

**TRANSLATION OF CHAPTER 1 OF ZAFER SENOCAK'S *IN DEINEN WORTEN:  
MUTMASSUNGEN ÜBER DEN GLABUEN MEINES VATERS AND REFLECTION***

by

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## STATEMENT OF THE AUTHOR

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a translation of chapter 1 of Zafer Senocak's recent novel *In deinen Worten: Mutmaßungen über den Glauben meines Vaters*. It is part of a collaborative translation project with the goal of combining the practical and theoretical aspects of the art, in order to reflect on the challenges that arise whilst translating. Zafer Senocak is a Turkish-German author, who currently lives in Berlin, and was a writer in residence at the University of Arizona during the Spring semester of 2015. The following work contains the translation of the previously mentioned chapter, as well as a critical reflection upon the process.

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## **Chapter 1 - A Free Person**

*Find out what is unmistakable in life. For a path has been opened for each one of us that has never before been taken by anyone.*

On a chilly and damp October day in Berlin we were standing in the Tempelhof Cemetery, around the grave in which we laid you forever. There weren't even a dozen of us, two of your children and their wives, and a few friends of your children. I'm sure that every one of us, at this moment of sadness and farewell, felt lonelier than you would have felt. After all, you were already accustomed to living as a loner, as a cast away from your community – you had actually abandoned your community and were feared because of your writings and your speech, which rebuked and admonished your fellow believers, who from your point of view were inclined to bigotry and superficial belief. “A foreigner among the Muslims” — this is the title you gave your autobiography, concluded in 1989, 610 typewritten pages, from which only a small portion has been printed in a private press as of today.

However, you weren't filled with bitterness, for you clung to the saying of the prophet: “When the Day of Judgment approaches, the true believer will be lonely.” One of your snide essays was directed at the “smugglers of numbing thoughts”. This was directly addressed to Muslim clerics. In your eyes there shouldn't even be a clergy in Islam at all. Muhammad proclaimed a faith; however, he was no founder of a church. How, then, could an influential priesthood establish itself? The establishment of a politically harmless caste of prayer leaders, who were uncritical of the secular political leadership

and social injustice, and who functioned as wage earners and social servants, was seen by you as a clever chess move of corrupt rulers. Even today, you felt that Muslim societies suffer from the suppression of oppositional thought and the legitimization of an absolutistic leadership by supposed Muslim authorities.

A key moment in Islamic history for you was the bloody battle for political leadership that broke out shortly after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. The Muslim historical narrative refuses even today to analyze this internal struggle in a levelheaded manner. Instead a bitter civil war is rekindled time and time again. For in this controversy, one either takes the side of the Fourth Caliph Ali, the nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet, or takes a position against the rebels of Muawiya, the governor of Damascus. In this case one is a Shiite. Or one abstains and pays homage to both parties, which is what the Sunnis — the majority of Muslims — do. They glorify all of the followers of Muhammad, and make them into unimpeachable superhumans. In this way every critical historical observation is put to a stop.

You always wanted to pull teachings from history and nothing was more unbearable to you than injustice and the glorification of a course of life for the sake of an ideology. Ali and Muawiya, two characters who couldn't have been more contradictory. Ali a strict interpreter of faith even in opposition to himself. But he was also a thinker and scholar, a free spirit who still today is thought of as the forefather of Muslim mystics and free-thinkers. Muawiya, the political talent, the crafty tactician, for whom the protection of the benefice of the expanding Islamic empire came first and foremost. The foundation of a priesthood in Islam also can be traced back to him.

For you, Islam was not to be equated with conquest and worldly power. It was a guide for people seeking God, a guide for conversing with oneself, an education of the heart. It wasn't splendid mosques and palaces that offered a home to your faith, but it was rather the cave into which the Prophet Muhammad had withdrawn to meditate and to receive the call of Allah. Your life was about the repression of the people's own pride. For you, it was about control, the self-desire "nefs" that damages others. This self-desire would also stand in the way of the sense of self, because this numbs one's feeling for one's self. Thus, the evaluation of one's life becomes impossible. One would be driven. The string of life threatens to tear. "Live more consciously!" This resolution from post-industrial society seemed designed for you. You attentively followed the foundation of the green party at the end of the seventies. During this time my own politicization also came to be. Every political interest is based on dissatisfaction with the existing conditions. In this way, I remember many discussions with you about how the world is to be changed. No, not like communist China and Russia. The true revolution doesn't take place with massive crowds in fast-paced market squares, but rather in the meeting between two people. For you, the fact that intimacy and trust between two people was conceivable belonged to the wonder of life.

On this day, the day we said our farewell to you, I felt these forces more strongly than before, as if this goodbye was just a special form of encounter. It is beautiful that we were in each other's company, I thought, as if I wished that I had father all to myself. Only for me and those who are closest to me. And already the names of people came to me, to whom you were attracted. Abu Zer, the moral example for all future social

revolutionaries, and the lone wolf, Veysel Karani; the Sufi Master Üftade and Dervish Yunus. They had all lived centuries ago, some in the desert of Arabia, and the others wandering in the mountains of Anatolia and yet they all never ceased to accompany you. And they all had something in common: they united belief with an upright manner. It felt to me as if they had mixed themselves in with the visitors in our house during my childhood. There was so much talk of them that they took shape in my mind. For a while, they also became my companions. Sometimes they would appear in poems and scoop up a word from a language that was unknown to me, translate it for me, and then let me happily go back, with the feeling that I had found something missed.

Your role models from Islamic history reminded me of Saint Francis. They had made themselves scarce during your time. So your manuscripts grappled with the thoughts and social conduct of your fellow believers. Your thoughts weren't welcome. They migrated with you and mostly stayed unpublished.

The Muslims had become too lazy to think, you often said in your discussions. You said they no longer have a spiritual access to the writings of their traditions. Curiosity has abandoned them. Curiosity is the eye of truth. Without curiosity, the search for truth would be blind.

*If you go to Florence, every pore of your skin will become an eye and in every eye is the light that burns before every discovery. In Samarkand, where the spirit of the Orient gathered in the 15th century and left impressive buildings, one thinks wistfully of Florence and endeavors to keep an eye open in order to remember this past glory. Back then curiosity was kindled in Samarkand, where the ruler Ulug Beg built his*

*observatory, and at that time on the Iberian Peninsula in Cordoba and Toledo, where the translators brushed with many tongues through languages, plunged into unknown works of past generations, into their own and foreign forms of belief, and into a world that offered itself for discovery. Travelers roamed about, researchers searched in the universe for new bodies and discovered in the human body pictures of stars, which moved in the bloodstream. At that time everything was underway, just as creation is a constant sliding out of time, until everything in existence has abandoned time. The creator, who in unveiling himself craves his revelation, holds himself back in secrecy. In the Muslim world of today veiling takes priority; for a long time now, nothing is revealed and discovered. As if the curiosity in one's eyes had been erased. The eyes were made unrecognizable*

Significant writings of Muslim scholars would be forgotten or would not be read and commented on by those at the forefront of modern thinking. You didn't include only the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad among these texts. Philosophers like Ghazali and Ibn Haldun, mystics such as Ibn Arabi, Mawlana and Attar and especially the Anatolian wandering dervish Yunus Emre with his laconic as well as profound poems always stood close at hand in your library. In your eyes the Islamic poets and thinkers were not inspired only by the ancient Greeks. Without a doubt, the achievements in translation of the Arabs from the 8th until the 12th century A.D. were considerable. Ancient Greece was picked up and interpreted through their intellectual efforts and passed on to the European Renaissance. The Arabic translation of Aristotle laid the foundations for the intellectual resuscitation of the Western World. Translation

also meant living together. “The House of Wisdom” offered enough room for Christians, Muslims, and Jews. You had once said that without the Renaissance there would be no survival of culture. Which Renaissance did you mean? The one from the declining European Middle Ages, or the Andalusian-Jewish-Arabic one, or the Renaissance that the Islamic World is waiting for today? Islamic culture had four sources for you, the Quran, which is based on the Old Testament, the old Greeks, but also the Persians and Indians. The Muslims constituted a natural bridge between the East and the West, between the ancient world and the Oriental cultures. In their texts they created a new language of cultural mediation. The Muslim geography of culture dissolved the boundaries of customary classifications and markings of Western World. Therefore it would also be important today, and would offer an alternative to the Eurocentric projections of Western cultural historians.

A small book by the Indian poet Tagore from the year 1961 was translated into Turkish by Bülent Ecevit, who later became the prime minister of Turkey. Yellowed paper, but carefully printed with a lead typesetting. In the book small wisdoms and great verses were marked with stars, exclamation points, and commentary in pencil in your handwriting.

*We have the Ganges before our eyes when we read Plato’s texts. The Sufis wear the shirt of the Indian Fakirs. The eternal fire of the Persians burns in their hearts. We stand across from a legacy that obliges us toward multilingualism.*

Years later, Ecevit's own poems were translated into German by the unforgettable literary mediator Yüksel Pazarkaya. The lovely edition that I often read was called "I chiseled light from stone.". Ecevit's poems were memorable; they dealt with humankind and the meaning of life, the simplicity of grace, and faith in life, which wandered from the Indian philosophers to the Anatolian dervishes, in order to free the burdened shoulders and make the heavy hearts lighter. I was proud of this book. I could show it to my friends who take interest in poems and hardly knew anything about the land which I came from. They marveled at the politician who wrote poems that were so different from the poems that were being written at the end of the 70s in Germany, even though a significant number of young people from Germany travelled to India in order to gain wisdom and enlightenment. A poem by Tagore and a verse from Ecevit were also worth a trip. At least for me, who found refuge in the books.

In the poems of Tagore and Ecevit I found another path to you, Father, a different one than the sacred texts of the religion. With only the Quran in one hand and without Tagore in the other, you would have always stayed foreign to me. Since then I believe that it always depends on finding different paths to a person and their culture. No more do I use only the European border crossings to the East. I left my birthplace of Ankara and traveled into the past of the Republic of Turkey and into the jumble of Ottoman languages, I discovered Constantinople in Istanbul, and Rome in Constantinople. Rome, which had remained so foreign to you, Father. However, it was a foreigner that lived within us.

Together we then visited some ancient cities, whose remnants made Anatolian soil so fruitful culturally. We walked past fallen Greek and Armenian churches, which didn't further catch your eye. For me however these houses were open wounds that were reminiscent of the atrocities of the year 1915, when almost the entire Armenian population of Anatolia were violently expelled from their homeland. Hundreds of thousands perished. The silence about it seemed to me not only a provocation, but rather as a perpetuation of guilt. A guilt that neither you nor I were personally involved in. My involvement in this question, my writings, you never approved of. This bridge between us stayed forever sealed. Our attempts at a discussion were quiet and became quieter, and by no means ended in a loud argument, but rather on the border of speechlessness. As if we had a lump in our throat. Maybe this overwhelming obstacle between us contributed to me not becoming too self-righteous. In my own family I encountered this exposure of conscience and could no longer act as if I personally had nothing to do with it. Especially in an environment that is healthy and loving, every disturbance of conscience, every denial of guilt, even that of the previous generation, feels not only like a single transgression, but rather a mindset. One can be quiet about it. But it doesn't disappear.

Because there was also a contradiction there that was just as unlikely to disappear: had there not been Sufis in Anatolia, to whom you stood so close, with their philanthropic texts? The arm that embraced all humankind across the borders of belief was broken in Anatolia in a brutal way.

*Humanity survives in culture, not in history. In history the next extinction is always imminent.*

Could such a sentence resolve this contradiction? Or does it only make it even more unbearable? The dread can't be alleviated forever. At some point what is intimate, which takes the dread in and hides it, becomes frightening. One's homeland loses its innocence. It cannot hide itself behind its own myths. However, does one trust oneself to live in truthfulness? We have not come so far.

I learned to live and work with this contradiction. When I translated the poems of the Dervish poet Yunu Emre into German in the 80s, you, Father, had brought me closer to these texts, so close that I could render them in another language. You and I both lived in translation. Our house was everywhere where languages met one another. And mother was the worldly woman who left the door open to our salon and made meetings possible. Our small family, your stronghold against the solitude that surrounded you in the outside world.

On the day of your burial we laid you next to Mother. You were buried deeper in the earth than is customary in Muslim burials. The main thing was that your head was pointed toward Mecca. Berlin had accepted both of you. The sky is of God, the earth is of God, but seldom do people know where they belong. My mother probably could hardly have imagined that she would one day be buried in Berlin, of all places, in a former cemetery for soldiers, where soldiers from World War One are buried. She put off her decision about the final arrangements almost until her last day. However, at the

end she had decided to be laid to rest in the place where her husband and son lived. *After death our body will mix with the Earth and the soul returns home.* Suddenly the decision about where she wanted to be buried was quite easy.

In the earth, you were now closer to her again, Father. For this reason as well, you wouldn't have felt lonely on the day of departure, happier than the last two years that you had to spend without your wife, surrounded by memories that called upon you and over which you had no control. People who can no longer filter their memories cannot find their way within the self. But by no means is he lost. Because the self is full of undeveloped territories. In your last years I observed how many new paths opened up into your inner self. You embarked on these paths, until the end devoted and invigorated by curiosity. I observed how curiosity consistently again and again made you younger. Until the end you were always with yourself and this is the reason that I attribute these feelings to you, which are not supposed to be there after death. I don't only feel your closeness as an emptiness that the death of a beloved person left behind. This emptiness after death, into which the body falls to decay more or less slowly, I fill with stories, memories, and with a spiritual existence with which I feel connected, even after death. It is the foundation of love that we both felt for poetry, for these expressions in life that grounded us and at the same time also lifted us up. A tender hyphen between I and you, between you and me, between us. Without poetry your beliefs would have remained foreign to me, full of words which no one would look back on. We have a life long list of things to do with such words. Not just in belief. They also badger us with the calculation of power, and in the evaluation of truthfulness and reality. These words want

to instruct and explain, but they die when they encounter the skin that desires them. They leave behind no feeling, no pain, and no color.

## **About Narration**

*Know the difference between doctrine and emptiness. In emptiness lies the uncertainty of your existence. The possibility to spread yourself out like the universe is given to you. Those who can see with the heart will not be lacking when creation becomes sealed. There is only a fraction of oneself that lets itself be shown through doctrine. This fraction, which lays claim to entirety, is inscribed. With doctrine you won't be able to stride through the emptiness that is spreading within yourself. You'll merely be able to take note of the landmarks, isolate yourself, and learn to humble yourself.*

You had perceived the world that we live in as a world in which the connection between emptiness and doctrine is capped. For you this world was not the one that is given to us. It was a world created by us as humans, a creature of conception.

*With every discovery we restrict ourselves.*

I feel thankful toward you because early on you took away my fear of emptiness, which we all too quickly fill with the grab bags of the material life. The plan of life that is already filled out chokes us. In the course of life safeguards amass, the passwords and boundary stones that mark our path. Every one of us already sits in his capsule. What

an illusion to believe that we all fly through space in this capsule. These words that reveal us, look at us, and touch us, still have no language.

*I stem from no land, the oldest among you. No name is on my gravestone.*

The Unknown Soldier who fell in battle without ever really having spoken became to me the forefather of the poet. As if it were about letting him continue to breathe, as if it were our duty to prolong life, the verse in language became a breath and the breath in our body became a verse.

As I once attended the presentation of the Korean zen-master and poet Ko-Un, I once again stood facing this overwhelming emptiness, from which the words of air and breath relate, and change into the breath that creates air. That is something that only poetry can achieve, and its retreat from our life goes along with breathlessness.

Early on I already had melodies in my ear, which still accompany me today in my verses. The words that belonged to these melodies came from a foreign language. Their pronunciation needed to be practiced and their translation had long been unimportant to me. As a non-Arab Muslim one learns early on to trust sounds. The sound is like a great dark mouth of a cave, through which one can enter into the text. I hung onto the sound, which sounded different at every time of day. The hours when one prays are like seasons. In the morning it's spring, in the evening fall, and the dark night is winter, the afternoon a summer, mostly bright and short-lived. I imagined myself going through yellow foliage during the evening prayer and in the morning hearing the sprouting of words.

From the prayers which I learned by heart, the first verses were mostly the only ones that stayed in my memory. But the melody lives in me, without that words which I don't completely remember any more; they sometimes call me back to my childhood, into your proximity, to the grave that I visit much too seldom.

While praying I closed my eyes, just as I later closed them while kissing, to once again tear them open at the first moment, out of curiosity, excitement, out of the will to gain certainty as a witness. And in doing so I always fell into the loneliness of the expression. Thus I lost the prayer and my beloved.

The Imam, who read from the Koran at your grave, closed his eyes. As if he wanted to avoid the text coming not only from out of his mouth, but also from his eyes. Every word is like a tear. If only we had the courage to suffer through the emptiness that another leaves behind, then we could share in it together. I become a child again and play with my thoughts. I think out loud and hear many voices inside me. I break my silence and feel caught in the language. I hear the voice of my father as he read from the Koran. I wonder if he is also a prisoner, or one of the voices that watch over me.

*Read!*

That is the first word of revelation.

I don't read, I repeat what is said.

The Koran speaks in a foreign language to me.

The child in me would like to trust its melodies.

Soon I will want to measure myself with it, like every poet. I will later mistrust my heart, this hole into which we throw the child that we no longer want to be. There is this depth in the river of language, which I have a hard time escaping. I can imagine those people that heard this text for the first time, as if it was spoken for the first time. They are strangers: people of a foreign language, from a distant land, from a distant time. No translation will bring me closer to them. Are they even people, those whose stories interest me and move me? Do they stand at my side when I feel lonely and abandoned? One calls the followers of Muhammad Sahaba, or friends— the believers of the first hour. Among them was a former slave with dark skin and a child. The child touches me. It is Ali, the nephew of the prophet and later the fourth Khalif, who was unbending and controversial. He was murdered in the fortieth year after the Hidschra (662 C.E.) in Kufa, which is now in Iraq. It was not as an experienced and courageous sword-bearer, as an Arabian Samurai, as a knight by the grace of God that he impressed me. No, he impressed me above all as a master of the word, as a master teacher of silent emptiness, as a melancholic of the first hour. He knew that the fight for justice is futile but nevertheless has to be led, because the sand that covers everything is just as temporary as the sand that is thrown in one's eyes. He's supposed to have said that posing the right questions is half of wisdom, and doubting the answers is the other half.

*Ali's words are stars that fall to the Earth like snow. They shine in the sky; among people on the earth they melt away in an instant.*

You, Father, had Ali's sayings and sermons under your pillow while you slept and on your desk at work. They were the gateway through which you sent your own thoughts and words.

*Words that go on journeys in the search for truth achieve Ali's world of thought. They want to savor the nectar there, which nourishes the soul and delivers the body from pain.*

You felt with Ali, you were by Ali, you felt close to Ali with your thoughts and in your feelings, which found their expression in Ali's sayings and narratives.

You too heard about him as a child. On long winter evenings in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains people told stories of Ali as a hero, fallen in a battle for the righteous. The people's voice made you sensitive to justice. I wished we could make do without the righteous who fell in battle. It is so often the self-righteous who hide themselves behind the ideal of justice.

*People who have difficulties in the struggle with their I, their ego-instinct, seek a "you" as an enemy.*

The atmosphere of the conversation that always surrounded you will remain unforgettable to me, Father. Conversation was your empire. You told me many stories from your childhood. It made me happy that you were glad to tell me much from your life, especially from your childhood. When I read your memoirs today, the memories of my childhood mix with yours. A landscape that I hardly know loses its foreignness. The

sparsely settled areas with their untouched nature. And the bees, which for generations have been the companions of our family, or are we the companions of the bees? With their honey they also provided for prosperity and livelihood in hard times. There are also the migrant poets and tellers of tales and the figures in old legends and sayings, with whom you grew up. I found the stories of your childhood not only entertaining, but they also had something sublime. They instilled respect in me, strengthened the desire in me for the land of my ancestors and captured my imagination. In the course of this, there was a songwriter whom I could not get out of my head. An unknown beauty appeared to him in a dream. He fell in love with the girl whom he thought he knew lived in Afghanistan, an unknown land to him. Thus he had become a poet who conceived the most beautiful love songs from his desire for a distant beloved and strongly believed that one day he would find his way to Afghanistan. You, Father, encountered him at an old age. He was in the best shape and endowed with vigor; this mesmerized you. Surely this poet had inspired you. His breath had entered your voice. That was one of the stories which have accompanied me since my childhood.

Today, I believe that your desire to tell stories and your living memories also contributed a great deal to the closeness between us. Because the trust in one's parents arises not only from a happy childhood and an intense memory of it. The child also needs a key to the childhood of his parents. One knows one's own parents by heart only when they reveal their childhood. You, Father, had acquainted me with the language of your childhood. This language leads us to the roots of our words. I closed my eyes on long winter evenings and had fantasies of your childhood in the small garrison city in the

mountains of east Anatolia. In this region there was never only a single faith. Over the mountains came the wolves and the saints. They lived in harmony. They needed one another.

*Those who cannot tame a wolf will hardly be able to cope with a person.*

Then the times also changed, even in this remote corner of the Earth. The spirit of uniformity replaced faith. Perhaps that took place so easily because faith had long since put on a uniform. Those who wore a uniform set aside the caftan. Naked people appeared before my eyes, who had their rank sewed onto their shoulders. Their stars bleed, but they feel no pain, I thought. You preserved your father's caftan, just as I preserved the cloths that you wore on your pilgrimage. Why do we keep material possessions and not stories? The stories of Ali are something that I acquired later. Old booklets. I bought them from a travelling salesman in the old section of Istanbul, who carried them next to popular novels, comic books, and western booklets.

"They are selling better again. For a long time no one bought them." In this way the trader unsolicitedly commented on my purchase.

In these books eulogies of courage and heroism were to be found, but little of the philosophy of Ali, who had dared to formulate his own thoughts in the presence of the Prophet and the proclaimed word of God. This Ali emerges again among the Sufis, who honor him like no other. This Ali also shines in dark times. And Ali the Just, the admonisher of history, the noble king of the disenfranchised, the wise ruler who puts earthly power in its place? This Ali was not allowed to exist in any house or in any land. He will always remain the exile, the hated one, because he was committed to the weak,

to the poor, to the sick, to the orphans, as it is called for in the Koran. The orphan is not only the one who lacks a father, mother, or both. An orphan is everyone who has no support, and the homeless one is also an orphan, as well as the dervish who travels over lands, or the indigent one who depends on a handout.

Compassion comes not through the “good” person of the world, but rather through the misfortune that ambushes someone. Without this suffering the heart of the people would turn to stone and the Lord would stand without protection before his creature.

Thus the stories of the righteous almost always end tragically. But they fill our hearts, and let our hearts take part in their stories so that we can better bear our humanity, or certainly endure it.

Lord, protect us from evil as you protect us from good!

Because evil can rob us of our heart.

Good establishes itself in our heart.

It makes the heart fat and spills blood.

*The good is a **not** a form of capital that one can freely employ. It is a fleeting phenomenon, which one must love unrequitedly.*

## The Breath of Revelation

*Whoever lets their spirit wander between Ali, Ibni Arabi, and Mawlana, will have the Koran revealed to them as a book that promises love. In it belief and mystery encounter each other. Whoever confines his spirit in the treatises of scribes wanders in the labyrinth of the text without hope of salvation. His reason also cannot rescue him.*

For a long time the Koran stood between us, Father. As it is received by believers, it seems contradictory to me in many places, and above all as a book of inferior moral quality. Again and again the loftiness of the text, which without a doubt demands respect and its imploring poetical force is infiltrated from a small and prosaic spirit, which precedes scheming in a commercial way and in its innermost poise it is chauvinistic and inhuman.

For example, in the Koran the male is not only entitled to polygamy, it is also secured for him with the following advice:

“You won’t be able to treat your wives justly,

even if you endeavor to do so.

And don’t completely deny your affection toward the others,

so that you leave them in limbo...” Sure 4 Verse 129.

Wanting to explain such passages by the period of time didn’t seem convincing to me.

They could obviously only be interpreted psychologically. Actually, domestic peace is

threatened by polygamy. That's why for a long time it didn't seem unusual to Muslims for hundreds of years that God appeared as a marriage counselor. However which relationship do men and women have in the Koran? Does the Koran make the couch of Dr. Freud superfluous? With all its entanglements, Eros stands in a special relationship to creation. In erotic love, there is a godly fever. In the depth of the body the primal power can be found, which is unleashed only through the sensation of coalescence in the act of love. A momentum of revelation, as is experienced in the depth of the word as well as the depth of the dream. I would have liked to hear more about these three dimensions of revelation from the Koran, the text of revelation. When word, body, and dream open their depths, we create an intense aesthetic experience. In the dream I am the open word. In the depth of the word I am the open body. In love, the body rises and the border between skin and soul, between dream and reality, is lifted.

Shouldn't a divine text be in the position to anticipate the development of humanity, whether it be encrypted, or through less involvement in slavery, the oppression of women, or disregard of humanity? The captivity of the holy text in the atmosphere of its time of creation would have to irritate every believer, I thought to myself. I had not comprehended that belief above all means refuge, refuge from the strict climate of the critical mind, which examines the coherence of writings and exposes inner contradictions. The text freezes in the agony of belief. Critical reading becomes impossible. The persistence in the attitude of revelation, which promises people a godly voice and with it an eternal breath, dismisses doubt. It dissolves the reading of the voice

into breath. However, can such a breath claim the law for itself without following the logos and submitting itself to reason?

The story of Islamic thought constitutes a stage for such questions. But what role do they play today? Is it not time to lift the curtain that blocks the view of this stage? How can that humanity that influenced the thinking of Ali, Mawlana or Ibn Arabi be revived in Islam? This obviously requires a relativization of the godly presence in the world. In his writings, when he speaks to us, God is incomplete, in the process of becoming, he reveals himself only in part. There are doors in the Islamic tradition that open themselves to such a way of thinking. Only a person who goes through these doors can participate in a critical and historical reappraisal of the Muslim source texts. However, how does one open once more these doors that have been sealed for hundreds of years?

You, Father, believed in this writing as a, as *the* revelation of God. The voice of angels, which laid the word on the tongue of Mohammed. The Koran could be interpreted in every language, but could not be translated into any language. However, is not every translation always an interpretation as well? The believers in the Koran identify themselves as the antithesis of the translator. Thus they must tolerate contradictions that they cannot interpret either linguistically or historically. The reality of the writing is not allowed to be overridden by a human, which means the historically determined interpretation of the godly text. Today, the believers of Islam have one foot rooted in the seventh and the other rooted in the twenty-first century. Consequently, many conflicts arise, which cannot be resolved either spiritually or socially. How does one live in a

community with people endowed with equal rights but who are not Muslim and possess neither a sacred book nor belief in God? As a believer in the final, eternally valid revelation, how does one respect the views of others? From the Islamic tradition, there are no satisfactory answers to these questions. The necessary respect stands in the contradiction to the degradation of women in the Koran, with the degradation of non-believers, indeed with the deprivation of the right to life for certain people.

You also withstood such contradictions, Father. You absorbed the Koran with every pore of your heart, the writing, which appeared foreign and distant to me, dark and without that mild light that was promised to me in my childhood by the melodies of the word. I observed the people that recited from it: most of them coarse; they made good figures as oil wrestlers. I heard their speech. They weren't at home in beautiful arts. No Ali, no Ibn Arabi, no Mawlana had ever consorted with them. Because whoever wants to understand this, needs a breath of the most beautiful art. Thus opened a divide between the claim of your religion to bring the wise, beautiful word to the people and the vehement sermons of their devout followers. I closed the Koran.

I walked along the gap and wanted to measure it. However, I lacked the faith in measurement. Was I surveying the land without any reason to do so? Did I want to be a customs official at the border between belief and reason? At some point it tears one apart. At some point one helplessly stands between Ibn Arabi and Bin Laden and is very thankful to have nothing to do with either one of them. Heaven and Hell are close to one another in Islam.

But then I am seized once more by the sound that sounds softer than a lullaby, that leads the foreign language out of the sphere of meanings and interpretations, that pries it away from the fat tongue, and that lets it nimbly climb high trees, in order to let itself resound in the most distant of deserts. Who could wrest this sound from me, or me from you? We were closer, Father, when we forgot the interpretation of the words and dedicated ourselves completely to the melody. Outside in the towers of literacy, where the meaning takes possession of our senses, every word wanted to be justified with more flesh of the tongue. Thus words were encumbered, they complained only about the tongues, the tongues pinned themselves firmly between two words, which aspired to make sense of one another. Between us the words sounded close, trusted, kindred, completely at your side, completely at my side.

*So long as your heart feels at ease, linger by the sound of a word, it will lead you to its secret, into a language from which all malice has vanished.*

On the gateway the ninety-nine names of God. Al Halim, al Alim, Al Hafiz... The sympathetic, the all-knowing, the guardian. Allah will be at home under one of these names.

In the works of a German Poet of the post-war era, Günter Eich, I read the hundredth name of Allah. The search for each word that decodes the essence, and the mystery of the world. It knows no boundaries.

But what happens when the muezzin-voice-sound ruptures the name of God, when a rusty loudspeaker at the top of a minaret grows louder and louder, until it bursts? Will

one stone the one shrilly calling to prayer on the gateway to paradise, as one on Earth stones the adulteresses? Why apply a lesser punishment for an offense against beauty than for the wounding of marital loyalty?

Not long ago, during the summer on the mountain of the temple of Didyma, a Muslim wound bleeds on the Oracle Shrine of the ancient Greeks. A scratchy voice calls for prayer five times a day, the first time before the break of day. He must hate his belief, this Muezzin. He spits the name of God into an ancient microphone, whose frailty can't be hidden behind the twisted loudspeakers, but probably can only be strengthened. Thus the Islami faith exposes itself as a hateful variant of the cyclopic belief in one God. Among the blind is the one-eyed king.

*Earlier our belief consisted of beautiful speech and strict law. Today only strict law remains.*

We live our lives one-eyed. Seeing is tested by things, and it becomes taller and broader in the landscape and loses itself in particles that whirl around us. When we go into these things, and don't only observe them from the outside, but also capture their essence, that is seeing with both eyes. One eye envisions along the border a world that remains invisible. The other eye sees the shroud that hinders its vision. It sees what is seen as mirrored. The heart is the place where both eyes meet. Since both eyes are not enough in their pairing, it is the two hearts whose coalescence is searching for a place. Only when this place is found can lovers be united. It is the fireplace of those passionately in love, among whom is hidden the fountain that never runs dry. Only at

this place is the heart that thirsts satisfied, at this place, in which the other heart is passionate. Sight reaches from one eye to the other in a heartbeat, sometimes a far journey, because in people there is not only a tightness of breath. It them is also the distant loneliness.

There are no more seasons on the day of prayer. Winter has never emerged from a melancholic autumn. An ongoing fall covers the barren earth forever with a brittle foliage. The words come to a standstill, because they are no longer sure about their sounds.

Let us prick up our ears while wandering on this yellowed foliage to hear if there is still the rustling of leaves!

*On the back of a gazelle we rode through the forest. There was a tantalizing beauty around us. It renewed its message to us in an instant, such that no second was like the other. However, at some point we had noticed a certain shape, and had accustomed ourselves to it; our eyes no longer perceived the beauty as it changed, but rather only the repetitive confirmation across from us. We gave in to the illusion that the world around us was the same as the world we were born in, that our house endured and we that could go back, become tired and fall asleep. We fell asleep. At some point we woke up and found ourselves on the floor again, a dry quilted floor. A wild donkey passed by and went his ways without noticing us. We let him go. After all, we were not in a position to get up and climb up on him.*

## **The Autumn of the Orient**

Every revolution has a melancholic aftermath, such as the Turkish. In the shadow of Kemal Atatürk — who if nothing else focused on the alphabets, abolishing the Arabic characters and introducing the Latin ones in order to unequivocally point his cultural revolution toward the West — the discarded characters became emptiness that could've been the gift of a new beginning. His picture of the fallen East, to which he juxtaposed the old greatness of the Ottoman Empire, became more widespread the more the Turkish Republic fell behind in keeping its promises to catapult the impoverished and backward land into the modern age.

Nevertheless, the morbid charm of the counter-revolution was short-lived. Above burial shrouds of the old words. Nothing more differentiated the old libraries from cemeteries. And as is the case after every revolution, art could be inspired by cemeteries. The language of art would sooner or later resurrect those forms that had been decapitated by the guillotine of history. As death is omnipresent, life becomes the metaphor of survival. What the new life bestows becomes palpable only in rejection.

You, Father, were also drawn in by this language of an apologetic polemic, whose master was the poet Necip Fazil. A gifted poet who found inexhaustible reincarnations in shrill and restless polemic, but never the word that respects the all else it obtained its power from the bad conscience of its protagonists, whose belief took on increasingly strong features the more they distanced themselves from the Islamic way of life. Thus this phase lasted only a few decades, but it was an defining force for your generation. On the other hand, the dying out of the old culture was a long-lasting process that could

not be captured by nervous chroniclers. It would have needed the long breath that could change the exhalation into a pause, the pause into a resurgence, and the resurgence into a breath that moves through hearts in order to be processed in the mind. But the Turkish literature of modern times had no Kafka or Musil at the start, who could have achieved something so comprehensive. Thus the relatively dull division between progressive and reactionary writers remained, and an ideology of confining the mind to tight spaces. You wandered out, Father, into the land whose language you called a dancer. Into that land, in whose language Kafka and Musil had written.

*Time has become foreign to us. It sulks in a corner. We turn around to face it, and it has already moved on.*

The Autumn of the Orient persisted as you said farewell to the dream of your youth, the dream of the great Turkish nation, in order to enter into the dream of a great Muslim Brotherhood. For almost 10 years, from 1956 until 1965, you published "Islam" in Ankara, a Muslim magazine that brought conservative theologians and polemic critics of Turkish modernity together. A magazine in which no regeneration of Muslim sources can be seen. On the contrary, Islam here has the character of a stronghold.

The greatness of Islam lies in its past. Thus the present is always being translated into the past. Because everything must always be great, big, manly, and eternal. The Turkish Republic, a dwarf in the shadow of the giant, the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the translation of the past into the present is avoided. This requires new measures and presupposes a renewal of the language that was neither taught in the

resuscitated Imam schools nor spoken in the mosques. It was and remains grotesque that the humiliated and enslaved people of the Orient dreamt of a greatness that in no way corresponded to their reality. It was a dream that was directed at the past — no dream of the future. The community never got beyond this dream in spirit, and when the dream stood in the way of their businesses, it abruptly separated spirit and business. Thus the real world of your brothers in faith knows no spiritual, aesthetic, or moral dream that could nourish present and future. Present and future are real only in a material sense; spirit and spirituality have the flair of the past. The young generation of Muslims in Turkey has no more reason to be melancholy. In their hearts blooms capitalism. Praying and working has not for a long time been a guiding principle only for Protestants. In Turkey as well, this is practiced in recent times with great success. But this Islam, which is praised for being softer and milder because it is more compatible economically, in reality is spiritless and aesthetically undemanding. It grows in the shadows of Arab Salafists and Saudi Wahhabis who strive with their radical fervor, brutal violence, and alimony after power and influence.

What about the spiritual pillars of Islam? Hundreds of poets, hundreds of prophetic sayings and verses from the Koran could be cited that deploy their power beyond the open places in the heart of every individual. The work of the Sufis, hated and renowned, sympathized with and repressed, should be remembered. Some of the names to be remembered are Ibn Arabi, and Mawlana. Like blood cells, the words in their sayings and verses flow through the body. They bring the person and the Koran together. They create trust, and provide a sense of security. I had learned a few verses from the Koran

and felt them breed within me as I read the works of the Sufis. I could connect these verses with far distances, with clear sand that transforms itself into blue water, with figures from fairy tale books, with exotic beauty. I was overwhelmed. I had surrendered. I was at home in their sounds. In the stillness between the sounds I could make do without any words.

Your belief, Father, had something to do with waters

As clear as the water was your belief

And a purifying power it had

Like the waters that flow from one direction to the other

That flow continually and never freeze

And nevertheless stay true to themselves

That bind two banks like a river

Your faith, Father, was like its water

Like the river it bound the mountain to the valley

The valley with the sea

When did I leave the world of still words, of hidden sounds? Or did it leave me? When I was twenty I turned away from the houses of prayer. But the sound of prayers echoed inside me and mad me read Mawlana Rumi and Yunus Emre and drink from the sweet sherbet of words that have matured with time and smell irresistible. They were still there, the poets.

*Those that don't stand by words, but rather push open a door. For a little while, a small opening, in which a great world hides.*

There were certainly still there, the poets who sounded out emptiness, not committed to any doctrine, but who were conscious of this emptiness in which the invisible can grow in order to appear in a moment of revelation. What was shown to us in this specific moment also looked upon us. Our eye once again had an opposite.

We carried two of these poetic voices with us, Father. Asaf Halet and Behcet Necatigil. Two strangely isolated poets of Turkish modernity. The modernists mostly searched for solidarity with their kindred spirits. However, it wasn't just these two to whom we felt drawn. They perhaps knew (as did we?) that they had no other like-minded people. And yet they still had, and have to this day, attentive readers. In the reading of poetry there is time after time this boundness that in no way claims commonality. It opens a new land that is not yet planned. Perhaps no other poet has managed to suspend this melancholy of the Turkish Revolution better than Necatigil, who had something big to say about the small things of our everyday lives. And no one had the ability to look upon our world of malleable things with the eyes of Ibn Arabi and Mawlana Rumi more than Asaf Halet.

Without these eyes we find no foothold in our changing world.

You probably never would have formulated such a sentence. It is a sentence with two lavish, superfluous words, "foothold" and "world". A sentence that leaps over emptiness and flirts with teachings. Where, I ask myself, do I have this sentence? Whose voice has established itself within me? Or is it just a fleeting sentence said in passing, which

is not allowed to exist on paper? I delete it from from the text — in my thoughts. I let it remain on paper, so that it gives me a reminder, like a clock that one sets in order not to sleep through something essential.

*I am not a person who has procured light for himself that would be hidden to another. I practice only in the feel, the smell, and the commission of the darkness. Who are you? Will you show yourself to me? Will we encounter one another properly or bump into each other in the dark? We share the space with these unknown beings. Sometimes they take away the air that we need to breathe, another time they reach their hand out to us in a precarious situation. Therefore, they step out from their invisibility and end their existence. Then we suddenly recognize them in the person of a contemporary, who would otherwise pass by us unnoticed. Their finitude was only transitory, a passage from one existence into the other. And we, who stand clumsily in the midst of everything, are met. It occurs, it happens to us, we accept it.*

*Paradise is in the beautiful word. You can hear it, smell it, and taste it. Those who tarnish language will never come to enjoy paradise.*

Is there not this tarnished language in the Koran? Language that threatens, that rapes, that flows like molten iron in the ears?

I never asked you such a question. Perhaps out of respect, but also because I only now dare to say it. This book, the Koran, is a house for the believers. When their stones no longer remain standing, they are threatened with homelessness and wandering. Do we not all have the fear of losing our last shelter?

I accept the wandering. It is not the worst fate on Earth. Imprisonment in a house seems worse to me, a house that must be protected from the light of the sun so as not to collapse. In this house one prostrates oneself before one's own shadow and no body finds the peacefulness of rest, because in it are slumbering flashpoints. I have my flashpoint in my heart. No beautiful sermon, but rather bees had led you to Allah. Their baskets have stood at the courtyard of my great-grandfather over generations. They were as patient and diligent as ever. They had flown off on the path that led from the filled chalice to the sweet drink. In this drink is healing. You had tasted of it, in difficult times. Whenever the weight increased on your shoulders and pushed you down, the drink had unburdened your heart and strengthened your body.

*I can smell your love, Lord*

*I can taste your love, Lord*

The clock for your time of life was gratitude. Thus time became a river that laid itself at the feet of its most beloved. In this clear water is a distinct symbol for those who lets their eyes drift.

I went to this river. The region seemed barren, abandoned by people. The river was dried up. No honey-makers in sight. They brought the bees on trucks into distant mountains, because deeper in the valley everything was dried up. Heavy lead had sunken into the ground. Every root in the earth was leaden. The trees had no more power to sprout. It was hard for me to believe that there was once life here, and the water of clarity that distinguishes the safe pathways. When will this dead area be revived once more?

*When the writing no longer flows like water, our faith dries up. Blessed are those who can call:*

*O Lord, I taste, I drink, I smell your love*

*Your love makes the paths free in your name, O Lord*

*Day and night conceal themselves at the same time*

*Whoever strides through the earth in flight doesn't feel foreign on it*

We had made our feet heavy, heavy arms, a heavy heart. We are laden with of those who came before us and those who will come after us. We have grasped at eternity and now our hands and estranged from our hearts. The one whose hand had grasped the furthest, had lost them. The hand belongs on the heart. The heart belongs in the hand.

Do the teachers have a distinctive language when they speak to their students? They may have weighted down their tongues with the vocabularies of the earth, with the vernaculars that open up borders. However, there is also this silence that cannot be explained. It collects all attention, because nothing is known about it. I want to cry with you about the bees that interrupted their flights and while resting forgot how to fly. Where do the honey makers still want to carry them? The one scout questions the other if this simply remained a blank area on the map.

Only those who forget all languages and erase every word in their translations have a sound sitting in their ears that spreads itself out from their into the innermost, distant soul. The ear is the source of a poetic language that is formulated by the tongue. When even those who understand immediately begin to translate, the sound still remains forever as a memory of an intact text.

Your heart sits in your ear, thus you listen to the music without which you never would have spoken, because no word sounds more authentic than its sound. I will not touch any language as long as I have not heard your voice. One of these sentences of love that accompany our silence throughout our lives, when we let ourselves enter into language.

Before every border, the language promises passwords. Whoever speaks it is already on the other side. For the way back, there is no password.

Father, the barren landscape, to which time after time the holy text leads me, is the abandoned place. It is abandoned by believers who have cast off their belief there and became as wounded and sensitive as skinned bodies. But some preserve their skin for the day of judgement, so that in accordance with their inclination to enjoy suffering, they are sprinkled with hot and godly drops. For those weighed down with pain, the skin is a form of identification, a plaster of desire, a stage of painful enactment.

There where Allah set forth, instead of Him, womanly dominance became the guardian of the law about desire and the keepers of pain. Men are entangled, desire, protest, give into selves, give up, and find no proper measurement. Who predetermines the measure for men and women? The Koran? How about the following verses:

Do you deserve the masculine; on the other hand does he deserve the feminine? That would be an uneven divide. (Sure 53, Verses 21-22)

The lord who complains about the names of female gods, how much can he influence the masculine gender, which would like to secure his privileges regarding the feminine gender? What does it mean?

In the pre-Islamic era, Mekka patron saints had planted themselves in the Kaaba, masculine figures with manly names. But they had given feminine names to their gods.

### **The Beauty of those who Yearn**

We always catch ourselves in the attempt to avoid our own history. It's not seldom that our history makes us shudder. It shames us. The heroic places are orphaned. The future may still be a fairy tale, but the past is a nightmare. And yet we are a product of this history. Its ropes, which reach out to us from faraway times, not too seldom become snares in our presence.

Should every individual found his own empire and form an identity that allows only him entry into the world in which he creates? Would he then be ungraspable for the minds of the ancient world?

Every distance makes us remember that we are distanced from Him. Every distance stokes up a sense of yearning within us.

*We were compensated for the separation with yearning!*

*What happens between people is just a portrayal of that which can happen between God and man. Such happens with love, such happens with yearning. Those are the powers that maintain and carry life onward. Yearning stems from love. Love exists for*

*us only in yearning. Yearning is the very first earthly feeling that stirs within people. It will be the last feeling that departs from them. It is the biggest governess of people.*

*There are three yearnings that guide people. They are:*

*The yearning for childhood,*

*The yearning for love,*

*The yearning for God.*

*Like three rivers they flow into one another and thus turn into a great current, which flows alongside life, in the course of time continues to grow and at the end of life leads into an ocean that binds every aspect of life together.*

*The education of a person stems from this river of the three yearnings. Their fruitfulness is something we owe to their repression. Skills are no longer mysterious trails, if one explores yearnings. Poets obtain their material from there. And the crooks and bandits use this river bank as a storage space and a refuge.*

*Whoever finds no yearning in love, no yearning in childhood and no yearning in God, forfeits the gift of sensation. His soul is sedated like a body part that no longer bleeds through.*

*Whoever believes that the soul doesn't exist has never been a child, has never fallen in love, and has never struggled for God. He knows neither the peacefulness of the soul, nor the unrest of yearning. He is alone in the world. He doesn't need to feel abandoned because no one ever accepted him.*

*You called such people iron natures. You knew them by their steps and way of walking.*

*"They appear in such a way that they could never float."*

*“Bodenständige” (indigenous) people, as they are called in the German language. The world belongs to them. They know only the ground. But with only the distance of a hand above the ground, another world begins, one that would always stay closed to them. The indigenous only think about the voyage to the moon, if and when he was on it, on Mars, on Venus ,and on distant planets. They have no grasp of the cosmos on the world, of the seven spheres that surround them from head to toe, and of the seven heavens above the head, which the soul can enter without a spacesuit.*

*“We are not at all at home on Earth yet, and we already want to conquer the heavens!”  
As if we had ever learned to use our senses, now we are expected to deal with the supernatural.*

Is yearning not also a curse, Father? Its flame whose fuel reacts to no extinguisher?  
This old world, whose language sounds so hackneyed in our ears, hid itself in that language, and crept in beside us, a blind passenger that took all of our fears upon itself. Our yearning has lost its love. It will grasp us without mercy. It will take possession of us against all reason.

At some point we arrive at the banks of old, dried-up riverbeds and settle down without suspicion or fear, remain patient in waiting for the breath, in whose nature heavenly message and material elixir are woven together to become an ornament of beauty.

*And the proud world of today, discarded like a sandtable exercise.*

But what remains then? Can one *think behind*? I borrow this term from you. *Think behind!* Who may speak even today about the “future”, who may describe what is to come with a concept that has been fully exhaled from their mouths?

*In the future we will have to do without future impostors. That we can hope.* In this way you had commented on the fall of communism. But what about when swindlers come out of our own ranks? Where to then with the Koran? Is it well situated only when it is enshrined in every household somewhere way up high over their heads?

The Koran once again lies comfortably and heavily in the hand. And in its name outrageous things happen. The hands that touch it have covered themselves in blood. The ritual of washing leaves behind by traces of blood.

Must those people who dare to open the Koran, own a poison cabinet? Which connection exists between violence in the name of the Koran, of Islam, in the name of Allah and the writing? These questions are something that we cannot pursue together. They were my questions. They remain my questions.

On days when I am closer to belief than to doubt, the Koran appears to me as a book, whose message has only gone astray. A book that due to its readers' manner of reading has become a seriously ill patient among the great works. On other days, the Koran seems to me as something incurable, because its readers will never accept treatment for their illness.

However, it is not these or those days that propel me. Rather, it is moments in which I can do nothing other than feel a deep pain. Yes, I am helplessly vulnerable to this pain. I cannot even locate it. I experience a loss of control of my thoughts. I am sure that no

knowledge of the world can protect me from that which is coming. I hold on, I pause. I am just the breath of my body. In this breath is unrest, which nevertheless cannot escape outside my body.

*Your breath today smells of poems again.*

You sometimes received me with these words. We then sat together for a while wordlessly.

*Do not waste your breath when it smells like poems!*

All the sounds from which a word could have been formed shrank back from fear, retreated within themselves and built a barrier around themselves. In that way oceans are built drop for drop, and poems word for word. I had intended to present something to you with the proudness of creation and an audible voice. However, the voice had retreated into the protective space and fallen silent. I enjoyed your speechlessness. In this speechlessness smells that touched the heart became noticeable, like a hand that touches sensitive places on the body.

*We are occupied all through our lives with trying to numb our sensitivity. Experience the smells, everything starts with smells. Through this, every being is awoken into life, and through them life is eliminated. Whoever can smell well has an especially intensive life. He has smelled paradise. For him the body becomes word and the word becomes body. Thus the word finds its way into the voice and the voice into the heart and the heart into the body and the body into language.*

Language that becomes a matter of the heart — long have I not wanted to know of such a thing. I built a barrier between heart and head. The heart works against this barrier and the head keeps building upon it. It sufficed for itself. It was complacent. I wrote head poems. Pains accumulated behind this barrier. My tongue froze. I hardly felt it, and I suffered no more from it and was no longer sure of my breath. What I had carried from one language into the other got bottled up in the sparse rooms that I inhabited and blocked my access to the entrance. I was ready to choke on translation. Until I again let languages free and separated them from each other. Thus they breathed and let me breathe easily.

Most of the time in life we breathe unconsciously. The heart beats unnoticeably. We are pain-free and don't sense our body. If one were to ask us about our condition, we would be sure that we are completely healthy. We wouldn't be dependent on any cure and we would reject every medicine, even that of faith. But healing begins when we yearn for pains, when our heart is moved, when breath overtakes us.

I had to become sick before I could once again feel this yearning. Nothing in my body is in good order. But the breath is there again. I once again smell like poetry. Even if you, Father, are no longer there and I have no one else who will confirm this for me. This time I don't want to build any walls around myself. I don't want to inhabit a blocked off land. I had my own personal fall of the wall. Only when one accepts the disorder in their own body, at least in the way that one cares about the disorder in a room, should one devote himself to the world.

*In every life the question finally presents itself — where to go with the pain?*

*Whoever takes pain upon themselves — they'll be called sick patients — will turn internalize faith..*

*Whoever loads pain upon others — they'll be called the healthy ones —will externalize faith.*

*Belief will vanish from the heart and the heart will vanish from the body. It will still invite more pain upon others, because the body, which has lost its heart, can only deliver pain. In this way it bleeds out.*

For hundreds of years pain was thrashed out from our languages. It strayed about the world in all spheres. It was the greatest mystery of all the homeless. When all the places of exile were overflowing and the accumulating pain no longer could be banished, one opened the book and discovered in the middle of it a fountain of endless depth and stored all one's pains there. I stand on the border of this fountain and say to myself: Measure yourself with the wounds of the book! Make up for its pains in your own body! I again recognize the book by its smell. It is the smell of an orphaned room. A room not inhabited for a long time, to which one returns. One has forgotten how it was furnished or one has regretted the absence of something that one believes was located here. One remembered the room as bigger or smaller. The proportions have changed. What should one depend on? On one's own eye? On one's memory?

I wished that in this instant everything would seem as if it had just been created. Would I then have had the chance to be here?

I abandoned the book a long time ago. I was born into it. One entered my name. This entry can never be deleted.

Can I again make myself at home in this room? Or has it been weaned for such a long time that it has become one of the rooms that can no longer be entered? A paradise of those who yearn?

Nevertheless, I have now perceived this smell once more, have opened the book. It is loud and stuffy, nothing seemed cleared away, no soul was preserved in it. How long already has no one dreamt in this book? Does one believe that one can enter this book with fingers? Does one not confuse something there? The opening of the book with the opening of the words?

The graspings of the fingers come and go. The words stay there, they keep to themselves. In every word is eternity. It is said that words would disappear when they are dissolved from the paper, from the stone, and from the tongue. However, it dries up only the tongue and wears out only the paper and molds only the stone. To them the word was only lent. As such, they will separate and the tongue will provide an account of how it avoided the word. It will load the stone with guilt, and it will defame the paper until it can no longer move. But then the stone and the paper begin to speak. Everybody hears the most beautiful words from them. They come from the depths of it and have a full sound. We couldn't do what you could do. We couldn't speak, but we could do what you couldn't — we could be silent. So now be silent and listen once again. "But I cannot hear", the tongue would have wanted to say. "I am just a tongue, and a piece of stringy meat when I'm not allowed to speak to you." However, the tongue hears everything. It listens superbly, it can just speak no longer. It hears the words breathe freely, and the euphony of their breath alights on it.

*Let us go on trips so that our tongues can stand the test.*

Thus you began every discussion, whether it was with a stranger or with your next of kin. When a word is not put at risk to be misunderstood, it feels unchallenged. Yes, it can be lost along the way. It can be taken prisoner, it can cause pain. But when it comes back, entrusted with a new voice, clothed in a new meaning, it will give us more than any well-fed tongue. Does the greatest misunderstanding not lurk nearby? The greatest difference between two people lies in their common language.

*The just among you are those who struggle with words.*

We readers, learners, and knowers, we think that we examine words, but in reality they examine us. Will we who understand be understood? Will we who doubt, withstand doubt?

I take the Koran in my hand, the copy from which you read out loud every Friday. On the pages the words in the flourishing writing of the great book appear eternally young and fresh. In seven years the calligrapher had finished his Koran. For seven years he had not spoken a single word. When someone asked him how he had endured the solitude that lasted seven years, he answered: Don't ask me, ask the words! I only witnessed their loneliness." I understand why you always preferred the original version of the Koran to every translation, because the meaning of the words is fond of traveling, fleeting, and ambiguous, but the sound is eternal. In this sound is the solitude of God, which has become eternal, the one and only God who speaks to us.

*An index finger lifted itself from the earth and grew into a tower. And we expanded this tower into a fortress that should still stand after our bodies have turned into dust; a mighty fortress should bind the word and should protectively hold together the bodily language.*

You have opened this fortress for me, Father. That is the end of my captivity. There are supposed to be many in this fortress who are imprisoned in their faith. Some of them made the word a prisoner of their earthly existence, the others a prisoner of their belief in the afterlife. But the open word reminds us of our origin.

There is no fatherland, no mother tongue, no law.

Only the sound of several verses that lead me into my childhood. I knew these verses by heart. As a child, I had them on my tongue, and later they were swallowed and disappeared into the darkness of my body. They took a long time to arrive at a place where I could once again hear them. But now they come out irrevocably and in a splendid translation from Hartmut Bobzin:

The Widening, Sure 94 of the Koran:

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

Have we not stretched out our breast to you,

Have we not removed your burden,

which lay heavily on your back,

and have we not elevated your call?

Therefore behold, with heaviness also comes lightness

Behold, with heaviness also comes lightness.

When you are free, then endeavor,

and turn your desires to your Lord!

*Desire is the fruit of yearning; yearning is only possible in freedom. The yearning of the captive for freedom should be called small in comparison to the yearning of the free toward their heart.*

A breeze has gone through me.

Wherefore do I only feel so heavy?

Perhaps it also only brushed me.

No one wants to believe it, no one has seen it.

When he has left me,

then I no longer know,

what is going on in my heart.

It was easy, because he knew

Where he came from.

I have only an inkling of it.

A feeling.

Just a trace.

Why is His absence so difficult?

## Reflection

During Spring of 2015 I completed a graduate course titled “The Task of the Translator” with Dr. Barbara Kosta. During the semester I had the opportunity to translate a few small excerpts from Zafer Senocak, such as the first few chapters of his book *Das Land Hinter den Buchstaben* and a poem titled “Die glückliche Kindheit der Bastarde”. Translating these works at first wasn’t necessarily a simple task, and throughout my first experiences translating I found myself constantly looking up words that I understood through context, but in order to properly capture the essence of the passages, I had to resort to a dictionary. As a matter of fact, this was something I had to constantly employ while translating the first chapter of his new book *In deinen Worten: Mutmaßungen über den Glauben meines Vaters*. At the end of the Spring semester I had to decide on a project for my thesis which had to deal in some way with the theme of translation, since I am one of the first two students to undertake the track in translation studies. I approached Senocak and asked him if he had anything that needed to be translated because I had already worked with a few of his pieces and he seemed to allow for a lot of creativity when it came to translating. In fact, when asked about how much freedom a translator had in the process, he said the translator could do whatever they wanted with the text. It just so happened that he was working on finishing up his new book and was planning on getting it published in German, but was also looking for it to be translated into English for publication. During one of our last few courses of the semester, Dr. Kosta approached Patrick Ploschnitzki, Tara Taylor, Adelina Lane, and me and asked us if we wanted to be the ones to translate his new

book. Later on in the process, Judith Menzl also volunteered to be the person who reads through the entirety of the translation for continuity as well as accuracy. Seeing this as an opportunity not only to have a published translation under my belt, but also to have a topic for my thesis, I was overjoyed to take on the task of the translation.

From a translator's perspective, I don't think it's truly possible to move away from a dictionary, because a translator seems to have a more intimate relationship with the text than someone who is simply reading a text for enjoyment, or just to capture the gist of what's going on in the story. This means that one cannot simply glaze over words that one does not know, because then a piece of the true meaning of the text will be lost. Throughout the semester we also utilized a book titled *In Translation*, which was edited by Esther Allen. This book is a collection of essays on various themes and topics in translation, including not only methodology, but also the ethics of what it means to be a translator. The semester beforehand I also did a translation of Walter Benjamin's *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzer*, so I had some idea of what it meant to capture the essence of a text and accurately put it into words in my own native language. While I had an idea of how to go about translating a text, it seemed as though sentence formulation from German into English was a task far greater than I originally anticipated. Not only does the translator have to capture the meaning of the writing, but also the style, and beauty of the original. The translator has to have fidelity toward the text, but at the same time also has to exercise creativity to develop a text that flows well in another language. In some cases, this requires the restructuring of sentences from one language into the

other, and the translator occasionally has to take leaps and bounds in order to carry over meaning and readability.

I wanted to adopt a method of translating from *In Translation*, specifically that of Susan Bernofsky in her essay titled “Translation and the Art of Revision”. In this essay Bernofsky talks about the revision process, and she writes that she generally puts her translations through at least four different drafts. The four drafts are as follows:

1. A quickly executed draft that is meant to be discarded, but is also used as a basis for ideas worth preserving. (Bernofsky 223)
2. Producing a meticulous draft where multiple bilingual dictionaries or thesauri are consulted to capture the most accurate meaning possible in any given context. (223)
3. Printing the text out and using a pencil to revise the English language while not looking at the original essay. This is to ensure grammatical accuracy in the target language. (224)
4. This is the polishing stage of the translation. (224)

At first glance this seems like a method worth utilizing while translating, but working with this method proved to be quite problematic for me. The goal with the first draft of my translation was to execute it as quickly as possible, while marking problematic spots in the text as I went. This didn’t necessarily pan out the way I wanted it to, because of the difficulty of the idiomatic phrasing as well as vocabulary. I was unable to produce a draft quickly because my portion was quite long and I had to refer constantly to a dictionary to understand what Senocak was trying to say. Even then I

didn't quite capture the essence of some of the more intricate spots of the text. It seems as though I combined steps one and two, because without resorting to a dictionary there was no way I could've produced a first draft. Furthermore, I didn't fully discard my first draft because so much work went into producing it; however, I did use the first draft as a basis for all future revisions.

Instead of printing the translation out to revise it with a pencil, I read through it on the computer and highlighted troublesome parts to either discuss with the collective that is working on the project, or with Dr. Kovach, who was also helping me with my work. This proved to be quite helpful, and I learned a lot about structuring sentences in an artful manner to give them the most impact possible, while still preserving the underlying meaning of the source text. Sometimes German sentences can be quite long, and so it's important to break them up into multiple sentences where applicable to avoid ambiguity as well as run-on sentences. This also helps with the overall flow of the text by ensuring that long-winded areas are kept to a minimum.

One thing that has proven to be a great obstacle throughout the whole process was that our group was working from a manuscript at first, i.e. an unfinished and unpolished book that still had to go through editing. The first "three" drafts of the translation were based on this manuscript, but since having translated my part based on the manuscript itself we have received three more versions of the book, which contained minor tweaks. This has made the task of polishing my translation difficult, because I've had to read through each version in conjunction with my own translation to ensure that I didn't miss any details or sentences that may have been moved around.

From the first to the fourth drafts of the original there have been changes regarding paragraph structure, sentence structure, and word choice. One thing that struck me as arduous was trying to figure out where I should start a new paragraph. In any of the versions I have received it has been unclear where to break the text up. This might be something worth looking into more when the book is published and a paper version is made available to me.

Translation requires a certain sense of cultural sensitivity. Without the knowledge of the source culture's history, there is no way of accurately conveying the meaning of a particular work. This type of theory is represented in the essay in *In Translation* by Friedrich Schleiermacher titled "On the Different Methods of Translation",

Schleiermacher writes:

To be sure, whoever has mastered this art of understanding by studying the language with diligence, acquiring precise knowledge of the entire historical life of a people and picturing keenly before him the individual works and their authors - he, to be sure, and he alone is justified in desiring to bring to his countrymen and contemporaries just this same understanding of these masters' work of art and science. (Schleiermacher, 47).

While translating Senocak's new book I encountered situations like this quite often.

While I may have understood what the author was writing, I didn't always necessarily understand the cultural significance behind the message. There were many themes at play in Zafer's book that were religious, political, or societal in nature.

Regarding the notion of religion mentioned in the first chapter of his book, Zafer spoke of the 100th name of Allah. He writes, "Bei einem deutschen Dichter der Nachkriegszeit, Günter Eich, lese ich den hundertsten Namen Allahs" (Senocak, 32).

This portion of the text was seemingly easy to translate, but at the same time I didn't

quite understand what Zafer was trying to convey. I spoke with Dr. David Gramling, because he is knowledgeable in the realm of Turkish-German studies. He informed me that Allah only had 99 names. In some way, shape, or form, all of Allah's names have something to do with beauty, or glory. Still, after having looked at a little bit of Eich's work, I still don't quite understand the message. This is a perfect example of understanding the language, but not the cultural impact of what is being said.

Another example of the intricacies of carrying over the message of a source language lies within the mastery of how to convey a message accurately. In some cases this requires the restructuring of the language based upon idiomatic phrasing from one language to another. One example from my translation work is as follows:

Er wusste, dass der Streit um die Gerechtigkeit vergeblich ist, aber trotzdem zu führen, weil der Sand, der sich über alles legt, ebenso wenig für die Ewigkeit ist, wie der Sand, der in die Augen gestreut wird. (24).

He knew that the fight for justice is futile but nevertheless had to be led, because the sand that covers everything is just as temporary as the sand that is thrown in one's eyes. (McNutt, 15).

This could possibly be related to the notion of the sandman and falling asleep when sand is thrown into your eyes, or it could be interpreted in a more straightforward manner. Translating this I chose to stick with a more true-to-the-text method. I think here Zafer is talking about how a person's beliefs are just as temporary as society's. Another aspect of the text that was particularly ambiguous was "...ebenso wenig für die Ewigkeit ist." If one wanted to translate this part literally, then it would come out to something such as "It is equally as little for eternity." Something such as this requires a little bit of finessing, but because of the way the sentence was written I knew that this

structure presented a comparison between sand covering everything and sand being in someone's eyes. Thus I chose temporary, because the message to me seems to be about the fight for justice being futile, due to fleeting changes that occur in a person or a society.

With these two instances in mind, it is clear that no translation will ever be perfect. A perfect translation, in the sense that I am writing about, is one that exactly matches the original, insofar as the true meaning is being conveyed entirely. This is something that a translation will never truly achieve. A fantastic quote that I have encountered, which highlights this, is from Walter Benjamin *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, when he writes "Bilden nämlich diese im ersten eine gewisse Einheit wie Frucht und Schale, so umgibt die Sprache der Übersetzung ihren Gehalt wie ein Königsmantel in weiten Falten." This quote essentially means that a translation will never truly become the original and that the translation rests upon the shell of the outer work. Benjamin describes a translation as just barely touching upon the surface of the original, or in this case a "fruit draped in royal robes". In the process of translating, one gives a rendition of how the original felt to him and attempts to recreate this in an aesthetically pleasing manner, in order to stay as true and close to the original as possible; however, the translator falls short of ever duplicating the true background of what the original work entails. Benjamin describes the coming together of two languages into one that may accurately convey the meaning of what the original was as the pure language, one where words may contain the same connotations as those of both cultures.

Furthermore, while translating this book I encountered many areas in which it took me quite a while to understand what the author was saying. Even though I was eventually able to understand what the author was saying, I had a tough time putting it into words in the English language. Not only was understanding the general meaning of the sentence difficult, but this was compounded on based on what clause pertained to one another. Together with my co-translators, we went through many renditions of the sentence in order to arrive at the best possible structure. This specific aspect of translating is also mentioned in Bernofsky's article "Translation and the Art of Revision". She writes about August Schlegel's 1799 translation of *The Merchant of Venice* and the difficulty he had in translating the seemingly simple line "Sir, I would speak with you."

The five different translations that Schlegel came up with are as follows:

Herr, ich muß mit euch sprechen. (Sir, I must with you speak.)  
Ich muß euch sprechen, Herr. (I must [to] you speak, sir.)  
Herr, laßt euch etwas sagen. (Sir, let [to] you something be said.)  
Ich wollt' euch etwas sagen, Herr. (I would like [to] you something to say.)  
Herr, noch ein Wort mit euch. (Sir, a word with you.) (Bernofsky, 225)

As Bernofsky puts it, Schlegel could've been satisfied with the first translation of it, because it's a word-for-word translation. However, something isn't quite right with the rhythm of the sentence. The first four capture the meaning quite accurately, but don't convey the message in the intended way. It is, however, important to note that one may not know the intentions of the author, and one uses their analytical skills to come to their own interpretation of what they think the author would have done. In the "The Intentional Fallacy", it is argued that:

...the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that

this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes.

It is important to look at what is contained in the text and infer meaning from that, rather than delve into what exactly the author himself was attempting to do. This is further iterated in this particular utterance:

A poem can be only through its meaning - since its medium is words - yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery.

Therefore, it is important to look at the elements that compose a work of art and the elements that, combined, create the narrative of whatever genre is being read. Meaning is then derived from the aesthetic, political, religious, and societal elements within the text, along with whatever other devices are or were important in the creation of said work.

The last translation, which was the one Schlegel chose, captures the meaning and the structure syllable-for-syllable. This aspect of constantly revising your own work in order to come up with something that is the right fit is something that my group and I encountered with this sentence:

Die Etablierung einer politisch unbedenklichen, der weltlichen Herrschaft und sozialen Missständen gegenüber unkritischen Vorbeterkaste, die als Lohnempfänger und Staatsdiener funktionieren, sei ein geschickter Schachzug korrupter Herrscher gewesen. (Senocak, 12)

This portion of the text isn't quite as simple as the line Schlegel was working with, but the theory behind translating it falls into the same category, i.e. how to accurately carry

the flow and meaning from the source language into the target language. This sentence is also particularly perplexing because it was hard to ascertain which clause pertained to which clause within the sentence. My group and I took quite a while to come up with a meaningful way of translating the sentence, and at first we came up with:

The establishment of a politically harmless caste of prayer leaders, who function as wage earners and social servants, was seen by you as a clever chess move of corrupt rulers.

This translation captures most of what the sentence is trying to say, but while constantly coming up with new ways of structuring the sentence in English we accidentally and unfortunately omitted “der weltlichen Herrschaft und Sozialen Missständen gegenüber unkritischen Vorbeterkaste”. Due to this, another reworking was necessary and the translation we came up with is as follows:

The establishment of a politically harmless caste of prayer leaders, who were uncritical of the secular political leadership and social injustice, function as wage earners and social servants. This was seen by you as a clever chess move of corrupt rulers.

In the case of this particular sentence, while going back and forth about how to translate it, it was useful to break the language down into simpler components in order better to understand what Zafer was trying to say. However, the phrasing within this sentence was tricky, and to fit every component of it into one sentence would not look too great in terms of style in the English context. Therefore, it was best to break the sentence down into two different ones to preserve meaning, but also make it readable.

Another aspect of the translation that was tricky was translating pieces of the Koran that were strewn about the text. The predicament here is whether or not to seek out an English translation of it, or to translate it myself. This is compounded by the fact

that the version of the Koran used in Zafer's book is a German translation. Therefore, it was decided that it was best to translate it myself, using my own words, but also to reference a couple of English translations to see how others translated the source text. The meaning of my translation and the meaning of the ones translated directly into English were fairly similar, so I opted not to use one of those as a possible translation. One particular part of the Koran that was in Zafer's text and the subsequent English translation from me are as follows:

Ihr werdet die Frauen nicht gerecht behandeln können,  
auch wenn ihr euch darum bemüht.  
Und wendet eure Zuneigung nicht völlig ab,  
so dass ihr sie gleichsam in der Schwebe lasst... Sure 4 Vers 129.

You won't be able to treat your wives justly,  
even if you endeavor to do so.  
And don't completely deny your affection toward the others,  
so that you leave them in limbo... Sure 4 Verse 129.

The translation here isn't quite perfect and could use a little bit of work in terms of the vocabulary used, but I believe it captures the general meaning of this specific verse in the Koran. One word that I think might need to be changed is the word "limbo". To me, being in limbo reminds me of the world between life and death. It seems like the overall message being delivered here is to not leave one's woman hanging, but to me leaving someone hanging sounds a bit too slangy for my taste. Therefore, for now I stuck with the word limbo.

Throughout the course of the spring semester of 2015 and this semester I have learned an important lesson about the task of the translator: that there isn't just one be-all and end-all method. At the beginning of translating this text my goal was to follow a

systematic approach as detailed by Susan Bernofsky in “Translation and the Art of Revision”. While I incorporated some of her methods into my own translating, I quickly realized that I would be unable to incorporate them all due to my current experience in the realm of translation. Perhaps as I gain more knowledge in the field and gain a better feel for how accurately to represent foreign and complex ideas from German in my own language, I may then be better able to utilize some of her methodology. Furthermore, each specific genre has its own unique intricacies, and one must take appropriate steps within that text to identify and examine the difficulties that arise when translating. However, it’s important that in one’s translation one caters toward a specific audience, depending on the type of text. In the case of the chapter I am translating for Zafer, the targeted audience might be people who are interested in learning about Turkish culture from the standpoint of a Turkish-German author, or the readership might be interested in learning about how a German-Turkish author views his past culture after having integrated into German society. The dichotomy between cultures, in this case of *In deinen Worten: Mutmaßungen über den Glauben meines Vaters*, has to do with religious, political, linguistic and other cultural issues. Whatever the goal of the text, the language needs to be appropriate for that specific group. However, readability, fidelity toward the text, and the beauty of the text from the source language to the target language are all important factors to keep in mind while translating, and they go hand in hand. Even though, according to Walter Benjamin, a translation will never be quite the same as the original, it is important to strive to obtain close to the same thoughts and ideas in your translation as are represented in the source text. This ensures that the text

doesn't stray too far from the interpretation of the author's text and allows a readership that may not have knowledge of the source language to gain an understanding of another culture, regardless of the language barriers.

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