point where I learned not to heed a single word. I don't need to know those who've judged me, if they'd constructed an enviable bridge of meaning while they lived, they'd have stayed silent: Do you imagine that any life is right, ha, don't rely on the mistakes I made to help you know. If I'm up against my end, not an ounce of all I've learned remains here in my hands, yet the Art of Poetry has left an indelible trace on my soul: I was led to believe that beneath this mortal dome a few of my pleasing strains might linger on.

Translated by Mel Kenne and Saliha Paker

from *Dîvan of Aggravating Circumstances / Ağırlaştırıcı Sebepler Dîvanı*, in E-WD, 2018

End Notes

on “Fairy”

The fairies referred to here are the *aos sí* or *aes sídhe* (or *shee* in Anglicized spelling), meaning “the people of the mounds.” It is believed that the fairies were the descendants of a supernatural race, the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, defeated in battle by the Milesians, the ancestors of the modern Irish. Upon their defeat they agreed to retreat and dwell underground or in mounds across the country.

Shee / Sheehogue (sí / sídheóg): fairy.

Deenee shee (daoine sídhe): people of the fairy mound.

Marcra shee (marcra sídhe): the fairy cavalcade.

W. B. Yeats, “The Irish Fairies” in *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth*. Penguin Books, 1993,

Lake Tuz (Turkish *Tuz Gölü*, meaning “Salt Lake”): the second-largest lake in Turkey, located in Central Anatolia.

On Poems Selected for *Saga*

“Fear”

The photographs that were taken during the meeting in the poet’s office are from the Turkish original, *Yanık Dîvan* 2016, p. 26.

Samih Rifat: (1945-2007) architect, photographer, writer-translator and close friend of Enis Batur.

Turgut Cansever (1921 – 2009) pioneering architect and urban planner; Ömer Uluç (1931 – 2010) one the foremost painters of the time.

Münir Erteğün: (1883 -1944) Turkish ambassador to the U.S.A. during World War II, who died in Washington, D.C. in 1944.

Hüsnü A. Göksel: (1919 – 2002) Professor of Medicine and leftist political figure, Münir Erteğün’s son-in-law, Selma Hanım, his wife.

Gergedan: (1987-1988) prominent magazine of arts and culture published by Enis Batur and friends.

Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca, (1914 – 2008), a much revered poet of the older generation, whose politics clashed with that of Ece Ayhan (1931 – 2002) and Cemal Süreya: (1931 -1990), both leading poets of the Second New, the revolutionary modernist movement (1955-1975).

Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu (nickname Bedros): (1911 – 1975) distinguished painter, mosaics artist, muralist, writer and poet.

Sinan (1489-1588): considered the greatest of Ottoman architects.

“The Light”

The “Viennese” in the poem refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein, the philosopher, who was Bertrand Russell’s student at the University of Cambridge.

“Burnt”

Behçet Necatigil (1916-1979): a most distinguished and influential poet in modern Turkish literature, writer, and translator of German and Scandinavian poetry and fiction.

“The Seraphim”

The mosaics of the Seraphim Angels in Hagia Sophia. They were uncovered in 2009 when the building was being renovated. A seraph (plural seraphim) is a type of heavenly being originating in Judaism. Subsequently the Seraphim played a role in Christianity, where they were placed in the ranks closest to God. The angel referred to in the poem is the “Face of Istanbul,” an angel who has guarded the city for hundreds of years.

Independenta: the MT *Independența* was a large Romanian crude-oil carrier that collided in 1979 with a Greek freighter at the southern entrance of the Bosphorus and exploded.

“Saga”

Bâkî (1526-1600). considered the greatest figure in the canon of classical Ottoman-Turkish poets in the 16th century.

Sagalassos: “ancient Pisidian city located, north of Antalya (Southwest Turkey), near the town of Aĝlasun (Burdur Province). The Hellenistic- Roman ruins under excavation and restoration are situated on the southern slopes of the Aĝlasun Daĝları in the Western Taurus range.” (See “Sagalassos, Archaeology of.” <https://www.academia.edu>. (p.1), by Marc Waelkens (1948-2021), Professor of Archaeology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, who led the excavations with his team.

Flavius Neon Library: founded by Titus Flavius Severianus Neon, the great patron of Sagalassos, in the beginning of the 2nd century AD. (See M.Waelkens: “The Library of Titus Flavius Severianus Neon at Sagalassos.” <https://www.academia.edu> pp. 215-248). “In Late Antiquity, the Neon Library underwent a second renovation that was “perfectly in tune with the revival of Greek pagan culture as stimulated by Julian the Apostate (361 – 363 AD). The black and white ... mosaic floor, with its central panel which bears the name of “Dioskoros” the artist, is almost perfectly preserved.”

Hadrian: Roman Emperor (b.76- d.138 AD), cultivated admirer of Greek civilization, who unified and consolidated his empire “in 117–118 AD. Hadrian transferred northern Pisidia to the province of Lycia and Pamphylia, uniting it with the rest of Pisidia, and accepted Sagalassos as ...the officially recognized center of the imperial cult practiced by all Pisidians. He also granted it the honorific title of ‘first city of Pisidia, friend and ally of the Romans’... (M. Waelkens, “Sagalassos, Archaeology of” p. <https://www.academia.edu> (p.14)

Memoirs of Hadrian: a historical novel by Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987). References in “Saga” to “our broken statues will be mended” on pp. 419-420 of the original and the following passage have been translated from the French by Neil P. Doherty and Stephanie Nic Cárthaigh, *Mémoires d’Hadrien* (first published in 1951), Paris, Gallimard, 2014.

Celsus Library in Ephesus: built in 117 AD as a funerary monument for the pro-consul Tiberius Julius Celsus Poleaeus (b. 45 – 120 AD) of Greek origin, and completed under the reign of Emperor Hadrian as the third-largest library after Alexandria and Pergamon.

Limyra: Lycian city on the Mediterranean coast of Antalya;
Termessos, Pisidian city, further east in the Taurus mountains, also in Antalya.

Monopteros: a circular colonnade supporting a roof but without any walls.

Julian: Roman Emperor (b. 331/332 AD at Constantinople - d. 363 AD), nephew of Constantine the Great, also known as Julian the Apostate, noted scholar and military leader. Hostile to Christianity, Julian announced his conversion to paganism in 361.

Misopogon (in Greek, “Beard Hater”): a self-satirizing work written by the emperor Julian while he was in Antioch, also attacking the inhabitants of that city for mocking his beard and for their imperfections.

Libanius (b. 314 at Antioch – d. 393): Graeco-Syrian sophist and rhetorician; friend and admirer of Julian.

”Porphyrogenetos”

Porphyrogenetos: Greek term for “born in the Purple Chamber” (of the Imperial Palace in Constantinople), a term that confirmed the legitimacy of children of the reigning emperor as heirs (and heiresses) to the Byzantine throne.

Prinkipo (*Büyükkada* in Turkish): the largest of nine islands in the Marmara Sea off Istanbul, collectively referred to as the Princes' Islands.

“Mormora”: appears on the 19th century map as the former name of Prinkipo. But in the original poem, with its doubled syllable “mor,” which is the Turkish adjective for the colour purple, it also happens to intensify the porphyrean aspect of the poem.

“Icon makers and breakers”: refers to the Iconoclastic controversies of Byzantium in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Thomas Whittemore (1871-1950): American scholar and archaeologist who founded the Byzantine Institute of America and who began preservation work on the Hagia Sophia mosaics, with permission from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his government, in 1931.

“In the Hagia Triada Library”

Library of Haghia Triada: library of the Theological School of Halki, the Greek Orthodox seminary founded in 1844 on Halki Island (*Heybeliada* in Turkish), on the site of the 9th-century Monastery of the Holy Trinity. The island is the second-largest of the Princes' Islands.

Misopogon

See note on Julian the Apostate, under “Saga.”

“After Maurice Scève: Ten Versions, One Tribute”

This is Enis Batur’s lyrical *homage* to the French humanist poet, a central figure in the Lyonnese cultural circle that figured prominently in the evolution of French literature. Batur’s “versions” employ the *dizain* stanzaic form of Scève’s masterpiece, *Délie*, published in 1544. Playing on word and image, Batur’s lines resound with echoes of the original’s cryptic themes of love, death, and platonic beauty. This cycle of ten poems is neither a translation nor an imitation of Scève. Batur refers to it as a “metatext,” an apt description. Whatever we may call it, it is truly a *tour de force* that reflects the essence of Scève’s *Délie* and underscores Batur’s intimate acquaintance with European literary tradition.

“Variations on Karacaoğlan Poems”

Karacaoğlan: a 17th century folk poet, assumed to have live around Mersin, Southern Turkey, who was famous for his ballads about nature, love, separation and death.

“Parable of Abdal of the Sea”: in Anatolian folk culture *abdal* is the epithet held by the highest of mystic bards, who renounce worldly values and become “a friend to God” (as in the poem) and who generally spent a wayfaring life. Historically they were of Alevî and Bektashî affiliation, like the well-known Pîr Sultan Abdal of the 16th century.

“Branchings Out”

“Crisis in Verse”: an essay in verse by French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842– 1898), published in 1895.

“The Lord Chandos Letter”: a work of prose in letter form by the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, written in 1902. Set in August, 1603, it was supposedly composed by Lord Philip Chandos (a fictional writer), who sent it to Francis Bacon to describe his crisis of language.

Melih Bey: Melih Cevdet Anday, one of three friends—Orhan Veli Kanık and Oktay Rifat being the other two—who as young poets instigated the mid-twentieth century *Garip* (*Strange*) movement that revolutionized Turkish poetry.

Ars longa, vita brevis: The first two lines of the *Aphorismi* by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates. Horace’s Latin translation (*Vita brevis, ars longa*) reverses the order of the lines, stressing the enduring power of art over the brevity of life.

Letters: signifying characters of mystery in a word or name according to the esoteric *Hurûfî* system of belief (as in “...my face in / the mirror a manifestation of letters...” and in “Call me what you will, no matter / how many letters you use to spell my name...”). The *Hurûfî* system that originated in Iran in the 14th century was based on the premise of the hidden sanctity of letters in “the words” (*kelâm*) of the Qur’an, attributed to God. Each letter (in the joint Arabic-Persian alphabet) was assumed to be a code to be explicated both hermeneutically and numerically with reference to the Qur’an. By extension, the same rule was applied to divine the hidden meanings in the visage of a human being by decoding the letters in their name. (*Hurûfîlik* (Hurufism), Ömer Tecimer, 2008.)

The final lines of the poem (“...beneath/ this mortal dome a few of my pleasing / strains might linger on ”) resonate powerfully with a famous couplet in Bâkî’s classic ghazal from the 16th century.

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Author and Translator Biographies

One of twentieth-century Turkey's most prominent authors, **Enis Batur** was born in 1952. He was educated in Istanbul at the Lycée St. Joseph and in Ankara at Middle East Technical University before completing his studies in Paris and settling in Istanbul. By the mid-1990's he had become a foremost innovator in Turkish private publishing, directing the impressive cultural publications branch of the Yapı Kredi Bank and founding /editing several literary journals. He also established himself as one of the most productive poets and essayists in contemporary Turkish literature. The author of more than thirty books of poetry, he has been awarded many prestigious literary prizes both in his homeland and abroad between 1980 and 2024; his work has been translated into French, Italian, Persian, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, as well as lesser known languages such as Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Kurdish and Syriac. Enis Batur lives in Istanbul with his wife, the painter Fatma Tülin.

Born in 1971, **Gökçenur Ç.** is a poet, translator, editor, and poetry activist living in Istanbul. With seven poetry books to his name, he has received several prestigious awards in Turkey. His poetry has been translated into more than thirty languages, including English, German, Italian, Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian. He is the co-editor of the Turkish domain in Poetry International portal, a member of the editorial board of Blesok, the Macedonian-based international literary magazine, and the editor of the well-known literary quarterly Offline Istanbul (Çevrimdışı Istanbul). He has translated selected books of poetry by Wallace Stevens, Paul Auster, Ursula Le Guin, Ocean Vuong, Anne Carson and many other exceptional world poets into Turkish, as well as some of the best Turkish poets into English. He also attended the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature several times as visiting writer and has organized and/or participated in poetry translation workshops and festivals in many countries as a poetry activist.

Neil P. Doherty, originally from Kildare, Ireland, has resided in Istanbul since 1995. He is a translator of Turkish prose and poetry. He was one of the editors of *Turkish Poetry Today 2017*, published in the UK by Red Hand Books. His translations have appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Dreaming Machine*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Seattle Star*, and *The Berlin Quarterly*. His translation of Behçet Necatigil's "Bone" was selected for inclusion in Deep Vellum's *Best Literary Translations Anthology* in 2024. He is currently working on an anthology of Turkish Poetry for Dedalus Poetry, Dublin.

Clifford Endres studied at Emory University and The University of Texas at Austin, and has taught, in Turkey, at Ege University, Boğaziçi University, Başkent University, and Kadir Has University. He is the author of *Joannes Secundus: The Latin Love Elegy in the Renaissance* (1981) and *Austin City Limits* (1987). With Selhan Savcigil-Endres he has translated Turkish writers Güven Turan, Gülten Akin, and Selçuk Altun among others. This and other work has appeared in *Agenda*, *Chicago Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Near East Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Seneca Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Translation Review*, and *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*.

Mel Kenne is a poet who has translated much Turkish poetry and prose into English. He was a founding member of the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature (CIWTTL). He co-edited *Turkish Poetry Today 2016* and *2017* and also co-edited the books *What*

Have You Carried Over? Poems of 42 Days and Other Works by Gülten Akın (Talisman House, Publishers, 2013), *Aeolian Visions / Versions: Modern Classics and New Writing from Turkey* (Milet Publishing, 2014), and *Pomegranate Garden: a Selection of Poems by Haydar Ergülen* (Parthian, 2019). He co-translated, with Saliha Paker, Latife Tekin's novels *Dear Shameless Death* (*Sevgili Arsız Ölüm*) and *Swords of Ice* (*Buzdan Kılıçlar*) (Marion Boyers Publishers, 2000 and 2007). He has published six collections of poetry, most recently *Take* (Muse-Pie Press, 2011) and *Galata'dan / The View from Galata* (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), a bilingual collection translated by İpek Seyahioğlu.

Saliha Paker, Professor of Translation Studies, retired from Boğaziçi University in 2008. Her research in Ottoman and Modern Turkish translation history has been published internationally. Involved in translating modern Turkish poetry and fiction for forty years, she initiated and ran the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature (CIWTTL) from 2006 to 2016. She edited the first collection of poetry by Enis Batur to appear in English, *Ash Divan* (2006), co-translating poems with Mel Kenne and Clifford Endres. This was followed by a selection from Gülten Akın, *What Have You Carried Over? Poems of 42 Days and Other Works* (2014), co-edited with Mel Kenne, both published by Talisman House, Publishers. She also co-edited a book of translations produced by the Cunda Workshop: *Aeolian Visions / Versions: Modern Classics and New Writing from Turkey*, with Mel Kenne and Amy Spangler (Milet Publishing, 2013) and, more recently a selection of Haydar Ergülen's poetry, *Pomegranate Garden*, co-edited with Mel Kenne and Caroline Stockford, (Parthian, 2019). Her co-translations of Latife Tekin's fiction are *Berji Kristin Tales from the Garbage Hills*, with Ruth Christie (1993); *Dear Shameless Death* and *Swords of Ice*, with Mel Kenne (2001 and 2007); all were published by Marion Boyars.

Selhan Savcığıl-Endres (1957-2019) was a professor at Hacettepe, Başkent, and Kadir Has universities, where she wrote on authors such as Orhan Pamuk, Toni Morrison and Paul Auster. She was a founder of the Department of American Culture and Literature at Kadir Has University. Her English translations (with Clifford Endres) of Turkish authors such as Enis Batur, Güven Turan, Selçuk Altun, Gülten Akın, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, Haydar Ergülen, and Haldun Taner have appeared in *Aeolian Visions / Versions: Modern Classics and New Writing from Turkey*, *An Anthology of Modern Turkish Drama*, *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*, *New European Poets*, *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Near East Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *Seneca Review*. She co-translated two novels by Selçuk Altun: *Many and Many a Year Ago* (2009) and *The Sultan of Byzantium* (2012). Among her Turkish translations is *Edouard Roditi ve İstanbul Avangardı* by Clifford Endres (Istanbul: Kırmızı Kedi, 2018).