

TRANSLATING TURKISH POETRY
An Introduction to the work of George Messo

GEORGE MESSO

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The University of East Anglia
School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing

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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates how the development of my work as a translator implicitly challenges some of the principal values and assumptions inscribed in the works of my predecessors. I identify what these values and assumptions are in the process of translating poetry from Turkish to English, and why they present particular problems. Throughout, I show how these problems can be reconceptualised, re-examined, and overcome.

In section 2 I contextualise my work in the field of literary translation from Turkish to English during the period 1900 to 2012. I sub-divide this period of translation activity into three distinct phases and further justify this sub-division by contextualising these phases in relation to changing attitudes and tastes toward Turkish poetry, particularly in light of increased availability of financial support for translators and increased opportunities to publish literary works in translation. In section 3 I focus on translations of İlhan Berk to demonstrate differences in practice that distinguish my work from the work of my contemporaries. I further extend this comparative analysis of translation strategies in section 4 where I examine the dominant values and constraints influencing choice in the reading and re-making of Turkish poems in English. Finally, in section 5, I shift perspective to provide a descriptive commentary of critical reactions to some of my translation work.

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1. The Texts

Our knowledge of modern Turkish poetry in English translation is built on the work of a handful of translators. Two names stand out, Nermin Menemencioğlu and Talat Sait Halman, as the most prominent and productive, both non-native speakers of English, translating into English as a second language. Despite their admirable and unique commitment to the introduction of Turkish poetry to English-speaking audiences, their activities as translators and cultural ambassadors, including the socio-political subtext underwriting their activity, the selection of poems and poets, along with the dissemination and distribution of their translated work, and not least the translation strategies employed by them, have yet to be articulated and examined. I believe my work as a translator implicitly challenges some of the values and assumptions inscribed in the works of my predecessors. I aim to show how the methods of two of my near-contemporaries, Murat Nemet-Nejat and Ruth Christie, follow precedents established early in the translation of modern Turkish poetry by Menemencioğlu and Halman. I will argue that my work as a translator represents a position from outside of the mainstream which poses cultural, linguistic and theoretical challenges to the current orthodoxies among contemporary translators of Turkish poetry.

Throughout my critical introduction I will be focussing on six book-length works of translation, from Turkish to English, published between 2006 and 2013. These are:

- Messo, G. (trans.) (2006) *İlhan Berk. A Leaf About to Fall*, Cambridge: Salt Publishing;
- Messo, G. (trans.) (2008) *İlhan Berk. Madrigals*, Exeter: Shearsman Books;
- Messo, G. (trans.) (2009) *İlhan Berk. The Book of Things*, Cambridge: Salt Publishing;
- Messo, G. (trans.) (2009) *İkinci Yeni: the Turkish Avant-Garde*, Exeter: Shearsman Books;
- Messo, G. (trans.) (2010) *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets*, Canterbury: Conversation Paperpress;
- Messo, G. (trans.) (2013) *Birhan Keskin. & Silk & Love & Flame*, Todmorden: Arc Publications.

Broadly speaking, all six texts share cultural and stylistic concerns that situate them within an avant-garde, experimental tradition. I will be more specific about what I mean by this in the course of my introduction where I discuss the books individually,

collectively, and in relation to other contemporary works of translation from Turkish to English. I draw direct comparisons between my work and the work of three contemporaries, Talat Halman, Ruth Christie, and Murat Nemet-Nejat, with whom I share particular interests in translating the work of Turkish avant-garde poets, contextualizing my own working methods and strategies in relation to theirs.

To begin, it will be helpful to establish a background against which all translators of Turkish poetry have been working over the past 50 years, to say something about the extent of translation activity in the field of Turkish literature (and poetry in particular), and to give some impression of how much translation is done, by whom, who publishes it, and who pays for it.

2. Turkish Poetry in Translation: 1900 - 2012

The history of Turkish poetry in English translation from 1900 to 2012 falls conveniently into three distinct phases, each phase marked by significant increases in translation activity, for reasons I will examine, and each documented by statistical surveys, numerical records, and bibliographies of increasing detail and complexity. I will go through each of them briefly, before returning to identify what I think are the central questions raised by surveys of this kind.

2.1 Phase One: 1900-2000

Saliha Paker's survey of Turkish literature in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* (2000), though described as "brief" by Paker herself, is the first major attempt to document the area. Paker pointedly acknowledges that the vast output of Ottoman and Modern Turkish literary culture is represented by a limited number of translations, prompting her to consider:

what was translated (selection); *why* (motivation, i.e. the dynamics in Anglophone and/or Turkish culture); the central or marginal position of the original work/s in the source culture; and *when* (whether the translation was more or less contemporaneous with the original work or produced much later) (2000: 619).

Paker's survey is factual but evaluative, reflecting what she identifies as the 'dramatic shift in norms of poetic translation' (2000: 619) over the preceding century. The distinguished eighteenth-century British translators and scholars Charles Wells and Epiphanius Wilson are labelled 'Orientalist', while the Ottoman Turkish scholar and translator E.J.W. Gibb's enormous achievements are, Paker implies, undermined by 'the literary norms of a Cambridge scholar' (2000: 619). When Paker finds the translators worthy, their work is suitably described as 'powerful' (on Andrews, Kalpaklı, and Black), 'distinguished,' (on Halman) and 'outstanding' (on recent translations of Hikmet). Yet despite these subjective tones Paker presents a clear picture of the state of Turkish literature in English translation: between 1900 and 2000 there were only 26 single-authored works of Turkish poetry translated into English, while 11 of these were by the same author, Nâzım Hikmet.

2.2 Phase Two: 2000-2004

Significantly, Paker's subsequent research, 'A Chronological Bibliography of Turkish Literature in English Translation: 1947-2004', compiled together with Melike Yılmaz, documents the sudden explosion of activity in the four years from 2000 to 2004. This period alone accounts for almost one quarter of the total output for the preceding century, with seven single-authored volumes of poetry appearing in translation and a major anthology, *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* (2004), edited and largely translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat.

Paker goes some way to account for this dramatic increase in translation activity in her article, 'Reading Turkish Novelists and Poets in English Translation: 2000-2004', where she also makes reference to pressure from within, to Turkish authors' 'appetites for international recognition' (2004:6). Given that a record number of new works of Turkish literature appeared in the first seven months of 2004, Paker notes '... one can also observe greater interest on the part of writers to be translated into English.' (2004: 6).

2.3 Phase Three: 2004-2012

Two further studies, ‘Turkish Women Writers in English Translation’ (2011) by Arzu Akbatur and *Literary Translation from Turkish into English in the United Kingdom and Ireland, 1990-2012* by Duygu Tekgül, complete the picture with a wealth of statistical data across a range of related fields. Tekgül’s study is pointedly oriented to the publishing ‘industry’ and was updated for presentation as part of the 2013 London Book Fair’s regional focus on Turkey. It includes important new information on the publication, dissemination and funding of literary translation, with insightful profiles of some of the leading translators of Turkish literature. Tekgül’s study provides the platform for part 5 of this introduction, so I will return to it in greater detail. But a cursory glance confirms the upward trend identified in Paker and Yılmaz’s bibliography. Indeed, conflating the two studies, it is clear that from 2000 to 2012 major changes had occurred in the funding, publication, distribution, and translation of Turkish poetry on an unprecedented scale:

51 titles were published between 1990-2010, with only 9 titles published in the first decade, after which the volume has quadrupled. (Tekgül 2013: 8)

Breaking down these 51 titles by genre gives 1 book of essays, 4 memoirs, 7 short story collections, 22 novels, 3 magazines dedicated to Turkish writing and 17 collections of poetry (Tekgül 2013: 27). The number of poetry collections is augmented further by including the 13 volumes published during this same period in North America. There has been, therefore, more Turkish poetry published in translation over the past decade than over the preceding century as a whole.

A crucial factor here was the establishment in 2005 of TEDA, Türkiye’nin Çeviri ve Yayım Destek Programı [Translation and Publishing Support Programme of Turkey], a translation subvention project implemented by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism ‘for the publication of Turkish cultural, artistic and literary works in foreign languages’ (TEDA 2012). Its self-declared purpose is ‘to merge Turkish cultural, artistic and literary spirit with the intellectual circles abroad, and to orient people to the sources of Turkish culture, art and literature’ (TEDA 2012). As a political entity, granting and awarding financial assistance to the translation,

publication, distribution and publicity of ‘distinguished works by celebrated authors’ (TEDA 2012) as *specified* and *adjudicated* by the Ministry (in the form of the TEDA consultative committee, of which more later), its influence has been widespread.

We are, I think, now in a position to return to the considerations raised by Saliha Paker within the framework of her 2000 survey: *What* was translated? *Why* was it translated? *When* was it translated? In answering these questions I hope to establish a context for situating my own translation projects and to contextualise the dominant translation practices and values which my work implicitly challenges.

2.4 The *what*, the *why*, and the *when*: The Halman Canon

A staggering 40% of all Turkish poetry books in English translation published between 1950 and 1990 can be attributed to Talat Sait Halman and Nermin Menemencioğlu (Paker & Yilmaz 2004: 15-16). In addition to their vast outputs as translators, Halman and Menemencioğlu also edited anthologies of Turkish verse, guest-edited magazines and scholarly journals, wrote essays and actively reviewed new works of Turkish literature in translation. Both native Turkish speakers, Halman and Menemencioğlu enjoyed long academic careers teaching Turkish Language and Literature in various North American universities. Talat Halman also served as Turkey’s first Minister of Culture in 1971, a role specifically created for him under the premiership of Süleyman Demirel. He was also Turkey’s first Ambassador for Cultural Affairs, based in New York, from 1980 to 1982.

What we learn of Turkish poetry during this period largely reflects the personal tastes of these two translators. More significantly, *what* they translate mirrors in the target culture the dominant ideological understanding of a developing literary canon within Turkey, one that is aggressively *republican*, *male-centred*, and *modernist*. Memet Fuat’s influential two volume *Çağdaş Türk Şiiri Antolojisi* [Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry], for example, first published in 1985 and expanded in 1990, includes only one female poet in a book of over 1000 pages and reflecting more than a century of poetic activity. In Halman’s case, I suggest, this multiplicity of roles, of academic and translator on the one hand, and politico-cultural ambassador on the other, lends authority to choices that are at best personal, and

legitimises in the target culture canon formations that are ideologically supported and defended in the source culture. In retrospect, both Halman's and Menemencioğlu's selection of poems and poets for translation into English discretely censors or erases poetries that are perceived to be ideologically heterodox, i.e. *non-secular, Islamic, feminine, and non-western* in either style or orientation.

For the best part of 40 years Halman has been prominent and prolific, and held a near-monopoly on the translation of Turkish poetry into English. Even as that began to change, and as translation activity increased from 2000 to 2004, a new generation of translators - Ruth Christie and Murat Nemet-Nejat among them - sought Halman's blessing. Introductions, prefaces, and quotations bearing his name were, for a time, perceived requirements, necessary endorsements for any new book of translated poetry.

Just when his own activity as a translator was coming to an end, Halman was appointed to the TEDA Translation Subvention Project's selection committee as one of five members drawn from the professional artistic and literary community. In the period 2005 to 2008 Halman received seven monetary awards for the publication by Syracuse University Press of seven books, five of these in TEDA's inaugural year. Less than 0.5% of the work published had been previously unpublished in book form. The re-publication of a large number of his previously published translations secured Halman's continued presence at the centre of the translation scene at a time when the work of a younger generation of translators was beginning to emerge.

Post-2004, the narrative of Turkish poetry told by Talat Halman has not gone unchallenged, and the picture we have of twentieth-century Turkish poetry in English translation is now considerably broader. Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar's anthology *Modern Turkish Poetry* (1992) set the ball rolling when it introduced hitherto untranslated contemporary poetry of a discernibly non-secular, religious bent; Murat Nemet-Nejat's *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* (2004) explicitly challenges Halman's ideological premise that the narrative of Turkish poetry is essentially recognisable as the story of its adaptation and assimilation of the aesthetics of western literary modernism; and finally my own anthology, *From This*

Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets (2010), attempts to retell that narrative, and therefore to recast Halman's canon, from the perspective of those poets silenced through erasure in English representations of Turkish poetry.

All of these anthologies implicitly acknowledge the Halman canon, some contextualising themselves within it, such as Fergar's *Modern Turkish Poetry*, or in proposing antithetical positions and revisions to it, such as Nemet-Nejat's *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* and my book *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets*. They each do what anthologies do best: they boldly redress our extant knowledge of their respective fields, they challenge the foundations on which that knowledge is built, and they invite (and perhaps even demand) new thinking and new perspectives in order to understand the new poetry – and here, of course, as is the case with Nemet-Nejat's anthology, *new poetry* can mean simply *re-translations* of previously translated Turkish poems.

3. Self-Context: A New Translation Project for İlhan Berk

My point of entry into the bibliography of Turkish poetry in English translation was in 2006, shortly after the inauguration of the TEDA Translation Subvention Project. The catalyst for my 'intervention' as I then saw it, was a brief footnote in Saliha Paker's article, 'Reading Turkish Novelists and Poets in English Translation: 2000-2004', which appeared in a special 'Turkish' edition of *Translation Review* edited by Sidney Wade. Paker writes:

İlhan Berk, one of the oldest and most productive of living Turkish poets but long neglected by translators, has also been published recently in an individual collection, *Selected Poems by İlhan Berk* (ed.) Önder Otçu, translations by Önder Otçu and Murat Nemet-Nejat, Talisman House, New Jersey, 2004. Extensively represented in Murat Nemet-Nejat's anthology, Berk may be said to have finally got the attention he deserved in English. (2004: 13).

At the time, Berk's oeuvre was vast. He would go on to add substantially more work to it. It included poems, essays, translations, memoirs, and interviews which represented the uninterrupted creative output of more than half a century. Otçu's

Selected Poems of İlhan Berk, and Nemet-Nejat's anthologized excerpts favour brevity and neither reflects in their content selection Berk's omnivorous range nor his eclectic style.

I started out with the aim of proposing an alternative reading of Berk, and one that would attempt to represent Berk's achievements as broadly and as extensively as possible. Berk had clearly not received the attention he deserved. To an English-speaking audience Berk was still unknown and, despite Otçu's and Nemet-Nejat's best efforts, unknowable.

3.1 Visioning the Poet

My first translation project, *A Leaf about to Fall*, focussed on poems from İlhan Berk's middle to late period, dating approximately from 1958 to 1996. Though Berk and I consulted over the content, the final selection was left to me. We shared a common commitment to represent the more extreme side of his experimental work in breadth and depth, and this became the central thrust and impulse of the book. It also took on an additional 're-visioning' edge when I re-translated a number of poems already done by Önder Otçu and Murat Nemet-Nejat.

In the following section I return to one of these re-translations, the poem 'Av Vakti', to illustrate how instances of decision-making at the micro level of the individual poem, and its context, develop into general tendencies and strategies at the macro level, applicable across many poems, and come to inform my translation activity across a major four-book translation project for İlhan Berk, which includes *A Leaf about to Fall* (2006), *Madrigals* (2007), *The Book of Things* (2009) and *Words & Sounds* (2014).

Initially, however, my translation projects begin with considerations of the poet's broad context. In the case of Berk, for example, understanding the poet's historical, social and cultural context was a vital stimulant to a fuller understanding of the poetry's literary and linguistic context. Translation also begins with sensitivity to my own intuitive responses to the source poem and with a somewhat suspicious resistance to the idea that everything needed to recreate the poem in English will

come from the source poem only. Catherine Porter, in her article ‘Translation as Scholarship’ (2013), summarises some of the key issues in the following series of questions:

To what extent and in what ways is the source text innovative or deviant in its own cultural context, and how can those innovative and deviant aspects be represented in the target text? What aims and effects can be attributed to the original, and what aims and effects is the translation intended to serve, what effects to produce? What was the nature of the original audience, and how can the anticipated new audience be characterized? What range of voices, registers, and subject positions can be identified in the source text, and what adaptation will be required to render these in the target language? (Porter 2013: 62).

These, and questions of this kind, are particularly relevant to Berk, and before the translation has progressed, it is important, even if I do not have ready answers, that I have some notion of where the answers will come from. Once again, I want to be open to the possibility that some of the answers will come as a reader of the Turkish poem, before I have become its translator. There has to be a point of ignition, for reader and re-writer, if the translation has any chance of an afterlife, recognising what Santos calls the essential *significance* of a poem as *meaning* transformed into ‘an *experience* created by the words themselves’ (Santos 2000: 106).

The answers to Porter’s questions (2013: 62) make themselves felt as a translation proceeds and develops, in whatever form they come to be articulated: sometimes flashing as moments of insight and inspiration, as a sense or a tonal property, sometimes as an afterthought. The original working title of *Madrigals* (Messo 2007), for example, followed İlhan Berk’s original Turkish title, *Kuşların Doğum Gününde Olacağım* to read: *I’ll be at the Bird’s Birthday*. This faltering, clumsy cluster of syllables lacked the crisp surreal lyricism of Berk’s original. Both the publisher and I worried that Berk’s anticipated new audience in English might also falter over the title. Rarely, for me, is an answer absolute before the act. Reflectively, however, questions such as these open doors back through the text, into the source and ultimately forward again into the workings of the recreated poem, the translation.

3.2 ‘Av Vakti’

I want to examine İlhan Berk’s poem, ‘Av Vakti’, to begin to explore some of the issues raised in the passage quoted above by Porter (2013: 62). To briefly contextualise the source, ‘Av Vakti’ was published in 1968 as part of Berk’s collection *Âşıkane* (de yayinevi, 1968), one of several short, interconnected poetry collections which meditates on sexuality, the erotic, the sensualised world of nature, natural objects, the body-familiar, the body-as-other. Berk’s language is, unusually for Turkish of this time, visceral, noun-rich, and firmly planted in the developing aesthetics of an emerging group of avant-garde poets, later called the İkinci Yeni [the Second New Movement], of which Berk was, from 1958 and the publication of *Galile Denizi* [The Sea of Galilee], an outspoken practitioner and champion (Messo 2009: i-x). Berk’s poem in many respects typifies the experimental departure associated with the İkinci Yeni:

the new poetry was “abstract” (soyut), “absurd” and “devoid of meaning” (anlamsız), “introverted” and “obscure” (kapalı), “deformed in form and content” (özde ve biçimde deformasyon); it displayed unique concerns with “individualism” (bireycilik) and “formalism” (biçimcilik); it was a poetry, moreover, that “turned its back on society” (topluma sırtını dönme) and in this [critics] recognized its central thrust as a revolt, not against tradition *per se* but against a tradition of poetry-as-public-address. (Messo 2009: ii)

‘Av Vakti’ situates the reader in the centre of a poetic world that is semantically and grammatically deviant, where meaning is often tentative, tangential, and elliptical, and where moods and tones are subject to rapid, unpredictable change. The title embodies this kinetic energy, this state of restlessness: AV, meaning *hunt, search, quest*, and VAKTI, carrying a compound noun suffix from the noun VAKIT, meaning *time, period, moment, duration*. The two words together can be rendered: *Hunt Time, Time of the Hunt, Time of Hunting* (Otçu and Nemet-Nejat 2004: 78) or *Seasons of the Hunt* (Messo 2006: 8). The poem is complicated by an extraordinary level of vagueness which gives rise to near limitless potentialities in the semantic field. We have no idea, for example, who the people are in the poem, where they are either geographically or historically, even what their purpose is in being where they

are in the poem. Things simply happen, as word-events, reported or described. Crucially, Berk's poem relies on the assumed knowledge its audience has of its literary context and is calculated to subvert the conventions of Turkey's early modernist realists, particularly Orhan Veli and the poets associated with the Garip [Strange] Movement. A central tenet of the Garip Movement was a stripping away of allusion and ambiguity. Veli, for example, insisted that poems be written clearly and understandably, to speak of 'everyday life expressed in direct terms' (Halman, 1997: xi). Veli's iconoclasm, as Halman calls it, 'paved the way for a poetry steeped in the vernacular and stripped of adornment' (Halman 1997: xi). As Veli and the Garip poets self-consciously simplified and studiously minimised ambiguity, Berk and the İkinci Yeni self-consciously manufactured and exploited semantic tension – innuendo, suggestion, double meaning, and so on - in ways that provoked and promoted ambiguity, offering multiple, simultaneous pathways through the text. In a poem such as 'Av Vakti', therefore, Berk's poetics, his stylistic manipulation of the semantic, syntactic, and lexical fields (aesthetically) precludes disambiguation. One reading of the title is going to be a 'hunt' for meaning and, as Holmes writes of poetry in general, 'the form itself serves as a signal to us that our minds should remain open to ambiguities at every rank' (1994: 9). Berk's 'Av Vakti' frames ambiguity as its poetic credo and multiplicity of meaning as the variegated form of its being – 'the Turkish language does not distinguish gender either by endings or by pronouns' (Andrews 2006: 14): *he is she is it*, just as *his is hers is its*, and *him is her is it*, so that the sensualised 'other' is by (in)definition potently ambiguous. Holmes is particularly relevant here when he states 'even once we have chosen one specific signification of a word, a line, a stanza, or an entire poem as the chief surface signification, we do not reject other possible significations out of hand, but hold them in abeyance...' (1994: 9).

In re-making the Turkish poem in English – 'the poem intended as a translation of a poem in another language' (Holmes 1994: 10) – I am guided, prompted, stimulated and perpetually nudged into choices by the source poem. Looking retrospectively over my translation of this Berk poem I see there is something unusual right at the start: I have chosen 'season' over the more obvious 'time'. Retrospectively, the

published translation has a sense of definition that rarely holds in the translation process, when everything is open to revision, re-write, re-evaluation. I wanted the word ‘season’ to capture Berk’s grammatically inflected use of a repetitive past action in the aorist past. This same thought also prompted the more dramatic choice of the historical present tense over Berk’s habitual, relative aorist past – which I discuss later. The poem is set in an unspecified Ottoman past. ‘Season’ carries this sense of cyclical repetition, of custom, and hints of earth, a sensuality of movement in and through time. ‘Vakit’ translated simply as ‘time’ lacked these semantic echoes and textures, and as a title, ‘Season of the Hunt’ conjures into the translation the flavour of Berk’s lyric aspiration to transform the merely factual into moments of poetic engagement, so that descriptive details, historical action, harness potentialities for Berk in the receptive past, passively, and the active imagination of the present reading.

3.2.1 Appropriateness

The appropriateness of choosing ‘season’ over ‘time’ for ‘vakit’ has to be set against what we know about the source poem, and what we know about our responses to it. More roundly, Holmes writes, ‘the metapoet will strive to comprehend as thoroughly as possible the many features of the original poem, against the setting of the poet’s other writing, the literary tradition of the source culture, and the expressive means of the source language’ (1994: 11).

I conceptualize my own approach to ‘Av Vakti’ as an attempt to marry the twin impulses of a) interpreting the source poem’s specificities reliably [this will be examined in further detail below] and b) creating a poem in the target language ‘which is readable and enjoyable in its own right, with merit as an independent, literary text’ (Phillips 2001:23-4). It is easily said, but the appropriateness of a choice like ‘season’ over ‘time’ is weighed against the re-created poem’s ability to talk back to its Turkish source, to its creative core, in a voice that contends as an authentically viable poem in the ‘receptor-culture’ (Jones 2012: 172), whether, in other words, a target choice can be justified by relating it to a source text and whether the resulting target text is credible as a poem in its own right for an English audience.

3.2.2 Translation as Re-creation

Translation as re-creation makes three important demands on the translator: expertise in source reading ability, or ‘acumen as critic’ (Holmes 1994:11); expertise in target language writing ability, or ‘craftsmanship as a poet’ (Holmes 1994:11); and skill in ‘mediating between the demands of ST loyalty and TT quality’ (Jones 2012: 172).

Despite the fact that Nemet-Nejat and I share similar tastes in the selection of Turkish poems for translation – we both, for example, have translated Orhan Veli, İlhan Berk, Ece Ayhan and Cemal Süreya in quantity - our methods diverge in the manner of resolving stylistic tension in the translated poem. Continuing with the example of Berk’s ‘Av Vakti’ I want to try to unravel some of the thinking behind the choices Nemet-Nejat and I have made.

‘Av Vakti’ was one of Berk’s first serial prose poems. It was written in 1964 while Berk was in Paris. The date and the location are significant. For more than half a century French had been the dominant foreign language studied in High Schools and universities throughout Turkey. A Turkish reader of Berk’s generation would have encountered the prose poems of Baudelaire and Rimbaud in their school textbooks, perhaps even Mallarmé. And it is precisely this background residue, a shared cultural reference to a European aesthetic that Berk relies on to lend relevance and credibility to the relatively new and unexplored form of the prose poem in Turkish. The French avant-garde is a point of recurring reference throughout Berk’s work and later books by Berk, such as *Şeyler Kitabı* [The Book of Things], share uncommon, and I suspect not entirely coincidental, similarities to Francis Ponge’s *Rage de l’expression* [Mute Objects of Expression] and George Perec’s *Espèces d’espaces* [Species of Spaces]. The thematic and lexical repetitions of ‘Av Vakti’, its segmentation over time, support a highly fragmented narrative. While free of formal metre and rhyme, Berk’s sentences are short, their rhythms abrupt and staccato. The tone is often perfunctory, matter of fact, with residual echoes of ‘things-left-unsaid’, of what Berk also implies by ‘having said’. It is a work without precedent in Turkish.

In translating this poem both Nemet-Nejat (2004: 99) and I (Messo 2006: 9) take a mimetic approach to Berk’s original form, and in both translations Berk’s

typographical spacing is approximated with few deviations. A moment of almost unsupportable tension arises for both translations, however, when resolving the confrontation of Berk's second paragraph in Part I, sub-heading 'Av' (Hunt). The Turkish reads:

O zamanlar Amerikalılar yoktu. Kadınlar içlik giyerdi. Açık saçık bir şiire
başlardım ben ve bitiremezdim. (Berk 2001: 318)

[Those times there were no Americans. Women used to wear underwear. I
would begin a silly poem and could never finish it.]

In Turkish each vowel is independently sounded. As an agglutinating language with regularity of verb stem postpositions and suffixes, Turkish is also naturally rhyme-rich. Indeed, rhyme, assonance, alliteration and other acoustic effects occur with such accidental frequency that great craftsmanship and skill is required of a poet to limit and control the sound structure of the poem. Berk's use of the plural noun suffix 'lar' ricochets across the paragraph in 'zamanlar' [times], 'Amerikalılar' [Americans] and 'kadınlar' [women], to be echoed in the aorist past verb 'başlardım' [I used to start/begin] with its own insistent personal pronoun in the past tense, 'dim', reaffirmed in the final verbal phrase 'bitiremezdim' [I couldn't finish]. For Berk, the repetition works as a kind of pre-cognitive auditory refrain, lending momentum to an incrementally unfolding narrative that can never be wholly trusted. This is my own version of these lines:

In those days there are no Americans. Women wear underwear. I begin a
bawdy poem but can't finish it. (Messo 2006: 9)

Berk's first sentence 'O zamanlar' [In those days] introduces a recurring trope, the semblance and expectation of narrative expansion, which Berk frustrates semantically with whole sentences collectively fragmenting rather than consolidating meaning across the paragraph. The natural pause which follows 'In those days' is a mirror to Berk's phonic bridging, a juxtaposition which places the rhetoric of conventional narrative on one side of the pause, and the sudden, unexpected subversion of our conventional narrative expectations on the other. It is prose for the eye but with enough of an ear on sound to know its place as a poem. My heavily

alliterating second sentence fits Berk's staccato rhythms and I continue with this forward-moving pattern into the final sentence with 'begin', 'bawdy' and 'but'. I have sacrificed semantic accuracy, translating 've' [and] for 'but', and found a crisp tonal equivalent for Berk's dismissiveness.

On the whole the poem's dominant tense is the 'aorist past' (Lewis 2000: 118), sometimes referred to as 'the relative aorist past' (Kornfilt 2010: 339). It is here that I take a huge risk and decide to place my translation in the present simple, a category or 'structure shift' (Hatim 2001: 16) that converts Berk's past simple 'yoktu' [were not] of the first sentence and his aorist past 'giyerdi' [used to wear] and 'başlardım' [used to start/begin] from the second and third sentences. Why the dramatic shift? On the first translation I modelled the paragraph in line with the rest of the poem and came up with this: 'In those days there were no Americans. Women used to wear underwear. I'd start to write a smutty poem but I'd never get round to finishing it'. Grammatical fidelity seemed too high a price for such ponderous music. The relative aorist past is widely used in Turkish poetry to describe or imply habitual past activity, and despite its 'morphological complexity' (Kornfilt 2010: 339), Berk's use of it here in punchy monosyllabic suffix strings – 'giy-er-di' and 'baş-lar-dım' - gives the poem a simple and affecting rhythmic momentum. My first attempt lacked all of these effects and seemed uncomfortably transparent in what it thought it had to say. In subsequent drafts I opted for the present tense as a way to maintain the freshness and elasticity of the originals and to re-enact Berk's expression of repeated and inferential past actions. It allowed me to unclutter the syntax, to shorten the line, and to add a measure of vividness to the English that reflected more authentically the spirit and music of the Turkish. Such high-risk strategies have their 'prearranged limits' (Middleton 2000: 70) but need nevertheless to 'push against the unknown' (Middleton 2000: 70) in the target language if the recreation has any chance of life.

What I have tried to show with the example of 'Av Vakti' is the fluid nature of a working practice that oscillates between source and target in a matrix of negotiated re-making. Negotiating the requirements of the receptor-culture poem, as such examples show, can sometimes involve a form of *subjugation* to the literary forms and values of the target language, resulting in the '*suppression* of some of the

source-text's features' (Toury 1995: 171). It may even require, as does the example of Nemet-Nejat's translation, 'the reshuffling of certain features, not to mention the addition of new ones in an attempt to enhance the acceptability of the translation as a target literary text' (Toury 1995: 171).

3.2.3 Source-Culture-Specific Associations

I like to think that at all times it is the source poem that guides my movement through the building of the poem in translation. Foregrounding percussive, auditory stylistics in the recreated poem, as in the above passage from 'Av Vakti' for example, depends upon a nuanced reading of Berk's sensualised, fetishized vocabulary where simple nouns embody vast associative sense-worlds: *noun-smell*, *noun-taste*, *noun-feel*. And in the example quoted above, the word 'underwear' has power enough for Berk to unleash whole universes of cerebral-erotic rapture. It is against our knowledge of the source poem that we measure the appropriateness of our translator choices. And it is an *intimate* knowledge, one shaped in the case of Berk by sensual acquaintance: fickle, volatile, and largely unmeasurable.

But facts are hard to dispute and sometimes even harder to translate. And there are several source-culture-specific associations (c.f. Jones 2012: 174) in this focal paragraph from Berk's 'Av Vakti' that illustrate some of the complexities involved in deciding which way to take the translation. Beyond the surface structure, we have to ask what on earth Berk actually means here. Nothing in the poem tells us who these 'Amerikalılar' [Americans] are, and there's no indication that a close and sensitive reading of the poem will reveal a hidden content. And yet to the knowing reader Berk is making a transparent allusion to a photograph of the Hollywood actress Terry Moore which appeared on the front page of *Milliyet* newspaper on the morning of 11 June, 1955. I think I can say with some confidence that it's an allusion few contemporary Turkish readers would 'get'. Moore had accompanied Conrad Hilton for the opening of Turkey's first Hilton Hotel in Istanbul. In the journalist Muammer Kaylan's account: 'I remember it so well: Terry Moore near the swimming pool of Istanbul Hilton, sitting in *Playboy*-style pose with that

mischievous smile on her face. The trouble was that her skirt did not cover what it was supposed to cover, and she allegedly had on no underwear' (2005: 111).

This seemed to present two possible options for the translation: first, to ignore the allusion altogether; or second, to provide an explanatory footnote. It never occurred to me that there might be yet a third solution, as offered here by Murat Nemet-Nejat:

There were no Americans then. Women wore underwear. (Terry Moore visited Istanbul as Mr Hilton's companion when the Hilton Hotel was opened and a newspaper photographer took her picture her knees up in bed with no underwear under her skirt. Oh, the scandal!) I began a moronic dirty tasteless poem, but couldn't finish it. (2004: 99)

This is a daring solution. But it is a challenging one, for several reasons. We can only assume that Nemet-Nejat's reading of the original depends so crucially on possession of this fact that its translation would be incomprehensible without it. But is it? Nemet-Nejat boldly inserts himself in the poem as Berk, substituting anecdote for allusion and in the process introduces a rupturing, self-censoring moral tone. His choice of 'dirty' and 'tasteless' in the final sentence is also morally juxtaposed to the sensualised lexis of the amoral Berk. It is, on the one hand, an example of Nemet-Nejat's willingness to *re-write* as well as *re-voice* his source and, on the other, a clear indication of the extent to which Nemet-Nejat calls upon the resources of his own powers of invention when resolving tensions which arise from source-culture-specific associations in the source text.

I decided that I would avoid any form of paratextual reference or 'thin glossing' (Hatim 2001: 74) such as Nemet-Nejat's inserted paraphrase, to leave the allusion unmarked and unarticulated in my translation, just as it remains unflagged in the original. It goes about its own job of meaning in much the way Berk intends: before the Americans came (whoever they may be), women were more self-conscious in their dress, more discrete, more virtuous, more skilled at averting the sexual gaze of men. By ignoring all reference to the Terry Moore incident the translation bristles with the kind of deep, visceral suggestiveness that Berk extends throughout the poem. The allusion, the winking side-glance, just isn't worth it, if the price is a

paragraph filled with diversion and distraction. In my discreet act of erasure I steer the translation towards gains in suggestive force.

3.3 Madrigals and *The Book of Things*

Madrigals (2008) is a translation of İlhan Berk's *Kuşların Doğum Gününde Olacağım* [I'll be at the Bird's Birthday] (2005). It was only the second full-length Turkish poetry collection ever to be translated into English in its entirety, the first being Mutlu Konuk and Randy Blasing's translation of Nazım Hikmet's epic novel in verse, *Human Landscapes From My Country* (2002).

Madrigals introduced and opened up new understandings of source/target context, for the reception of Turkish poetry, by situating Berk's individual poems within the carefully composed architecture of the author's single volume. No longer extracted or selected, preserving the collection's inter-textual integrity meant deeper, closer readings across and through the poems. A broader, more voluminous Berk began to emerge.

I applied the same strategy of 'total context' to the translation of Berk's epic poetic trilogy, *The Book of Things* (2009). Replicating Berk's own compositional strategy by uniting all three individual collections – *Things That Count Things That Don't*, *Long Live Numbers*, and *House* – allowed for a degree of textual immersion in the work of a single author rarely experienced in English translations of Turkish poetry.

The Book of Things represented a personal departure on two further fronts. Firstly, it was undertaken while contracted to a publishing house; secondly, it was the first of my translations to receive financial assistance from an external funding body – in this case financial assistance was given directly to the publisher from Türkiye'nin Çeviri ve Yayım Destek Programı (TEDA), part of the Turkish Ministry for Culture & Tourism.

Taken together, my three translated books of İlhan Berk's poems represent a significant and sustained reassessment of traditional norms of presentation for Turkish poetry. The translation strategies I employ further our understanding of the creative force and energy of Berk's poetics, allowing me to carry across into the

English poem stylistic features unique to Berk and idiosyncratically part of a recognisably authentic voice for him in English.

4. Translation Stock: The Past as Precedence

A translation stands in relation to its source as the original poem stands in relation to reality (Holmes 1994: 10) but how do translations or metapoems stand in relation to each other, from translator to translator or within the corpus of a single translator's work?

The dialogue that translations prompt between translators working from and into the same languages, is a potentially rich source of knowledge, whether articulated self-consciously within the community or incidentally across it. And such opportunities for dialogue exist precisely because 'no set of social, practical, linguistic or generic constraints ever determines completely how a translation is to be done' (Bellos 2012: 335). Where Nemet-Nejat sees Berk's source-culture-specific associations as essential elements of the translated poem – to its meaning - my translations frequently suggest or imply that perceptions of receptor-culture needs are just as likely to over-determine a translator's re-creative counterparts and to inhibit or compromise equally important stylistic considerations in the translation. What an intervention of the kind Nemet-Nejat enacts for Berk's 'Av Vakti' gains in semantic equivalence, it may lose in tone, measure, and compression. But how are we truly to judge the appropriateness of our decision-making, particularly when the output options in poetry as multidimensional and multi-faceted as Berk's are so vast?

It has been suggested by Holmes that one impediment to appropriate decision-making from little-translated languages, of which Turkish is an example, is a lack of 'accumulated translation stock' (Holmes 1994: 13). The thinking here is that translation traditions could function as a reference of 'proven solutions to specific problems that frequently arise' (Holmes 1994: 13). Where there is a lack of traditional translation practices or where such practices are so infrequent, the development of translator style, of voice, of stylistic patterns and models of

signification and structure often require the translator to ‘go it alone’, working ‘outside a tradition’ (Holmes 1994: 13).

4.1 Caution and Conservatism as Background Assumptions

Whatever it amounts to in practice, the *sense* of a translation tradition encourages, and may even compel, a translator to think about the impact decision-making processes have on the development of a poem. Retrospectively, we can learn to recognise stylistic features of the translation as contingencies born of choice – choices which ‘add to the knowledge we apply to making further decisions’ (Boase-Beier 2006: 62-63).

Translator Ruth Christie, in selecting poems for her book *Oktay Rifat: Voices from Memory*, talks of being guided by ‘poems which had lyrical qualities and *apparent* simplicities’ (1999: 59) in preference to more complex, image-driven poems such as those from Rifat’s notoriously difficult *Perçemli Sokak* [Perchemli Street]. Such choices not only determine the version of Rifat we get in English, a version limited and indeed compromised by criteria this narrow, they also continue to inform Christie’s decision-making throughout the translation process. In translating Rifat’s ‘İki Adam’ (1999: 84), Christie describes the ‘juxtaposition of image and metaphor alongside speech which is rich and strange and challenging to translate’ (1999: 59), and the poem’s dialogue which Christie finds ‘direct and colloquial’ (1999: 59). Furthermore, she describes the proximity of these various modes as ‘startling’ (1999: 59) in the original, an effect that she was able to reach in the translation ‘by an almost close, literal following of the metaphors’ (1999: 60). It is this same taste for simplicity that informs Christie’s rendering of Rifat’s deeply colloquial ‘Nerden bu geliş’ [literally: where from this coming] (1999: 84) into a line as flat as ‘Where have you come from?’ (1993: 54) and ‘işte çorba, içine ekmek doğra’ [literally: here bread, into it bread break/chop/cut] (1999: 84) into ‘here’s soup, crumble bread in it’ (1993: 54). Somehow all that was seen to be *rich*, *strange* and *colloquial* in the source has dissolved into austere, pedestrian English.

Christie wrote in strikingly similar terms ten years after translating Rifat, in her introduction to Bejan Matur’s *In the Temple of a Patient God*. Again she describes

Matur's Turkish as 'simple' (2004: 10) but that 'apparent simplicity' (2004: 10) masks a deeper sense of what was strange, unusual, and new in Matur's voice (2004: 10). Christie is one of the most perceptive translators of Turkish, sensitive to context, mood and tone (2004: 10) and often describes the translator's task as one 'bedevilled by choices and judgements' (2004: 10). Yet Christie's choices follow remarkably consistent impulses, even when the poets are as radically different as Oktay Rifat and Bejan Matur. Here, what was good for Rifat's juxtaposition of image and metaphor, will do just as well for Matur's juxtaposition of the abstract, the everyday, and the enigmatic:

For a translator the best strategy to convey the impact of such startling imagery was a rendering as literally direct as is possible... (Christie 2004: 10).

Christie's idiosyncratic use of the phrase 'literally direct' seems not to extend beyond the level of lexis, and in consequence many of the stylistic features of Matur's and Rifat's poetry are overlooked. One such feature that is frequently overlooked is prosody. I mean by this, 'the effects of poetic sound' (Kinzie 1999: 450) which I identify in these lines from Rifat, for example, more specifically in terms of alliteration, assonance, tone, metre, and rhythm. One of the first things to note in the line 'Nerden bu geliş' [where from this coming] is the rhythmic inversion of typical oxytone stress, in which main stress 'is accented on the last syllable' (Lewis 2000: 19) of most Turkish words. Among the lexical exceptions are adverbials, such as 'Nerden' [where-from] and verbal nouns composed of a verb stem and the **-iş** suffix, where the dominant verb stem stress falls on a 'front, non-high vowel [e]' (Kornfilt 2010: 512), such as 'geliş' [coming]. So that in Rifat's line 'Nerden bu geliş' the more naturally occurring iambic foot in Turkish verse, a stress pattern of one weak syllable followed by one strong, is here subverted into what can best be described as a line of two reverse iambs, or trochees. The absence of a consonantal coda on the monosyllabic demonstrative 'bu' [this] also accentuates the trochaic feet by lightening the close, back rounded vowel [u]. Also, by representing the line phonetically, we can show in bold where assonance in the syllabic repetition [e] reinforces the rhythmic dynamic of the two trochaic feet: **nerden bu geliş**. Importantly, the phonological structure of Rifat's line creates tonal qualities which

introduce elements of threat, accusation, and challenge. Though the line is clearly interrogative, despite the lack of question mark, it is also no longer simply a question. Rifat's skilful manipulation of the poem's sonic effects works to determine the particular way we hear the syntax (Longenbach 2008: 38). Tone plays a crucial role here in shaping our reading of the line, and without this 'tonal context' we are likely to *misread* the poem. By choosing to ignore Rifat's schematized auditory logic there is a danger that 'Where have you come from?' (Christie 1993: 54) as a translation of 'Nerden bu geliş' might lose much of the contextual depth that the combination of Rifat's sound *and* meaning would seem to imply.

This is just one example where foregrounding stylistic features of the source text might provide valuable insights, not only for understanding the source poem but for understanding the decision processes involved in making the translation. If much of the 'foreignness' of the Turkish poem resides in its combination of prosodic features, such as assonance and metre, or in other words, in its sound, then I suggest, it is in the sound of the translation that we might justifiably identify 'foreignness' as those sounds which are 'strange', 'unusual', 'alien', or 'exotic'.

In the second of Rifat's lines, quoted above, Christie's decision to foreground semantic content and lexical fidelity in translating 'işte çorba, içine ekmek doğra' as 'here's soup, crumble bread in it' (1993: 54) is no less consequential for understanding Rifat's richly interwoven prosody. Assonance, internal rime, and alliteration are all skilfully balanced in a textured line of regular oxytone, final word-stress, over five metrical feet, which largely conforms to the rhythmic pulse of an iambic pentameter. The discourse particle 'işte', a trochaic substitution, disrupts the oxytonal pattern, accenting the semi-alliterating 'ş' [ʃ] of 'işte' which is then echoed in the syllable onset 'ç' [tʃ] of 'çorba' and consolidated in the alliterating syllable core 'ç' [tʃ] of 'içine'. This bold alliteration finds its counterpoint in the less intrusive assonant pairings of 'işte/içine' and the unstressed 'o' [o] of 'çorba/doğra'. The final stress ending of 'çorba' adds a metrical and tonal punch to the verbal imperative 'doğra' which once again reinforces the overall impression that the speaker of these lines is being abrupt, and unusually direct. Time and again Rifat's prosody edges us 'to recognise that we read a poem for its manner rather than its

matter' (Longenbach 2004: 32). Semantic fidelity to the surface 'matter' of the poem, to its rhetorical features such as image, diction, metaphor, and simile, comes here at the expense of the stylistic 'manner' of the poem's speaking, and that can sometimes be a heavy price to pay for a 'foreign' poem in English.

Christie opts for a fluent English syntax, even when the Turkish is self-consciously playful and disjunctive, – such as the examples from Rifat quoted above - creating a homogeneous literary style in which it is impossible to distinguish Matur's prosody from Rifat's, and vice versa. Indeed, so seamlessly fluent is Christie's syntax, it is not only difficult to identify the poetry as Turkish, but even as foreign.

Lawrence Venuti writes that while the function of translation is necessarily one of 'assimilation, the inscription of a foreign text with domestic intelligibilities and interests' (2003: 11), a good translation is nevertheless one that *demystifies this inevitable domestication* and 'demonstrates in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text' (2003:11). Christie's translations seem to imply that a form of domestication is underway but I think it is too harsh to infer this as a strategy. Rather, Christie's tendency to identify foreignness with meaning, to the exclusion of style, occasions what might best be described as accidental losses, and even more so where often what is foreign in the Turkish poem resides in prosody. Returning again to Rifat, in the example already quoted, it is not the semantic content of 'Nerden bu gelis' (Rifat 1999:84), 'Where have you come from?' (Christie 1993:54) that lends significance to Rifat's use of the phrase but its very manner of expression.

Christie follows a common aesthetic in directing choices through the poem, an aesthetic which favours, and therefore over-stresses, simplicity, closeness, and a narrowly 'literal' view of meaning, which often neglects the source poem's auditory and rhythmic effects. Rifat's lexical and syntactic richness is 'challenging to translate' (Christie 1999: 59) precisely because it resists Christie's inclination to reduce it. What limited translation stock we have for Turkish poetry is based largely on the work of Talat Halman and Nermin Menemencioglu, both prolific translators and both non-native speakers of English. Their English is cautious, correct,

uncomplicated, and utterly unidentifiable – it is, in other words, an English without roots, spoken by no one.

Measured against such traditions, Christie’s conservatism finds ample precedence. Yet it is in relation to the same background translation tradition, Halman’s ambient noise, that my own work also takes its bearings. Unlike Christie, who furthers and refines aspects of the decision process underlying this translation tradition, I expressly explore techniques for overcoming and silencing it. But if my second and third books by İlhan Berk, *Madrigals* and *The Book of Things*, showed what might be done differently, my anthology *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant Garde*, showed that difference also needs its reference for success. In the following section I look critically at moments of tension in three translations of Edip Cansever’s ‘Alüminyum Dükkan’ [Aluminium Shop] and try to evaluate why my own failure of nerve in translating this particular poem draws me back to the values of the Turkish translation tradition as a default. I also try to illustrate some of the practical difficulties involved in wanting to harmonise innovation and the best practices of Christie, Halman, and others.

4.2 Experimental Voices

‘Alüminyum Dükkan’ [Aluminium Shop] is one of eighteen Edip Cansever poems that I translated for *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant Garde* (2009). Ruth Christie (2002: 66) and Julie Clare Tillinghast and Richard Tillinghast (2009: 24-25) have also translated this poem. Even the most cursory comparison of the translations will be revealing and will have as much to say about the translators as it will about the poem. More optimistically, studying these target language styles ought to allow us to reconstruct the translator rationale for the choices and decisions made in reconstructing the poem. Choices and decisions of these kinds ‘especially to the extent that they express personal preferences of the translator, do not relate merely to the translation in hand, but can be seen to apply to the body of a particular translator’s work’ (Boase-Beier 2006: 63).

Here are the first nine lines of Cansever’s poem in Turkish, followed by the three translations:

ALÜMİNYUM DÜKKAN

Bir göz atıyorum denize
Çın çın ötüyor balıklar
Bu bir giyilmiş ayakkabıdır diyorum
Bu bir sulanmış peynirdir diyorum
Bu bir haşlanmış patates elinizdeki
Bu insandaki ezgi
Bu insandaki akıl
Bu kanundur kanun
Çileğin çilek oluşu gibi.

(Cansever 2006: 111)

THE IRONMONGER'S

I cast a glance at the sea
The fish are singing ting-a-ling
Here's a shoe someone wore I say
Here's a sodden piece of cheese I say
Here's a boiled potato you're holding
Here's human intuition
Here's human wisdom
Here's natural law
Like a strawberry becoming a strawberry.

(Christie 2002: 66)

THE ALUMINUM SHOP

I cast a glance at the sea,

“Bottoms Up!” sing the fish.

This is an old shoe, I say.

This is hard cheese, I say.

This is a boiled potato you are holding in your hand.

This intuition people have

This inborn human intelligence

This enduring law –

It’s like the strawberry-nature of strawberries.

(Tillinghast and Tillinghast 2009:24)

THE METAL SHOP

I cast a glance at the sea

The fish are singing ring-a-ding.

This is a worn shoe I say

This is a water-logged cheese I say

That’s a boiled potato in your hand.

This is human intuition

This is human reason

This is the rule of law

Like strawberry’s genesis into strawberry.

(Messo 2009: 104)

My own translation pre-dates its publication in the anthology by five years, to 2004. Developmentally, the translation shares affinities with my earlier Turkish-to-English translations and I have chosen it here because it best shows the influence of what I think I mean by the ambient background noise of a Turkish translation tradition.

In section 4.1, where I examine Ruth Christie's translation of lines from Oktay Rifat, I tried to outline a general tendency among translators of Turkish poetry to marginalise the reproduction of the source poem's sonic effects, as prosodic features such as metre, assonance, alliteration, rhythm, end rime and internal rime. I want, therefore, to begin by looking closely at these opening lines of Cansever's poem to highlight the more obvious features of its sound construction and the auditory schematics that work together with the poem's rhetorical effects both to produce and reinforce meaning.

The two dominant sonic effects are assonance and alliteration. While there is no uniform metrical structure across all nine lines, there is, nevertheless, a high frequency of rhythmic parallelism between selected line-pairings, so, for example, the pairs 1 and 9, 3 and 5, and 6 and 7, each carry the same number of syllables. The assonant 'o' [o] and 'u' [u] of the first person present progressive verbal suffix '-y^orum' – stress marked in bold – in 'atıy^orum' and 'diy^orum' (the latter repeated) establish the first tripartite phonic grouping – the others are 'giyilmiş/sulanmış/haslanmış', 'ayakkabıdır/peynirdir/kanundur', 'elinizdeki/insandaki/insandaki', and the end rimes 'elinizdeki/ezgi/gibi'. The alliterating demonstrative/article pairing in 'Bu bir' [this a], repeats the voiced labial phoneme 'b', in lines 3 to 5, with its residual echo from the demonstrative 'Bu' [this] cascading through the following three lines. These are powerful, tightly controlled effects but with enough subtlety to be taken for granted. In bringing attention to Cansever's sound structures, we can begin to understand how prosodic features underscore, enhance and complement rhetorical effects in a poem whose auditory logic works to concretize the 'thumps' and 'bangs' and 'poundings' suggested by the poem's title.

Despite a few obvious differences in lexis and syntax, which I will return to, my poem makes clear stylistic allusions to Christie's version (2002: 66). Christie's punning 'ting-a-ling' for Cansever's 'çın çın' is too closely mirrored in my 'ring-a-ding' to be entirely coincidental. Such sideways glances to Christie are symptomatic of backward glances to Halman, but the effect is to turn my own poem to stone, whenever it happens. The translation jumps between invention and caution, unable to

take a decisive line on lexical fidelity and semantic equivalence. The title boldly deviates from a literal rendering of the ‘Aluminium Shop’ which in English is perhaps less familiar, to give a generalised, non-specific reading in ‘The Metal Shop’. Christie’s ‘The Ironmonger’s’ re-concentrates Cansever’s lightly flashing suggestions by invoking a heavier list of cognates such as *hammer, furnace, anvil* and so on. The choice is, nevertheless, and as Christie is well aware (2004: 10), ‘context-bound’ (Levy 2000: 148).

Christie’s translation shows a clear awareness of Cansever’s sound structures and reintroduces into the target text acoustic effects that are suggestive of the source. The peculiar syllabic string of ‘singing ting-a-ling’ substitutes assonance for Cansever’s alliterating ‘Çın çın’, and Christie’s delicately modulated line ‘Here’s a shoe someone wore I say’ shows great skill in the consonantal breathings over ‘s’ [s], ‘sh’[ʃ], and the ‘w’ [w] sound of ‘one’ and ‘wore’. Where the translation sensitively responds to its source, Christie’s poem is enlivened by an unfamiliar music. For a brief moment what is ‘foreign’ in Cansever - his vocal range, what is tantalisingly ‘strange’ to our ear in its cadence and pitch, the reason perhaps we were drawn to the ‘foreign’ in the first place - is perceptible, if somewhat intangibly so, in the music of the translated poem.

Through all three translations, however, the rhythms are ponderous and faltering, and there are too few occasions when syntax and lexis are put to the service of Cansever’s sound.

In these few opening choices, there are clues which will propel the translation into determinate future choices. That is to say, choosing a kind of lexical conservatism as a tonal equivalence in my version of Cansever predetermines what my creative options are likely to be and the solutions I am most likely to pursue. Succeeding choices are to some degree or other ‘influenced by the knowledge of previous decisions’ (Levy 2000: 149). It might seem to imply recurring stylistic tendencies and consistencies which, when interrupted or broken, show instability in the text. For example, in the final line of my Cansever poem, ‘genesis’ replaces Christie’s ‘becoming’ for the Turkish ‘oluşu’; having decided on simplicity and semantic

fidelity as the principles of choice among the translation variants for the poem, ‘genesis’ carries an unbearably heavy load. By failing to adhere to a predetermined pattern of choosing, the use of ‘genesis’ ought to strike most readers as glaringly ‘over-the-top’, as decontextualizing and, therefore, inappropriate. With no obvious constraining limits on the lexical possibilities in the paradigm for ‘oluşu’ and with no obvious lack of verbal ingenuity on the translator’s part, ‘genesis’ is simply a poor choice.

But choices can sometimes be puzzling. In Tillinghast and Tillinghast (2009: 24) the choice of “Bottoms Up!” for Cansever’s ‘çın çın’ and ‘hard cheese’ for ‘sulanmış peynirdir’ bully the poem to say more than it wants and force the English poem to speak ill of its source. At first glance it seems the translators are boldly remoulding the source-text’s rhetorical frame to fit Cansever’s idiosyncratic music. The first four lines are brusque, staccato, rhythmically tight and responsive to their source. The fifth line, however, confounds this view. This long meandering line acts like a sponge, absorbing the rich phonetic energy of its antecedents, scattering it across a line which now cannot decide if it wants to be true to Cansever’s ‘manner’ or his ‘matter’. Cansever’s easy-going, colloquial tone is swiftly erased. In the second line the level shift (c.f. Catford 2000: 141) from the Turkish present continuous ‘ötüyor’ [singing] to the translation’s simple present ‘sing’ implies a causal connection - between the casting of the glance and the fish singing – which Cansever purposefully opposes by signalling the connection *temporally*. As puzzling as it might first appear, however, the choice to disrupt reader-expectations has the potential to produce gains in revitalising our engagement and close reading of the source and the target text. In other words, even when we puzzle over a translator’s choice, nevertheless, we work with the assumption that choice can be rationalised, with reference to the source text, the target translation or the possession of additional information.

4.3 On Failing to Translate

For many years translators of Turkish poetry have been happy to further the perception of Turkish as a ‘difficult’ language, with ‘formidable linguistic

boundaries between Turkish and English' (Tharaud 2007: 91). We have been told that the translator who succeeds is one who 'acquits himself of the impossible task of translating Turkish poetry into English poetry' (Tharaud 2007: 91). But the judgement and the perception are relative, and the translator may know many different truths: choice-dependent, context-bound, and malleable.

In my example above, taken from Edip Cansever's 'Alüminyum Dükkan' [Aluminium Shop], I tried to show what one kind of failure might mean and how knowledge of the processes involved in the making of the English poem allow us to recognise failings as necessary stages in the re-making process. Crucially, however, I have tried to show how recognition of failure, in this case, furthers our understanding of translator strategies as they develop.

5. Reception and Response: Measuring Success

The reception of works of Turkish poetry in English translation is highly contingent. The publishing industry is a decisive factor in shaping translator and translation visibility. Textual issues aside, a publisher is often the sole determinant in issues of distribution, publicity and marketing of literature in translation. If, where, and how frequently, a translator is interviewed, where books are reviewed, the visual appearance of a book, and the advertising budget for a particular project are variables usually outside the translator's sphere of influence. Such factors have the potential to significantly affect the target-culture reception of any given text.

With limited resources available to publishers of minority literature in translation, one of the few ways in which we can assess reception is to look at target-language reviews (Munday 2001: 156). A review's influence in the cultural constituency of the target audience can vary enormously, depending on who does the reviewing and where the review is placed. The relative value of a favourable review in *The New York Times Book Review*, for example, can positively affect sales by as much as 100/1, - 1 being the average sale unit for the book *pre-review* (Tony Frazer, Shearsman Books: personal communication).

Reviews, often the only points of contact between translator and reader, are potentially rich sources of insight. Yet, as a recent online discussion ‘On Reviewing Translation’ (2011) shows, the situation is beset with problems of a surprisingly ‘rudimentary nature’ (Bernofsky, Cohen, and Grossman 2011). Translators’ names are frequently omitted from reviews; translator notes and paratextual information are often ignored; re-translations are rarely compared to previous translations (Bernofsky, Cohen, and Grossman). Marion James’s December 19, 2010, full-page review of my anthology *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets in Today’s Zaman* newspaper illustrates the point: even though James quotes liberally from the book’s 300-plus pages and passes judgement on the quality of the translations, the translator is never named and remains invisible (James 2010). In the main, as Grossman observes, reviewers’ ‘omissions and distortions are extraordinary’ (2010: 30) leaving the whole enterprise of reviewing translations afflicted by a ‘deadly shallowness’ (2010: 31).

Few reviews of Turkish poetry are undertaken by speakers of Turkish. This inevitably tilts discussion away from issues of translation. And where reference is made either to source or specifically to the translated poetry as translation, remarks tend to be superficial and speculative (see Hart 2011; Hart 2013). Though reviews by non-specialists rarely provide insights of the same kind as those by Turkish specialists, these reviews are still a ‘useful source of information’ (Munday 2001: 156) concerning the target culture’s view of translation as a whole and general attitudes to the translation of Turkish poetry, however ‘Turkish’ is here understood.

5.1 In Review

Reader responses have the potential to form profoundly insightful contexts for a translator’s self-reflection, a rare opportunity to see the translated poem through the eyes of another. In what follows, I explore a number of critical responses to my work to highlight the extent to which the invisible workings of the translation, and the unseen decision processes involved in the making of the translated poem, some of which I examined in the preceding sections, reach across on a close reading of the

target text. More simply, I question whether many of the differences that I believe my work as a translator represents are actually being noticed.

5.1.1 Şebnem Birkan on *Madrigals*

In her review article for *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, entitled ‘Messo’nun İlhan Berk Çevirisi’ [Messo’s Translation of İlhan Berk] Birkan is particularly concerned to highlight what she considers the technical achievement of a marriage between typographical form and semantic content in my translation *Madrigals*: ‘Messo şiirlerin biçimine ve içeriğine bağlı kalmış’ (2008: 15) – [Messo has stayed faithful to the poem’s form and content]. In contrast to British reviewing norms, it is significant that a foreign language translation is reviewed at all in Turkish, but additionally noteworthy is its prominence in a major daily newspaper such as *Cumhuriyet*. Translator, translation and translation strategies are discussed, and Birkan quotes liberally from the text, providing Berk’s Turkish source in parallel, despite the book being monolingual.

5.1.2. Jon Thompson on *Madrigals*

Read entirely from a target-language perspective, Thompson offers what many translators would consider a less than ideal reader-response - ‘Ideally... reviews of foreign literature would be written by critics fluent in both the source and the target languages with enough space to discuss not just the work and its cultural context, but the translation as well’ (Lewis 2011). Nevertheless, Thompson gives close and detailed readings of the English poems, perceptive and sensitive to their nuances, willingly engaging Berk as an authentic voice:

Berk’s poems seem to suggest that because there is no absolute border between the subject and the object, the individual and the world, everything is a part of everything else, essentially indivisible: ‘You were whirring forests strange birds wild rivers.’ Even if lines like this are read as only metaphors for the beloved, their multiplicity and inventiveness appears to insist upon the odd inseparability of experience. The obligation of the poems in this sequence then becomes one of not simplifying experience. The speaker in them sees a world in which strange beauty and strange horror rival one another in almost equal measure and each poem renames this world in an effort to do justice to its wild heterogeneity. (Thompson 2008)

Thompson's ability to read Berk into a broadly Sufi narrative of yearning, with reference to the concept of 'the beloved', is a profoundly insightful contextualisation which allows him to directly address two of the fundamental weaknesses of reviews of literature in translation highlighted by Bernofsky, Cohen, and Grossman (2011): firstly, the translated work's contribution 'to the literary life of the English language, to our speech, art, and sensibility' (Bernofsky, Cohen, and Grossman 2011); and secondly, Berk's manner of challenging and expanding 'the boundaries of literary practice in English' (Bernofsky, Cohen, and Grossman 2011).

5.1.3 Alev Adil on *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde*

As a native Turkish speaker, Adil is familiar with the source poetry from which the *İkinci Yeni* anthology is drawn. Her contextualisation provides a rapid and relevant historico-political overview of the poets' emergence, their shared practices and their development of a common poetics. Adil cites the anthology's main role as introductory, describing it as a 'spirited and idiosyncratic introduction' (2010) and later as 'an intoxicating introduction to the ghosts that haunted the five most renowned Second New poets, and continue to haunt the Turkish literary imagination today' (2010).

Adil also references Surrealism and Romanticism in the target-culture context as detectable echoes of a more familiar European modernism but is careful to situate the poetry geographically in Istanbul and historically in the contemporary political traumas of modern Turkey:

This is an Istanbul haunted by the ghosts of its Greek inhabitants, expelled from Istanbul in 1955; of a people haunted by the ghost of a centuries-old multicultural, multilingual Empire now rendered foreign and incomprehensible (2010).

Bizarrely for a review in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, Adil mentions the translator only once, and then in relation to the selection's sequencing, and makes no mention of the poems as translations, their quality, or the manner of their production.

5.1.4 Christopher Whyte on *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde*

Whyte, in contrast, is willing to tackle the translations directly, as English versions that ‘read easily and naturally, despite occasional strangenesses’ (Whyte 2010). Among the ‘strangenesses’ he cites ‘lokanta’, ‘musa’ and ‘spermaceti’ as words that ‘could usefully have been glossed, or rendered otherwise’ (2010). Speaking of the anthology as a whole he writes:

Complex, inscrutable, capricious and inventive, the poems he [Messo] has chosen suggest that, where Turkey is concerned, links to European literature pass first and foremost via Paris (2010).

Where Whyte recognises difference, in Berk for example, he makes efforts to contextualise it:

Berk’s references to European, indeed christian culture, which in a British context give a welcome sense of familiarity and recognition, may well ring both exotic and transgressive for a Turkish reader (2010).

Despite Whyte’s implied equation of Christian and European, he is right to identify Berk’s references to Christianity as transgressive in the source culture, knowing Berk’s Christians to be Greek and Armenian – orthodoxies with spiritual identities in the east, - whose very identity as part of an Anatolian and Middle Eastern spiritual nexus has been the controversial subject of rejection and erasure in Republican Turkey.

5.1.5 Murat Nemet-Nejat on Everything

Nemet-Nejat’s review for the *Journal of Turkish Literature* focuses on three books by İlhan Berk, *A Leaf about to Fall*, *Madrigals*, and *The Book of Things*, and on the anthologies *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde* and *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets*. Nemet-Nejat looks closely at the translation strategies employed in each of the books and offers detailed explications of selected texts to support a critical position that is fiercely source-orientated. He raises particular concerns where he identifies infidelities in semantic equivalence and flags

stylistic features such as voice and rhythm as crucially dependent on the translator's 'inner' reading of the Turkish source. Nemet-Nejat writes: '... Messo's translations, as a rule, do not condescend and are fully committed to the works undertaken' (2012: 90). He cautions, however, that the 'challenge for Messo is, in my opinion, the ability to transcend the literary and intellectual conventions of his background and the limits of his sensibility as a poet born in England and writing in English' (2012: 90). This is one of several discrete assumptions that personalise Nemet-Nejat's judgements and deflect from an otherwise astute and illuminating review.

In conclusion Nemet-Nejat divides my work into what he sees as two distinct groups, placing Berk in one and the anthologies in the other:

Messo's translations of İlhan Berk's poetry are first rate. He has a fine ear for Berk's music, his Eda, the peculiar, joyful, idiosyncratic movements of his lines. Particularly, *The Book of Things* is a significant achievement, enabling a reader to discover in English the startling originality of Berk's poetry (2012: 110).

Such praise is tempered by Nemet-Nejat's more emotive and negative reaction to my anthologised work:

On the other hand, *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde* and *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets* are extremely problematic. The failure of the former is caused by two factors complementing each other. First, his translations are guided by a ghost of "common English usage". He trims his language to fit that standard whereas Turkish, by nature, is more baroque, movement driven, nuanced in syntax and imagery. The result is often a flattening of the originals. Second, though Messo is semantically careful in his translations, he as a rule misses (or ignores) the syntactical disruptions the Second New poets create by moving the poems to a metaphysical level (2012: 110)

Nemet-Nejat's twenty-five page review-essay is the first serious academic attention my work has received. It is an essay filled with rich, carefully observed detail in close readings of the translations. It also contains many insights about the Turkish language and Turkish poetry in general. It is, however, offset by Nemet-Nejat's willingness to allow personal feeling to inform his critical judgement, by frequent errors in quotation and spelling, and a willingness to *infer* ideological bias where

textual support is either weak or absent. Critics of the review process for translations are perhaps right to observe that every ‘translation is inevitably flawed, yet its weaknesses, like its strengths, can be illuminating as long as the reviewers are held to high enough standards’ (Lewis 2011). Despite its faults, Nemet-Nejat’s review-essay is an important acknowledgement of my contribution to the field of Turkish poetry in translation.

There are many insightful observations made in these critical readings, but, as I suggest in my descriptive commentary, few are of a kind that substantively address the poems as works of translation; fewer still are informed by either knowledge of or acquaintance with the source culture. They have much to say about their readers but say little about the processes by which the translations come into being in their final printed form. The critical introspection required of a translator – that ability to ‘go it alone’ – may prove to be a more reliable asset, and coupled with a knowledge of translation theory ‘may alert the practitioner to phenomena s/he would not otherwise have noticed’ (Boase-Beier 2006: 111).

6. Conclusions

Subdividing the period of literary translation from 1900 to 2012 into three allows us to see more clearly changing tastes and attitudes towards Turkish poetry, particularly in light of increased availability of financial support for translators and increased opportunities for publishing literary works in translation. This has to be seen, however, in a context in which the ideological motivation of important and prominent translators imposes limits and restrictions on opportunities for greater understanding of modern Turkish poetry by censoring the selection of poets and the choice of poetry translated into English.

The translation tradition that exists for Turkish poetry exerts a powerful influence over the behaviour of translators. Its dominant values and constraints are capable of shaping and affecting decision-making at all levels of the translation process. Recognizing a translation’s strengths and weaknesses, understanding its contextual

value within this tradition, leads to real gains in a translator's working knowledge which better equips readers and translators to appreciate a given translation's cultural place, value, and necessity.

As I repeatedly demonstrate, contextualisation is crucially important for understanding poems translated from Turkish. Reader-responses, in the form of critical reviews, have the potential to play a significant role in developing contexts for new 'foreign' authors. In reality, however, reviews rarely fulfil this potential given the tendency of reviewers to decontextualize the poems and to misread them culturally. The best translated poetry, however, tells us *by showing* and survives this occlusion by implicitly re-examining and reconceptualising the values and assumptions inscribed in its own making and reception.

Differences in practice, the kind that distinguish my work from the work of my contemporaries, permit us to read even subtle variation, as departures from traditional practice that are capable of effecting dynamic shifts of perspective in the translated poem. At the same time tradition helps make sense of shifts from the point of view of translation practice. This dialogue between practice and theory, which I situate at the centre of my translation projects, has the potential to considerably reshape both our knowledge of target texts *as translations* and our understanding of source poems.

It may be an obvious point to make, but the extent to which our knowledge and understanding of Turkish poetry evolves is crucially dependent on the extent to which individual translators continue to seek out new audiences and to stimulate new appetites for poetry in translation. Two recent anthologies, Murat Nemet-Nejat's *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry* and my own *From This Bridge: Contemporary Turkish Women Poets*, dramatically illustrate *how* this can be done, while at the same time implicitly challenging traditional attitudes in terms of *what* gets translated, *why*, and by *whom*. More significantly, these new translations place windows where previously there were walls. They invite their readers to seek in the framed view of the anthology contexts that considerably expand our understanding and enjoyment of Turkish poetry.

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