



## **Behçet Necatigil**

1916-1979

A poet who was born and died in Istanbul, he was well known for what Talat Halman called his “staunchly individualistic,” style. This award winning poet is still popular today and also appreciated for his lexicons and plays.

Selected poems translated by Fahri Öz

## **“Saffron Twig in Pure Heights” or on Translating Necatigil:**

My familiarity with Behçet Necatigil was at first rather limited, based on a couple of poems in some anthologies. This interest gradually turned into a passion when I embarked upon translating the complete poems of Emily Dickinson into Turkish. It may sound a bit off the wall but as a translator I seek an equivalent voice in Turkish, if there is one. (Or rather, this is a process that automatically and inevitably triggers itself when one begins to translate a literary text.) While rendering Whitman into Turkish, for example, I had the booming voice of Nâzım Hikmet as model; if not a replica of Whitmanic cadences, Hikmet was not irrelevant since both poets shared many thematic, sonic and formal traits.

While translating Dickinson, I also looked for poetically congenial voices in Turkish that might help me raise my translatorial voice with more confidence and less wavering— but to no avail.

Apparently there were no female Turkish poets who had a voice that could sing in unison with Dickinson. But later I realized my mistake: I was doggedly looking for a kindred voice among female poets. It could as well be a male voice. The poet I was looking for was one who employed language with strict economy, one who loved being enigmatic and cryptic, one that did not pay too much heed to formal metrical aspects or rhyme in poetry but still did not discard them

altogether. Behçet Necatigil, 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish poet, was surprisingly akin to the 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet Emily Dickinson in terms of his playfulness and ingenuity in the way he constructed his poems, his flirtation with half rhymes and eye rhymes, his thriftiness in words, and ellipses that gave his poems a riddle-like quality.

I translated into English about a dozen Necatigil poems very carefully, cautiously, as if building a ship in a bottle with shaky hands on cold winter days in Iowa City and left them to rest. After completing the first volume of my Dickinson translation I revisited those dozen poems. To my surprise (and relief), translating Dickinson had given me more confidence and agility in “deciphering”, understanding and enjoying Necatigil’s poems. So I translated more pieces by him. This is a mere bunch from about the thirty poems I translated. “Saffron twig in pure heights” in the title above is a line from a Necatigil poem.

Fahri Öz

## KIR ŐARKISI

Tam otların sarardıđı zamanlar  
Yere yüzükoyun uzanıyorum  
Toprakta bir telâş, bir telâş  
Karıncalar öteden beri dostum.

Ellerime hanımböcekleri konuyor  
Ne şeker şey onlar!  
Uç böcek, uç böcek diyorum  
Uçuyorlar.

Pan'ın teneffüsü bile  
Ilık, okşamakta yüzü.  
Devedikenleri, çalılık vesâire  
Bir âlem bu toprakların üstü.

Tabiatla haşır neşir  
Kırlarda geçen ikinci vakti.  
Sakin, dinlenmiş, rahat  
Bir gün daha bitti.

(Kovan, 15-16, Ekim-Kasım 1944)

## PASTORAL SONG

Just as the grass turns yellow  
I lie face down on the ground,  
Such ecstatic commotion in the earth  
Ants have been my friends for so long.

Ladybugs perch on my hands  
How sweet they are!  
Fly away, I say, fly away  
And away they do fly.

Even the breath of Pan  
Feels warm on the face.  
Thistles, underbrush, and so on  
Are a sight to see over the ground.

Cheek by jowl with nature—  
An afternoon in the country.  
Pacified, refreshed, comfortable—  
Another day is over.

## KİRLİ SORU

Benim oralarda hiçbir işim yoktu  
Şeytana uydum,  
Aç ahtapotlar kaynaşırken dipte  
Kaypak kalabalıkta sürükleniyordum.

İnce yüzünüzde üzgünce bir bakış  
Birden sizi gördüm,  
Açtı arı doruklarda bir safran  
Durdum.

İlk sevgili güldü yitik anılardan  
Mutsuz, yalnız  
Sessiz kınamanızı, utançlarda küçülmüş  
Aldım, geri döndüm.

Gelsem,  
Siz yine orada mısınız?

## DIRTY QUESTION

I am not to frequent those places  
I was tempted,  
Hungry octopuses teemed in the depths  
And I was adrift among slippery crowds.

A sad look in your slender face  
I saw you all at once,  
A saffron twig bloomed in pure heights  
I stopped.

The first love smiled through distant memories,  
Unhappy, all alone  
Receiving your silent frown,  
And feeling small with utter shame  
I returned.

Would you still be there,  
Were I to come?

## HERAKLİT'İN SULARI

Ne zaman sokaklarda dolaşsam  
Okul, sinema, sergi  
Kullanıyorlar  
Bendeki eski benleri.

Kalabalıklarda çoğalıyorum  
Hangisine yetişeyim şaşkın  
Tıpkı onun çizgileri  
Karşıdan gelen şu kadın.

Bir küçük çocuk  
Yıllarca öncem  
Korkar mı gitsem yanına  
Çocuk sen bensin desem.

Üç delikanlı yürüyor  
Bir dört yol ağzında her biri bir yana  
Üçe bölünüyorum  
Yolların her birinde birim gidiyor.

Biri eve derslerinin başına -- kitabı açıyorum  
Biri parkta bir sevgili -- bekliyorum  
Bir yerde çalışıyor üçüncü, okul dönüşü  
Gecenin geç saati işimden dönüyorum.

Hey! Durun diyorum, siz bensiniz, bensiz  
Nereye gidersiniz, hey durun!  
Sessizce yürüyorlar benden habersiz  
Durmuyorlar, o kadar sesleniyorum.

(Varlık, 486, 15 Eylül 1958)

## WATERS OF HERACLITUS

Whenever I take a stroll  
School, cinema, exhibition,  
They make use of  
The previous me's in me.

In the crowds I multiply  
I am at a loss, am never enough  
That woman walking over here  
Has exactly the same features as him.

A little child  
Is like myself years before  
Would he be frightened if I went near him  
Saying, Kid, you're me.

Three youths are walking  
Side by side, at a crossroads  
I am divided into three  
At each road goes one of my me's.

One goes home to study—I open the book  
One is waiting for his lover in a park—I wait  
The third works somewhere after school  
I come home from work late at night.

Hey, I say, Stop, you are me, where do you think  
You can go without me, hey stop!  
They walk past quietly, oblivious to me  
I call out but they do not stop.

## EVİN HALLERİ

Evin yalın hali  
İster cüce, ister dev  
Camlarında perde yok  
Bomboş, ev.

Evin -i hali, sabah,  
Geciktiniz haydi!  
Uykuların tatlandığı sularda  
Bırakacaksınız evi.

Evin -e hali, gün boyu,  
Ha gayret emektar deve!  
Sırtınızda yılların yorgunluğu  
Akşam erkenden eve.

Evin -de hali, saadet,  
Isınmak ocaktaki alevde  
Sönmüş yıldızlara karşı  
Işıklar varsa evde.

Evin -den hali, uzaksınız,  
Hattâ içinde yaşarken  
Aşkların, ölümlerin omzunda  
Ayrılmak varken evden.

## THE CASES OF HOME

The nominative case of home  
Be it a dwarf or giant  
No curtains on windows—  
The home, it is totally vacant.

The accusative case of home, morning  
You're late, come on!  
When sleep is too sweet to resist—  
You must leave home alone.

The dative case of home, all day  
Hang on, trusty dromedary!  
Carrying all the fatigue of years—  
You must go home early.

The locative case of home, happiness means  
Warming your body on the stove's flame  
Facing the turned-off stars—  
If at home you have lights inside.

The ablative case of home, you're away,  
Even when you're living inside  
When inevitably you have to leave it  
On the shoulder of love and death.

## SOLGUN BİR GÜL DOKUNUNCA

Çoklarından düşüyor da bunca  
Görmüyor gelip geçenler  
Eğilip alıyorum  
Solgun bir gül oluyor dokununca.

Ya büyük şehirlerin birinde  
Geziniyor kalabalık duraklarda  
Ya yurdun uzak bir yerinde  
Kahve, otel köşesinde  
Nereye gitse bu akşam vakti  
Ellerini ceplerine sokuyor  
Sigaralar, kâğıtlar  
Arasından kayıyor usulca  
Eğilip alıyorum, kimse olmuyor  
Solgun bir gül oluyor dokununca.

Ya da yalnız bir kızın  
Sildiği dudak boyasında  
Eşiğinde yine yorgun gecenin  
Başını yastıklara koyunca.

Kimi de gün ortası yanıma sokuluyor  
En çok güz ayları ve yağmur yağınca  
Alçalır ya bir bulut, o hüznün bulutunda.  
Uzanıp alıyorum, kimse olmuyor  
Solgun bir gül oluyor dokununca.

Ellerde, dudaklarda, ıssız yazılarda  
Akşamlara gerili ağlara takılıyor  
Yaralı hayvanlar gibi soluyor  
Bun alıyor, kaçıp gitmek istiyor  
Yollar, ya da anılar boyunca.

Alıp alıp geliyorum, uyumuyor bütün gece  
Kımıldıyor karanlıkta, ne zaman dokunsam  
Solgun bir gül oluyor dokununca.  
Solgun bir gül oluyor dokununca.

(Varlık, 565, 1 Ocak 1962)

## A FADED ROSE

Many people drop it unawares  
Yet the passers-by fail to see it  
I kneel down to pick it up  
It turns into a faded rose as I touch.

He is in a big city  
Wandering around a crowded bus stop  
Or he is in a distant place in the country  
In a coffee house or a hotel lobby  
No matter where he goes in the evening  
He plunges his hands in his pockets  
Bringing out cigarettes, pieces of paper  
It slips from among them quietly  
I kneel down to pick it up, no one around  
It turns into a faded rose as I touch.

Or in the lipstick that  
A lonely girl wipes off  
Again at the doorstep of the tired night  
Before she lays her head on the pillow.

Some nuzzle up to me in midday  
Especially in winter and when it rains  
As when a cloud comes down, in that sad cloud.  
I reach out to take it, no one around  
It turns into a faded rose as I touch.

In hands, lips and in deserted fields  
I gets caught in fishnets stretched over evenings  
It breathes like wounded animals  
It feels smothered, wishing to run free  
Along roads, along memories.

I keep bringing it home, all night it sleeps not a  
wink  
It wiggles in the dark, whenever I touch it  
It turns into a faded rose as I touch.  
It turns into a faded rose as I touch.

