

Poet's Preface

"AT THE GATHERING OF DESIRE . . ." was the first line of the first Ottoman poem I translated over seven years ago. What began as a small collection of poems grew slowly into the present anthology, to include biographies, notes, and illustrations. Originally, I felt translator and poet were one profession. Since then I have seen them fragment into two, with one (translator) absolutely dependent on the other (poet), but the poet corralled by the original work.

I must add that I am not a scholar of Ottoman Turkish. Only through the intricate knowledge and approval of my collaborators was I able to reconstruct these poems.

This was not easy, although often wonderfully enjoyable, like a very difficult puzzle.

Sometimes it was impossible.

Nowhere, however, was the translation process more challenging than in the case of gender. Turkish uses the same word for "he" and "she." English does not. Fixing the gender of anyone's beloved is beyond my responsibility. I stand aside, only left wishing there was an English equivalent which had the delightful ambiguity of the Turkish pronoun.

With that, I would like to dedicate these poems to the men and women who wrote them, and to all lovers and beloveds, everywhere.

Najaat Black

