

An Anthology of
Turkish Poetry

by

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Preface

Turkish literature is very rich, but not very widely available in English language translation. Some English language sources on the web for Turkish Poetry include:

<http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/>

<http://www.poetrytranslation.org/poems/from/turkey>

<http://www.poemhunter.com/nazim-hikmet/poems/>

http://www.ottomansouvenir.com/General/Turkish_Poetry.htm

<http://jacketmagazine.com/34/eda-poems.shtml>

<http://www.turkishclass.com/turkish/poetry/poems.php>

<http://www.transcript-review.org/en/issue/transcript-30-poetry-from-turkey/new-turkish-poetry/bejan-matur>

Poetry in the Turkish language is quite varied, including folk poetry, poetry of the Ottoman court, as well as contemporary poetry. Please see the Wikipedia page on Turkish Poetry for further background:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry_of_Turkey

The selections in this Anthology are all original translations. They are simply some favorites, and are not (yet) organized in any particular order. Please enjoy!

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Selected Turkish Folk Songs

Poems by AHMET ARIF

INSIDE

Have you heard, stone wall?
Iron door, blind window,
My pillow, my bunk, my chair,
My hidden sad picture for which
I risk death again and again,
Have you heard?
My visitor brought green onions,
My cigarettes smell of cloves
Spring has come to the mountains of my land

EVENING COMES EARLY IN PRISON

Evening comes early in prison.
If you were a dragon it would not help.
Not your skill in fighting,
Nor your hell-hearted bravery.
They do no good against the longing,
Finely creeping in and taking over.

Evening comes early in prison.
The seven latches come down
On the seven gates.
Suddenly the yard is in tears.
Across the way, against the wall,

Three stems of night pleasure,
Three pansy plants

It is all the same terrible love:
Cloud in the sky, apricot on the branch.
Imprisonment starts to hurt.
The blackness boredom ...
Someone talks of the Kurd's bride
And I pace next to my bunk
And fantasize impossible things
Ridiculous, naïve, childish ...

To be shot and lost I think,
Naked in a fight.
It must be fair, I think,
Friendship and enmity.
But nothing happens,
The bayonets are fixed.
The guard's night shift begins ...

With passion I strike a match,
In two drags half my cigarette is gone,
I inhale the smoke deeply,
I inhale the smoke as if to kill myself.
I know you will say: "You too?"
But evening comes early in prison.
And outside a hot-blooded spring,

I love you,
Madly

I WORE OUT SHACKLES LONGING FOR YOU

You, to explain you.

To good children, to heroes.

You, to explain you,

To the dishonorable;

To insensitive, bastardly lies.

How many endless cold winters?

The wolf sleeps, the bird sleeps, the prison sleeps.

And outside a roaring flowing world ...

Only I did not sleep,

How many springs, love?

I wore out shackles longing for you.

Let me put blood-red roses in your hair,

One on this side,

One on the other ...

You, to shout you,

To bottomless wells,

To flowing stars,

To the insignificant matchstick ...

The matchstick floating

On the ocean's most abandoned wave.

To one who has lost the sparkle of lost loves,
Who has lost kisses,
Who has no claim in the suddenly descending night,
Who with a glass, a cigarette, just dreams on,
You, to explain you ...
Your non-existence is hell's other name
I'm cold, don't close your eyes ...

YOUR LOVE

Your love did not desert me,
I was hungry, I was thirsty,
The night was treacherous and dark.
A body lonely, a body quiet,
A body torn apart ...
And my hands manacled,
I was without tobacco and sleep,
Your love did not desert me.

ANATOLIA¹

I have given cradles to Noah,
Swings and hammocks,
Your mother Eve is still my baby,
I am Anatolia,
Do you know me?

I am ashamed,
Ashamed of poverty,
Naked in front of all ...
My seedlings are cold,
My harvests are small.
In this world of
Brotherhood, labor
And unity,
A world of the blooming roses of atom bombs,
And of poets and scientists,
I am alone,
An alone and distant land.
Do you understand?

I have been milked for millennia,
With their terrible horses they tore apart
My gentle morning slumbers,
Emperors, conquerors, and robbers,
Taxed my lands.
I paid no mind to Alexander
Or to Sultan Murat.
They have left without a trace!
I have acknowledged my friends
And lasted ...
Do you understand?

If you only knew how I love,
Koroglu²,
Karayilan²,
And the unknown soldier ...
Also Pir Sultan² and Bedrettin².
And books don't tell ...
A great love ...
If you only knew how much
They loved me.
If you only knew, how those at Urfa³
Laughed at death,
From the minarets, the shelters
And the cypress trees.
I definitely want you to know,
Do you hear me?

Don't stand there so ...
So sad, so helpless ...
Wherever you may be,
Inside or out, in class or at your desk,
Walk at him ... at him ...
Spit in the executioner's face,
Spit at the opportunist, the intriguer, the traitor ...

Struggle by learning,
Struggle by working,
With your nails, with your teeth,

With hope, with love, with dreams.
Struggle; don't disgrace me.

See how I can be rebuilt,
By your young and honest hands.
Daughters,
And sons in my future,
Each one an indispensable piece of the earth.
The buds of my thousand-year longing,
I kiss your eyes,
Your eyes.
You are my only hope,
Do you realize?

Notes:

1. Asia minor; the Asian part of Turkey.
2. Koroglu, Karayilan, Pir Sultan and Bedrettin are all Turkish folk figures/heroes.
3. A city in southeastern Turkey where an important battle in the Turkish war of independence took place.

THIRTY THREE BULLETS

1.
This is Mengene Mountain¹
When the sun rises in Van²
This mountain is Nemrut's³ baby
At sunrise across from Nemrut
One side is avalanche prone; Caucasus horizon.

One side faces Mecca; Persian property.
On the summit the icicle bunches
Escaped pigeons by the waterholes
And the herds of roe deer,
The quail flocks ...

Bravery cannot be denied
In one-on-one combat they are unbeaten
For thousands of years, the people here.
Come, how can we deliver the news
They are not a flock of cranes
Not a constellation in the sky
A heart with thirty three bullets
Thirty three blood fountains
Unflowing,
They have become a lake on this mountain ...

2.

A rabbit ran from the foot of the hill
Its back is speckled grey
Its stomach milk white
A poor two-lived mountain rabbit
Scared to death, so helpless
It makes a man regret
Uncrowded ... uncrowded the hour
It was a faultless naked dawn
One of the thirty three looked

The heavy emptiness of hunger in his stomach
His hair and beard long,
A flea on his collar;
He looked, his shirt sleeves rolled,
A hell-hearted warrior,
First at the poor rabbit then away.

He remembered his flintlock,
Unhappy under his pillow,
He remembered the pony from the valley below,
Blue beads on its forelocks,
White on its forehead,
Three of its hooves white,
A restless, wild and graceful
Chestnut mare.
How they had flown past Hozat⁴
Now if only he had not been,
Helpless and tied,
A cold barrel behind his back,
He could have taken refuge in the heights.
The mountains, friendly mountains, know their strength,
God knows these hands won't shame a man,
Craftsman's hands,
That in the first shot
Blow away the burning cigarette's ashes,
The viper's tongue
That sparkles in the sun.

These eyes did not fail even once
These eyes expected
The destruction of avalanche-awaiting passes
The snowy, soft treachery
Of the cliffs ...
Hopeless
He would be shot
The order was final,
Let his eyes be eaten by blind reptiles
His heart by vultures ...

3.

I have been shot
In a secluded pass in the mountains
At morning prayer time
I lie
Bloody, stretched out ...

I have been shot
My dream blacker than night
No one to interpret it for the good.
They take my life prematurely
I cannot make it into the books
A general has given orders
I have been shot, without hearing or trial

Friend, write this just as I say

Some may think it a rumor
These are not breasts of rose
They are dum-dum bullets
In my torn mouth ...

4.

They executed the death sentence,
They bathed in blood
The blue mountain smoke
The half-asleep early morning breeze
Then they camped there
And carefully they searched
My breast pocket,
They tore apart
My hand-woven red belt from Kirman⁵
They took my beads and tobacco case,
All presents from Iran ...

We are friends, we are kin, tied with blood
To the villages across the border
We have exchanged women for centuries
We are neighbors.
Our chickens often mix.
Not out of ignorance,
Out of poverty,
We have ignored passports
This is our fatal crime,

Now we are known as outlaws
As smugglers
As thieves
As traitors ...

Friend, write this just as I say
Some may think it a rumor
These are not breasts of rose
They are dum-dum bullets
In my torn mouth ...

5.

Hit me, damn it,
Hit me.
I don't die easily.
My essence is tempered in fire,
I have a standing promise
To those who understand.
My father gave his eyes at the Urfa⁶ front
And three of his brothers
Three gentle cypresses,
Three chunks of mountain still thirsty for life.
When from the walls, the hills, the minarets,
The children of friends and kin
Stood against the French bullets,
His moustache newly grown
My younger uncle Nazif

Handsome,
Light
Good horseman
Said strike brothers
The day of honor is here
And reared his horse on its hind feet.

Friend, write this just as I say
Some may think it a rumor
These are not breasts of rose
They are dum-dum bullets
In my torn mouth ...

Notes:

1. Mengene is a mountain eastern Turkey
2. Van is a city in southeastern Turkey
3. Nemrut is large mountain in eastern Turkey
4. Hozat is a town in eastern Turkey
5. Kirman is a city in Iran
6. Urfa is a city in southeastern Turkey where one of the battles of the Turkish war of independence was fought

Poems by NAZIM HIKMET

THE HORSEMAN'S SONG

Galloping from farthest Asia,
jutting into the Mediterranean like the head of a mare,
this country is ours.

Wrists in blood, teeth clenched, feet bare
and the soil beneath like a silk carpet,
this hell, this heaven is ours.

Close the gates of dependence, never to be reopened,
eliminate man's servitude to man,
this invitation is ours.

To live single and free like a tree
and in brotherhood like a forest,
this longing is ours.

THE LAST BUS

Midnight the last bus,
The tickets are bought.
There is no bad news waiting for me at home,
Nor is there a feast.
Separation awaits me.
I walk towards separation fearless
And without sorrow.
I am very close to the great darkness.
I can watch the world now,
Calm and comfortable.

A friend's deception does not surprise me now,
The knife he stabs me with as he shakes my hand.
Useless, the enemy no longer scares me.
I have gone through the forest of fetishes
Chopping,
How easily they fell.
I looked again at my beliefs
Thankfully most of them were pure.
I had never felt so purified before,
Nor so free.
I am very close to the great darkness.
I can watch the world now,
Calm and comfortable.
I don't lift my head from my work and look,
From the past before me appear,
A word,
 A smell,
 A hand waiving,
The word is friendly,
 The smell is beautiful,
 It is my beloved waiving.
The invitation of memories no longer saddens me,
I have no complaints about memories,
There is nothing I have complaints about anyway,
Not even about my heart
That aches without end, like an infected tooth.

LIKE KEREM*

The air is leaden thick!

I'm

shouting

out

loud.

Run

I'm calling

you

to melt

lead ...

He says to me:

-You will be reduced to ashes by your own voice!

by

burning

like

Kerem ...

"Troubles

are many,

sympathizers

few."

The

ears

of

hearts

are deaf ...

The air is leaden thick! ...

I say to him:

-Let me be reduced to ashes

by

burning

like

Kerem ...

If I don't burn

If you don't burn

If we don't burn,

Then how can

darkness

receive

the light ...

The air is pregnant like soil.

The air is leaden thick.

I'm

shouting

out

loud.

Run

I'm calling

you

to melt

lead ...

Note:

* Kerem is the hero of a Turkish folk legend who is consumed by fire when he looks at his beloved (Aslı) before he is supposed to (Orpheus looking back to see Eurydice).

IN BERLIN

In Berlin at the Astoria restaurant

there was a waitress,

a girl like a drop of silver.

She would smile at me over the heavy, loaded trays.

She looked like the girls of the country I have lost

But I do not know why

she would sometimes have a black eye.

I never had the chance

to sit at one of the tables she waited on.

He never once sat at the tables I waited on.

He was an old man.

I think he was ill too,

he had a special diet.

He knew how to give me long sad looks

but he did not know German.

Three months, three meals, he came and went,

then he disappeared.

Maybe he has returned to his country

maybe he has died before he could return.

Poems by FAZIL HÜSNÜ DAĞLARCA

GREENING THE EARTH AND SKY

He comes on a beam of light

Mevlana*

Mevlana isn't,

Mevlana

Mevlana is,

Mevlana

He leaves on a beam of light

Note:

* Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, known simply as Rumi, was a 13th century Persian poet, living in Anatolia, who was also a jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian and a Sufi mystic.

HOME FRONT I

The son of Mehmet had six sons,

Six poplars six willows six

They grew with the day and night

Six poplars six willows six

They lived so fast like the wind

Six poplars six willows six

So tall, so broad, so thick

Six poplars six willows six

The fields and pastures emerald green

Six poplars six willows six
Hands plow, hands scythe, hands stone
Six poplars six willows six

The son of Mehmet had six sons
Six poplars six willows six
Open to the seven levels of the heavens
Six poplars six willows six

HOME FRONT II

The father's name became the sons'
All six were Mehmet, every branch
Their faces a face
Their eyes an eye
All six were Mehmet, every branch

The youngest was 13 years
All six were Mehmet, every branch
Their ages 4 or 9 years apart
The oldest had reached 48
All six were Mehmet, every branch

They brought joy to the fields and animals
All six were Mehmet, every branch
Their heights a height
Their hands a hand
All six were Mehmet, every branch

VOLUNTEERS II

We came to division headquarters, they said: "Halt!"

We saluted at attention

"We're volunteers," said tall Mehmet

They took us to the Commander

"Hello," said a starry white man

We saluted at attention

The Commander asked: "Who are you? Where from?"

We saluted at attention

"We're brothers, we'll fight," said tall Mehmet in a breath

That instant a glow passed through the tent

The Commander looked us over, one by one

We saluted at attention

"Bless you my sons," said our commander lovingly

We saluted at attention

"Assign them all to the first regiment," he said

That previous glow brightened a little

"Thank you," said tall Mehmet with his cavernous voice

We saluted at attention

VOLUNTEERS III

The regiment commander sure is young

He called us brothers, brothers we became

"God hasn't separated you, how can I?" he asked

He assigned all six to the First Company
He called us brothers, brothers we became

He asked us our names one by one
"Mehmet," said tall Mehmet
"Mehmet," said crazy Mehmet
"Mehmet," said grey Mehmet
He called us brothers, brothers we became

The Major, laughing, said: "and you?"
"Mehmet," said broad Mehmet
"Mehmet," said white Mehmet
The Major then turned red with joy
He kissed each one of us, said "bless you"
He called us brothers, brothers we became

THE SIX MEHMETS' SQUADRON

The Captain could not bear to separate us either
He made the six of us a squadron
Tall Mehmet became our Corporal
Tall Mehmet: Gallipoli, Caucasus, Yemen

Our elder had been a corporal in those places
The winds of blood and fire blew over us
We crawled, we rolled, we jumped
Our palms split open on the hills and fields

Those three fronts became our chests
Such hard work, you had to see it
We learned three military arts in three days
You can't talk back to a corporal

Our squadron was like a single man, so united
We communicated via winks and whistles
Even when we lay down we felt well rested
As if we always carried the flag

Poems by YAHYA KEMAL BEYATLI

SNOW MUSIC

This is the composition of a thousand year night
This is the enduring sound of the snow
Mournful like prayers at a secluded monastery
An endless chorus from a hundred mouths
The sound of an organ comes from afar
Slavic melancholy I've experienced without joy
My mind is far from this city, this age
Tanburi Cemil Bey* plays on an old recording
Suddenly I am happy with the desire to hear
My heart is filled with that sound from Istanbul
I imagined the snow and darkness faded
For a full night, in my sleep, I am now on the Bay.

Note:

* Nineteenth century Ottoman tanbour virtuoso and composer

SILENT SHIP

If the moment has arrived to lift anchor from time
A ship going to the unknown leaves this port
It sails silently as if it had no passengers
Not a handkerchief, not a hand wave at departure
Those standing on the pier are grieved by this journey
They stare at the bleak horizon, tears in their eyes

Poor souls! This is not the last ship to leave
This is not the last mourning in a sad life.
Hopelessly the lovers and beloved wait in this world
They do not know the departed will not return
All of them must be content where they have gone
Many years have passed and none return.

Poems by ORHAN VELI KANIK

LISTENING TO ISTANBUL

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

First a soft breeze blows;

Slowly they stir

The leaves in the trees:

Distant, very distant,

The water carrier's endless ringing grows;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

Just then birds fly by;

High up, in huge flocks, screaming.

Fishing nets are being drawn out of the water;

The water touches a woman's toes;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

The cool covered bazaar;

The crowded Mahmutpaşa market;

Pigeon filled courtyards.

The sound of hammers come from the docks,

The smell of sweat and the spring breeze juxtaposed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

A villa with its secluded boathouses,
Drunk with the flavor of past days;
Under a dying south wind's force
I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;
A coquette walks down the street;
Swearing, singing and flirting galore.
Something falls from her hand to the ground;
It must be a rose;
I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed;
A bird flutters about your skirt;
I know that your face is flushed;
I know that your lips are wet;
A white moon is rising behind the trees
I can tell; your heartbeat is so full;
I am listening to Istanbul.

HOY LU-LU

I would also like to have
Black friends with strange, unheard-of names.
I would like to travel with them
From the harbors of Madagascar to China.
I would like to listen to one of them
On the deck of the ship, facing the stars,

Singing the song "Hoy Lu-Lu" every night.

And I would like to run into one of them, one day,

All of a sudden ...

In Paris.

FOR YOU

For you, my human friends

They are all for you

The night is for you, as well as the day

Daylight in the day, moonlight at night

Leaves in the moonlight

Curiosity in the leaves

Intelligence in the leaves

A thousand-and-one greens in the daylight

The yellows are for you, as well as the pinks

Skin touching a palm

It's warmth

It's tenderness

The comfort in lying down

The Hello's are for you

For you the masts rocking in the harbor

The names of the days

The names of the months

The paint on the boats is for you

For you the mailman's feet

The potter's hands

The sweat pouring from foreheads
The bullets spent at the front
For you the graves and gravestones
The prisons, the handcuffs, the death sentence
For you
They are all for you.

INDOORS

A window, a window is best
You can watch the birds fly by
And you won't have to see the rest

BEAUTIFUL WEATHER

Beautiful weather such as this has ruined me.
It was in weather such as this
When I resigned my government job.
I became addicted to tobacco in such weather.
In such weather I fell in love.
I forgot to bring home the bread and salt
In weather such as this.
My poetry writing disease
Always recurred in such weather.
Beautiful weather such as this has ruined me.

Poems by CAHİT SITKI TARANCI

MY DAILY SONG

While the city is depressing,
The wind is inviting,
The future free,
And the body young,
While the white sails
Open daily in thousands
On the blue water,
Why not say goodbye
To the city
And be a passenger,
While the city is depressing,
The wind is inviting,
The future free,
And the body young?

AGE 35 POEM

Age 35! The halfway mark on our journey.
Like Dante we are in the middle of life.
The essence of youth disappears
(no use moaning and groaning)
and pays no mind to your tears.

Are those snowflakes on my temples?
Is that wrinkled face really mine?

Are those purple rings under my eyes?
My old friend the mirror,
I am now starting to despise.

How a person changes with time
Any old photo I look at is not mine
Where are those days of passion and joy
That smiling man is surely not me
Its a lie that I'm happy, just a ploy

Hazy memories of first love
Even those memories are strangers
Our old friends: our young partners in crime
Have gone their separate ways
Our loneliness only grows with time

The sky actually has many colors
And I just noticed that a rock is hard,
That water drowns, and fire burns
That every day brings a feeling of dread
I only learned these truths after many turns

The red and yellow fall colors
I embrace them more every year
What are those vultures circling?
Who died, whose funeral is that?
Whose garden is that in ruin?

Death hangs over everyone's head
One day you just don't wake up
Who knows where, when, at what age?
You will have your last say
On your final throne: your gravestone

Poems by Yunus Emre

YOU, YOU

Your love has taken my self away

What I need is you, you

I burn for you both night and day

What I need is you, you!

I do not rejoice in existence

Nor worry over nothingness

I am occupied by your lovingness,

What I need is you, you!

Discussion is what the religious need,

The other world is what believers need,

The beloved is what lovers need,

What I need is you, you!

Heaven, heaven as they call it,

A few palaces with a few angels in it ..

Give that to whoever wants it,

What I need is you, you!

YUNUS stands my name,

Each passing day feeds my flame,

In both worlds my desire is the same,

What I need is you, you!

WATER WHEEL

Water wheel why do you moan?

I have troubles, so I moan.

I have come to love God,

That is why I moan.

They call me the troubled wheel,

My waters rush on by.

God has commanded thus.

I have troubles, so I moan.

I am a mountain tree.

Neither sweet not bitter.

To God I am grateful.

I have troubles, so I moan.

They cut my logs from the mountain,

And upset my various orders.

I am a tireless minstrel,

I have troubles so I moan.

I draw my water from below,

Turn and pour it from up high.

Come see what I must endure.

I have troubles, so I moan.

YUNUS, the earth-born do not laugh,
A person does not reach his goal.
In this world of death no one is left.
I have troubles, so I moan.

Poem by KAYGUSUZ ABDAL

I bough a goose from a woman
Its neck is longer than a pipe
May forty idiots dry up its blood
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

Eight of us gather wood
Nine of us feed the fire
The goose still lifts it's head and looks
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

We paid a few pennies for the goose
Its meat is tougher than its bones
I've neither pan left nor spoon
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

This isn't a goose, it's a monster
For forty years it's travelled on magic mountain
And strengthened its wings and tail
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

We put the goose on a stove
And it flew away somewhere
Hey, what is this Hacı Aga*
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

My goose's wings are yellow
Its bones are worse than its meat
Don't sell it in good health woman
For forty days I've boiled it, it won't cook!

Note:

* Haci Aga literally means "Pilgrim Lord" and is a common title of respect

Poem by DERTLI

This is called the stringed saz
It obeys neither scripture nor the judge.
It helps the player understand himself,
Where is the devil in this?

Its string comes from Venice,
And the arm from the Juniper tree.
Hey God's stupid creation,
Where is the devil in this?

Wash for prayer and it won't say you did,
If you pray it won't say you did.
And it won't take bribes like the judge did,
Where is the devil in this?

Is it inside or outside?
Is it in the tuning keys?
Or is it in the engravings?
Where is the devil in this?

Its body is from the Mulberry tree,
And the arm is tied with hemp.
Hey, you donkey of a man!
Where is the devil in this?

Like DERTLI it wears no turban,
And has no sandals on its feet.
It has no horns and no tail,
Where is the devil in this?

Poems by KARACAOĞLAN

I.

As Cukurova* puts on its holiday clothes
As it strips off its nakedness
As February chases away the winter winds
Mountains, it would be fitting to call you heaven

Your trees become decorated with leaves
Your stones believe in a unity
Flowers spring up all over your chest
Mountains, your springs roar and flow

The wind blows and your branches stir
Your birds sing to each other
This holiday makes the ruins cold
Mountains, why does the hyacinth look sad?

KARACAOĞLAN looks at you and rejoices
As he rejoices his heart begins to burn
All my troubles within me stir and grow
Mountains, my joy collapses with sorrow.

Note:

* Cukurova is a large valley in southern Turkey.

II.

White swans migrate from their homes
Warriors are restless from their woes
At morning prayers, from behind the mountain
I counted six beauties came to the spring

Three are of average height and very pretty
Three are quite tall and glance around
I said: why is a white gazelle at the lake?
Six colorful quails came to the spring

KARACAOĞLAN again lost himself in ecstasy
He went and wandered in the sea of love
The spring cried because the beauties left
My heart burned in sympathy for the spring

III.

Death, don't tire yourself following me
Go away death, and come back later
You will take me in the end, you won't spare me
Go away death, and come back later

Just as I'm eating and drinking for a while
Eating and drinking and wandering in the meadows
You come again, as I'm running from you
Go away death, and come back later

I haven't bayed like the grey wolf
I haven't stood up against the deceitful world
I haven't met all my friends and peers
Go away death, and come back later

KARACAOĞLAN says, my troubles grow worse
In the garden the nightingales sing
Enough, just yesterday you took my mother and father
Go away death, and come back later

IV.

I looked beyond, but there is nothing
Go on deceitful world, I'm tired of you
I labored hard, it all went to waste
The life in my corpse, I'm tired of you

My load is heavy, it won't rise
Life's bows are of iron, they can't be drawn
I looked the world over for a coy girl
All the gossip in the world, I'm tired of you

This head of mine is troubled and worried
My belongings are packed, my brothers remain
Constantly tears run from my eyes
Don't cry my eyes, I'm tired of you

KARACAOĞLAN says: what happened to us?
Foaming blood covers our chests
My hours become months, my days become years
Unpassing black days, I'm tired of you

V.

I wish I could be smoke rising in the sky
I wish I could be a plant growing out of the earth
If only I could be red polka dotted cotton cloth
And my beloved could wrap me around her

I wish I could be the mark on her arm
I wish I could be the date she eats
If only I could be colorful mascara
And my beloved could put me on her eyes

KARACAOĞLAN, if I could be a servant
If I could be a belt for my beloved's waist
If only I could be a silken mattress
And my beloved spread me beneath her

VI.

Beauty, how your beauty has grown
Since I saw you last
Your black hair has curled
... it's been so long since it was braided

Your rose in the garden has bloomed
Your mad nightingale has begun to sing
Your breast has grown dirty
... it's been so long since it was last suckled

I washed my handkerchief
And hung it on a rose branch to dry
I have forgotten what my name was
... it's been so long since I was last asked

Quickly I caught up from behind you
I bent over and kissed your face
I used to know your name, I forgot
... it's been so long since I last called you

My beloved is angry with me
She has let her hair down to her neck
She has cut off her love from me
... it's been so long since she was last loved

Call KARACAOĞLAN call
A stone grows heavy where it falls
A man grows cold from the one he loves
When it's been so long since he was last hugged

Poem by SEYYID NESIMI*

Today I went to my sage
The sage's face is a rose, a rose
He sits in his rightful throne
His throne is a rose, a rose

They make a balance of roses
They weigh roses with roses
They buy roses, sell roses
The marketplace is a rose, a rose

The earth is a rose, the stone is a rose
The dry is a rose, the damp is a rose
In this very special garden
His tall figure is a rose, a rose

A mill of roses turns around
And in it roses are ground
The water flows, the wheel turns
The dam, the spring is a rose, a rose

A white rose and a red rose
The pair grew in a garden
They glance at each other
The thorn is a rose, the flower a rose

Come, come Seyyid Nesimi
A song of God is a rose, a rose
This strange nightingale that sings
His grief and cries are for a rose, a rose

Note:

* Seyyid Nesimi was a mystic who believed in pantheism. He belonged to the Bektāşi order (one of the largest Sufi mystical orders) and he was an apprentice to the sage he mentions in this poem.

Poems/Songs by PIR SULTAN ABDAL

Be Pleasant to Your Ox

He brings strong logs from the mountains

He brings them and the fire burns them

Every home's governing rests on the ox

Farmers, be pleasant to your ox

Make a low roof over the ox's head

Don't leave him wet, put dry hay 'neath him

After every plowing kiss his eyes

Farmers, be pleasant to your ox

Lord, Lord (Hudey, Hudey)*

If I were a nightingale, if I flew in and perched

To stand in the court of God

If I were a rosy red apple

If I sprouted on your branch, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a rosy red apple

If you came to sprout on my branch

If I were a silver clad crooked staff

If I were to land a blow, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a sliver clad crooked staff

If you came to land a blow
If I were a handful of millet
If I was scattered on the ground, what would you say?
Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a handful of millet
If you came to be scattered on the ground
If I were a beautiful grey partridge
If I gathered up every grain, what would you say?
Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a beautiful grey partridge
If you came to gather up every grain
If I were a young hawk
If I seized you and flew off, what would you say?
Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a young hawk
If you came to seize me and fly off
If I were a squall of sleet
If I broke your wing, what would you say?
Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a squall of sleet
If you came to break my wing
If I were a wild nor'easter
If I came to gust and disperse, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you are a wild nor'easter

If you came to gust and disperse

If I had a great sickness

If I lay before you, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you had a great sickness

If you came to lay before me

If I were the Angel of Death

If I took your soul, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were the Angel of Death

If you came to take my soul

If I were a subject destined for heaven

If I ascended to heaven, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord ...

If you were a subject destined for heaven

If you ascended to heaven

If you found your master PIR SULTAN

If we ascended together, what would you say?

Lord, lord; Lord, lord

Note: * This is a song of dueling minstrels, a boy and a girl, who hand off the stringed instrument (saz) to each other for each alternating verse

Poem by EMRAH

In the morn I called at a sapling,
I said are you sleepy? She said No, No!
Her white dimpled hands were painted with henna¹,
I said is it a holiday? She said No, No!

I said what is a pearl? She said my teeth;
I said what is a pencil? She said my eyebrow.
I said what is fifteen? She said my age;
I said is there more? She said No, No!

I said what is Erzurum²? She said my homeland,
I said will you come? She said it is my road.
I said who is EMRAH? She said my slave,
I said will you sell him? She said No, No!

Notes:

1. It is a custom in rural Turkey for women to paint their hands with henna at weddings and other special occasions.
2. Erzurum is the name of a province, and its capital city, in northeastern Turkey.

Poem by BURSALI HALİL

Roads that wind and straighten

Are they lonely like me?

Floods that flow with a roar

Are they lonely like me?

In the day and in the night

The star we are enchanted by

The star up in the sky

Is it lonely like me?

Bloody tears flow from my eyes

And embroider my heart's wounds

Birds that leave the nest

Are they lonely like me?

Floods that flow with a roar

Winds that blow at sunset

Serfs that leave their lord

Are they lonely like me?

HALİL says: Two goals

Stir in the heart

Those separated from their beloved

Are they lonely like me?

Poem by GEVHERİ

Hazel eyed shy beauty
I fear for you from blood
Not only from blood, hey beauty
I fear for you from life!

Don't look about you like that
Don't put my jealousy to a test
Don't put your hand on your breast
I fear for you from you!

GEVHERİ says, I am a good man
My troubles will not leave my heart
I am wolf, you are a lamb
I fear for you from me!

Poem by AŞIK CEVDET

It's like a cloud, it's like a bird
Like a fantasy or a dream
It sketches an ocean before my eyes
This wave of cigarette smoke

Longing, domestic problems, love problems
The generous Lord has given me every problem
It tells everyone I am troubled
This wave of cigarette smoke

My whole village appears smoky
My coy mistress is going to fetch water
It makes my little heart ache with longing
This ring of cigarette smoke

May the Lord let me see my beloved
This year we'll go to the highlands
Like a strange traveller it leaves it's home
This stumbling cigarette smoke

Poem/Song by AŞIK VEYSEL

THE BLACK SOIL

Though I've turned to many as a friend

My loyal beloved is the black soil

I traveled endlessly and grew weary

My loyal bellowed is the black soil

I became attached to many a beauty

I was never rewarded with loyalty

I got my every wish from the soil

My loyal beloved is the black soil

It gave me sheep, lambs and milk

It gave me food, bread and meat

Gave little when I didn't beat it with a pick

My loyal beloved is the black soil

It has fed my ancestors since Adam

It has given me a variety of fruit

It has borne me on its back every day

My loyal beloved is the black soil

I rent its stomach with picks and hoes

I tore its face with my nails and hands

It still greeted me with a rose

My loyal beloved is the black soil

It laughed at me as I tortured it
This is no lie, everyone saw it
I gave it a seed, it gave me four gardens
My loyal beloved is the black soil

If I look to the sky I get air
If I look to the soil, I get a prayer
If I leave the soil, I have no lair
My loyal beloved is the black soil

Ask God if you have a wish
But stay near the soil to receive it
God granted the soil generosity
My loyal beloved is the black soil

If you seek the truth, here is a fact
God is close to man, and man to God
God's hidden treasure is the earth itself
My loyal beloved is the black soil

The soil covers up all our faults
It provides medicine to heal our wounds
With open arms it embraces me
My loyal beloved is the black soil

Whoever realizes this secret

Leaves the world an immortal act
One day it will take VEYSEL into its bosom
My loyal beloved is the black soil

Selected Turkish Folk Songs

Golden Girl (Altın Hızma, Mülayim)

Golden girl, gentle soul,
I ask your hand from the Lord.
In July on a summer day,
You perspire, I wipe away.

I've had my day, many a joyous kiss,
Yet I see your face and it is bliss

Golden girl, she is my pearl,
Her red blouse is unfurled.
I find myself tongue-tied,
Whatever I ask is denied.

I've had my day, many a joyous kiss,
Yet I see your face and it is bliss

Golden girl, her lips are red,
Matching the rosy cheeks on her head.
Come let's see each other my dear,
I soon will be far away I fear.

I've had my day, many a joyous kiss,
Yet I see your face and it is bliss

I'll be there as soon as the Hoopoes sing (İbibikler Öter Ötemez Ordayım)

Black-eyed beauty don't be sad ... just smile

I'll be there as soon as the Hoopoes sing

You say in your letter: "come now"

When the milk turns to cream, I'll be there

Even the mountains and rocks are in longing

My heart in my chest lacks patience

Night is falling beyond the mountains

When the sun is set, I'll be there

Spring is here, the sheep and lambs are playing

Two lovers have now waited four years

My black-eyed, the time for wedding affairs is neigh

When my national debt is paid, I'll be there

What Do the Fates Want from Me? (Bilmem Şu Feleğin Bende Nesi Var)

What do the Fates want from me?

Everywhere I go they demand a lover

As if I had a garden with purple hyacinth

In the month of January, my dear, they demand a rose

I was tired and sat by the roadside

Hoping beauties would gather 'round

I brought a declaration from the Sultan

That everyone, my dear, be united with their true love

Olive trees in the front yards

Have shed their leaves, leaving bare branches

If your heart is not for me

Call me brother and I'll call you sister