

The Courtyard in the Mirror

A Collection of Short Stories by Emine Sevgi Özdamar

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About the Author and the Work

Emine Sevgi Özdamar was born in 1946, just shortly after the close of World War II and at the dawn of the Cold War, in Malatya, a province in middle-Eastern Turkey. Like many Turks, she left her home country to find work abroad. She moved to Berlin as a teenager, where she was employed at a factory for two years.¹ After returning to Turkey and studying acting in Istanbul, she moved back to Germany in 1976 to work with directors Benno Besson and Matthias Langhoff at the famous Volksbühne theater,² located in the Eastern half of Berlin. In addition to being an author of novels, short stories and plays, she is also a theater director and an actress, both in film and on stage.

Özdamar has earned a unique place in the world: although born and raised in Turkey, the German press has named her a *Berliner*.³ Although her mother tongue is Turkish, she writes almost exclusively in German. Although she is an actress, she is also a careful observer of the world. These dichotomies are reflected beautifully in her collection of short stories *Der Hof im Spiegel* (*The Courtyard in the Mirror*).

The title story, “The Courtyard in the Mirror,” tells the tale of a woman who bears a striking resemblance to the author herself. In this story, the narrator closely follows the lives of her neighbors by watching their reflections move through the mirrors in her courtyard apartment. This woman weaves her own memories of the past with the lives of the people she observes and comes to know and care for, thus bridging her identities as

¹“Emine Sevgi Özdamar.” Arte.tv. 03 Mar. 2005. <<http://www.arte.tv/de/ARTE/811478.html>>.

² “People’s Theater.” A large theater located in East Berlin, one of the more provocative and experimental theaters in Germany.

³ “Kunstpreis Berlin an Emine Sevgi Özdamar.” *Der Tagesspiegel* 22 Jan. 2009. <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/art772,2711868>>.

an insider and as an outsider. Through her perspective, the reader is introduced to the rather uncertain identity of a person who has left one homeland behind for a new one.

“The New Cemeteries in Germany” recounts the stories of a selection of Turkish immigrants in Germany. At times humorous, and in the end moving, these stories provide a perspective which may be new to the American reader. What does it mean to have been a guest worker?⁴ What does it mean to be a Turk living in Germany (or a German Turk)? What does that ever-important document, the passport, mean to a person’s identity? Through a patchwork of short passages, Özdamar tackles these questions, while leaving them open to further thought and interpretation.

The final translation chosen from this collection, “Uli’s Tears,” recounts the everyday events in the lives of Berliners shortly after the fall of the wall. In this story, the narrator transforms into an authority, for she knows both the East Berliner actors and the West Berlin stage. In comparison with the dramatic events of November 9, 1989, ordinary stories like the ones Özdamar tells are often overlooked.

Understanding culture, to a great extent, means understanding people. I hope that this translation will introduce the reader not only to a beautifully written collection of short stories and their characters, but also to some of the people who live in today’s Germany. Perhaps you will find yourself drawn into the world of these characters, just as a traveler is drawn into the lives of people in a foreign land.

“...don’t look into the mirror at night, or else you’ll go to a foreign land”

⁴ The guest worker program was started in West Germany in the 1950s in order to boost the work force. A large proportion of guest workers came from Turkey and were expected to return home after a few years of work. At the program’s close in the 1970s, a number of these guest workers remained in Germany.

Notes on the Translation

It is important to remember that there is no such thing as *one* perfect translation. Words, phrases and sentences will inevitably appear in a source text of any great length that simply have no direct equivalents in the target language. Translation theory is at its most helpful in these cases. When does the translator have the freedom to compensate? If a translation is not literal, it is still valid? How does one make a translation sound natural rather than clumsy and foreign?

I consulted three texts on translation in order to answer these questions and to develop a justified system of decision making: *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* by Mona Baker,⁵ a collection of articles entitled *Translators' Strategies and Creativity* edited by Ann Beylard et al.,⁶ and *Thinking German Translation* by Sándor Hervey et al.⁷

Where explanatory notes could be made to assist the reader without interpreting Özdamar's work (for example, translating passages from French into English), this was done, keeping in mind that the audience for this translation is the generally educated American with little knowledge of Turkish immigration issues in Germany and Europe.

It was important to me to retain Özdamar's tone and style. For this reason, the reader will find numerous instances of repetition, some long sentences, and some odd-sounding constructions. The images she paints are as uncommon in the German language,

⁵ Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

⁶ Moser-Mercer, Barbara. *Translators Strategies and Creativity (Benjamins Translation Library)*. Ed. Ann Beylard-Ozeroff and Jana Kralova. New York: John Benjamins North America, 1998. Print.

⁷ Hervey, Sandor, Michael Loughridge and Ian Higgins. *Thinking German Translation: A Course in Translation Method: German to English*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

though technically correct. Wherever these instances could be retained while still being comprehensible in English, they were so translated.

Specific decisions that were made during the translation process are explained in translator's footnotes at the bottom of every page. A glossary can be found on page...

I would also like to thank Professor von Wörde, who dedicated time and a tireless eye to providing me with advice and assistance on this translation.

The New Cemeteries in Germany

About forty years ago the guest workers came to Germany.

I love the word “guest worker.” I always imagine two people in front of me: one of them is a guest and sits there while the other works.

At that time the Italians, Greeks and Turks were twenty or thirty years old – by now many of them have died - and they could not carry the dead back to their countries. The Turks in Germany often shared this anecdote:

Two brothers were working in Germany. Their father came to visit from Turkey and died here. The two brothers deliberated: flying the two of them to Turkey with a dead person in a coffin would cost too much money. So they hunted down a large cardboard box, placed the dead father into the empty tv box (Schaub-Lorenz brand), tied the box to the luggage rack of their car and drove off. They stopped for a break in a forest in Yugoslavia and went to sleep. By morning the Schaub-Lorenz box had been stolen.

Today some Turks already speak of cemeteries they could build in Germany; some of the dead no longer have any desire to return home.

Still today it's best for a Turk who hopes to find work in Germany to leave Turkey with a work visa in order to get a work permit. In the last forty years many Turks have also tried to enter Germany with a tourist visa. Tourist visas have been suspicious at the German border, and for this reason you'd have to come up with something. For example, some men would dress as members of the Turkish soccer team.

From my first play “Karagöz in Alamania” (Dark Eyes⁸ in Germany):

German border.

The passport control officer asks: “To the Federal Republic of Germany?”

Footballer: “Fedril Repislic.”⁹

“What is the purpose of your visit?”

“Fotbol-fotbol: fenerbahce.”

The officer asks: “Is your team the guest?”

“Not guest, not work. Fenerbahce.”

There was also talk of nine Turkish men with tourist visas, eight of whom dressed themselves in tailcoats before the Swedish border. Only one kept his normal attire on. He got through the passport control, the others were turned away.

Giovanni Sgognamillo wrote about the Levantine Istanbulers ten years ago (they had come from Italy to Istanbul a few generations ago):

If a Levantine felt threatened by the Turkish police, he would throw his Italian passport on the ground in front of the policeman and place his foot on top of it. That meant: I am located in Italy. The passport meant: a different country. Whether the foot on the passport really helped, I don’t know.

A Turk that I knew was married to a German woman, a marriage of love. He was afraid of the Turkish military and gave up his Turkish citizenship many years ago in order to get

⁸ I translated this as “dark eyes” instead of the literal “black eyes,” so that it would not be confused with bruised eyes.

⁹ This translation does not necessarily match up with what a Turkish speaker would say in English, it is merely a way of showing this person’s difficulty with the language.

a German passport. For twelve years he didn't go back to Turkey. Out of longing for his family he got himself drunk for two whole days every month for these twelve years. Then he cried, sung in Turkish and said to me: I have my days just like the women. His fear of the Turkish military was greater than his trust in the German passport.

In order to get a German passport, the Turks, after they have worked long enough in Germany, must first give up their Turkish citizenship. But this is a game. The Turkish officials in Germany would often say: "Go ahead and give up your citizenship, there's no other way. The Germans don't accept you having two passports. When you're Germans, we'll take you in again."

The German authorities knew this game. Some officials even said: "And then eventually you'll get your German passport, then you'll go to your consulate and get your Turkish passport again."

When I flip through my expired Turkish passports, every stamp is tied to a story.

My first visa was a tourist visa. When I got a job at the Schaubühne theater in West Berlin und needed a work visa, I had to go to the Turkish consulate in Berlin with my contract. There an official wrote by hand in my passport that I'd found a job in Berlin and that I could take care of my living expenses. Then he stamped the page and signed. With this notation in my passport I was shipped to Istanbul, where the German consulate had to approve my employment at the Schaubühne. With these credentials I then had to go to the Turkish passport authorities in order to have the "tourist" designation changed to "worker."

When I had gone to the Turkish consulate in Berlin with my passport and showed the official my contract with the Schaubühne, there was a famous Turkish singer who had

come to Berlin for a concert sitting in the official's room. Her hair was dyed blonde and the official flirted with her. So that he wouldn't be interrupted from looking her in the eyes, he dictated the sentence to me, which he himself had to write in my passport. In front of the singer, he expressed himself particularly politely and elaborately, and so I wrote an entire page in my own handwriting in my passport. Then he stamped it and signed, without reading.

The head of the passport authority in Istanbul, who had to change the "tourist" entry into "worker" said to me, "But my beautiful lady, you can not be a worker. With those eyebrows, those eyes und that hair and your graceful gazelle gait."

I begged him, and finally he wrote "worker" in my passport.

When a friend at the Schaubühne glanced at the page in my passport with my handwriting, she said to me, "I had no idea that your passport's also your diary."

I have had the German passport for three years. Because of my books I often had to travel abroad and, with my Turkish passport, I had to apply for a visa for almost every country. At borders the Turkish passport is worth as much as Turkish lira. With the German passport you get in to every country.

Many years ago I travelled with some friends from Germany to one of Matthias Langhoff's theater premieres in Switzerland. The car with which we travelled was an old Jaguar like the one from the Hitchcock film *Vertigo*. Jaguar MK2, year 63. Because we arrived right before the performance was about to start, we had to park the car somewhere quickly. The friend who owned the car was very worried that the Swiss police would tow

his car away. The director Matthais Langhoff said to him: “Don’t worry, as a Jaguar owner the Swiss couldn’t think of you as a bad guy.”

It’s exactly the same with the German passport as it is with the Jaguar.

But does the German passport always help?

For example:

One summer night I was sitting at the bar in the artists’ pub “Florian” between two Turkish actors, my favorite friends. They told me their sex stories with ever changing women, and we laughed so much our stools wobbled. I wore a taffeta dress with a deep neckline. To the left of us sat a very young girl at the bar. She smiled and asked: “Are you Turkish?”

“Yes.”

“I live in Kreuzberg,¹⁰ and it’s so full of life there, the Turks are so nice, but you know, one thing bothers me.”

“What?”

“The Turkish girls have to leave the house with their head scarves und only after their parents can’t see them anymore do they take it off and put it in their bags. And when they come home, they put the head scarf on again on the doorstep. We founded an organization – we want to help the Turkish girls with problems like these. You don’t wear a head scarf, or do you have it in your bag too?”

“Yeah, it’s in my bag. Later I’m going to have to put it on again.”

¹⁰ An area South West of the center of Berlin. Famous for the high proportion of Turkish immigrants and a counter-culture movement.

I forgot this discussion and went back to laughing with my friends. At some point she tapped me on the shoulder and gave me her card.

“If you need help, call me. Are the boys there your brothers?”

“Yes, one of them.”

“Does he hit you?”

“Yeah.”

“Call me if he does it again.”

She felt sorry for me.

“You know, he screws me too.”

“Incest. Call me tomorrow.”

I turned back over to my friends, smoked a cigarette. She kept watching me with this sympathetic look in her eyes, and my conscience started to bother me.

“It was a joke. I don’t have a head scarf in my bag, he’s not my brother, and nobody beats me.”

She was hurt and grew angry.

“I see, you wanted to show me that we Germans are too prejudiced against Turkish women!”

I ask myself today: if I'd had a German passport in my bag next to my Turkish one – would the story have been different?

Maybe soon more foreigners will have two passports. I wonder how many Turks about to cross into Turkey will show their German passport.

A Turk I knew covered his Turkish passport in a Swiss passport holder. If he shows this cover, his moustache and workers' hands give him away:

“Aren't you Turkish?”

A Swiss friend, who speaks Turkish, put his Swiss passport in a plastic Turkish holder, showed it at the border, said “Grüezi”¹¹ and went through.

Maybe all people in the world should have at least nineteen passports. If a Turk goes to Greece or Armenia, he'll simply hold up the German or French passport, if he goes to Israel, he'll hold up his Turkish passport. When a French person travels to Algeria, he can show his Swedish passport, when a German travels Holland, he can show his Irish passport. But this is also a lot of work, first you'd have to study history. Who knows who did what to whom 400 years ago. Or would it have to be that the passport report would have to come on after the traffic report on the morning news. “Today: which passport for what country?”

¹¹ A Swiss-German greeting

I would like to quote Nihal here, she earns her living as a cleaning lady and has two children.

“What do you think about double passports?”

“I will also apply for a German passport, if it’s possible, for the sake of my children.

They were born here. But we’re all just guests in this world, no one will stay here, we will all go. We are all foreigners in this world in the end. *One* passport for everyone is best. The world passport.”

The Courtyard in the Mirror

I thought she had died. I stood in the kitchen, my back leaned against the heater, and waited for the sad light in her room to go on in the large mirror fixed to the wall over my kitchen table. For years her light from the house on the other side of the courtyard was my setting sun. Only after I saw her lighted window in the kitchen mirror would I turn the light in my apartment on. Now I stood in the dark and had a cookie in my hand, but didn't eat, was afraid that I would make too much noise. If she had died...

The light went on in the staircase; someone was going down the stairs. The light crept through¹² the frosted glass window of my apartment door into the kitchen, and I saw my waiting expectant face in the mirror. That must be Herr Volker, who is going down the stairs. His steps used to be much louder than they are now. He used to live with a young man, a handsome boy. The young man sewed elegant suits for himself and for Herr Volker on a sewing machine. Herr Volker's wooden floor trembled from the rattling of the sewing machine, and my ceiling trembled along. And from the trembling ceiling, the plates that were stacked on top of one another in the cabinet began to tremble too. When he paused, I thought, now he's tearing off the thread with his teeth between the completed, sewed fabric and the sewing machine needle. That's how my mother had always done it when I was a child. A few threads always hung down from her hair, she lay the right half of her face on the sewing machine, in front of the sewing machine needle, and tore the threads that connected the fabric and the sewing machine needle off with her teeth. She told me that her right middle finger once got caught under the needle moving across the fabric, which then broke off in her finger. The doctors said: "We can

¹² Literally "grew." Since this is awkward in English, I chose to convey slow movement through "crept"

operate, but don't worry, the needle will not move towards your heart. It will stay there in your finger."

As a child I had always felt for this half of the needle in her finger. Sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and feel her middle finger, to see if the needle was still there. Or was it on the way heading for her heart? For years I was the watch guard of a broken needle. When she died, I stood in the cemetery, not underneath the tree where the men were placing her in the ground, but rather under the next tree, because the girls were not allowed to stand next to the open grave of the dead, only the sons. The men lifted her out of the coffin, held her shroud at the four corners; suddenly I saw her heels, which peeked out from underneath the shroud. She's swinging, I thought, here is a garden, she's swinging on a swing that someone had fixed up between the two trees, I'm standing underneath and see her heels.

When she left the world, she only took half a needle with her. When I used to hurt her, she said to me: "My daughter, first you must prick your own flesh with a needle. Only if it doesn't hurt, can you prick other people's flesh with a needle." Or "What is man?" she said, "you can't eat his flesh, you can't wear his skin. Man has no more than his sweet tongue." When she died, I wondered, how many words had she taken with her under the ground? I longed deeply for her words. She had said: "The world is the world of the dead, when you consider the number of the living and the dead." How many words lay down there now?

I sat in the airplane and dealt with death in the heavens. "When I arrive in Istanbul, my mother will open the door for me, the room will smell like the cooking filled grape leaves that I love." When I got out of the taxi onto the steep alleyway in Istanbul, the curtains up

in her window were moving with the wind from the Sea of Marmara. For days I searched for women who were similar to her on the streets. I found only two. The gypsy, who always sold flowers at the end of the long steep alleyway and rolled thin cigarettes, one after the other, and smoked the cigarettes to the end, so that no stubs lay around her on the street. I traveled by train and asked the people if their mothers were still alive or how old they had been when they had died. But it didn't matter if their mothers had died younger or older than my mother, it didn't help me. One time the train stopped at a small station. There were Kurdish women and children, who were brought there as seasonal workers, sitting on the ground. But it had rained a great deal, and the wool they were supposed to pick had gotten wet. One of the Kurdish women was crying loudly. Her crying was similar to my mother's crying, but the train drove away, and I still heard her crying voice.

Before my mother died I had never seen my father on the telephone. When the telephone rang, he would speak to one of my siblings briefly. "Come over, son, we're home," then he would hang up again. Now he looked through the apartment for books with all of the telephone numbers that they had collected over the past fifty years, dialed these numbers, told those that were still alive of my mother's death, and said, "look for a wife for me." Look for a wife for me. I sat in an armchair. On the armchair across from me I could still see the imprint my mother had left. My father sat with his back to me on the telephone. His shoulders were slouched downwards. I went to him, lay my hand on his shoulders and wanted to stroke and massage them a little. On the other line I heard the voice of a man my father had met at the beach twenty years ago and whose number he had first taken down in the sand until I had brought him his pen and cigarette box from

the beach house so that he could write it down. Suddenly this voice yelled into the phone “Mr. Mustafa, earthquake, earthquake!” and the earth carried me, my hands on my father’s shoulders, a meter forward and then back again, and I arrived exactly back where I had stood a second ago. But my father, the phone in his hand, said he hadn’t noticed the earthquake at all. The next day he went to the pharmacy at the corner of the steep lane and wanted the pharmacist to find a wife for him. Then he went to a nearby cemetery where Armenians from Istanbul were buried, came back with a bottle of Raki¹³ and gave me a glass. At night he lay down on the side of the bed where his wife had always lain. In those days many Bulgarian Turks were fleeing Bulgaria for Turkey. They lived in tents, and it was said that the Turkish border police would rape the women that were fleeing Bulgaria for Turkey. My father said to my brother: “My son, go, find me a Bulgarian wife. She needs a roof over her head.” Then he went back to the pharmacy to tell the pharmacist the same. But there he discovered that a truck had driven into the pharmacy. His brakes had suddenly failed on the narrow, steep lane, and he had destroyed all of the medicine bottles that were on the shelves. Cough syrup and Eau de Cologne ran down the truck’s radiator and mixed with the smell of iodine. On the floor lay the old scale, squashed, on which my mother and my father had from time to time weighed themselves. “Father, I have to go back to Germany tomorrow.”

I gave all of my mother’s clothes to the gypsy who sold flowers at the top of the steep lane and left Istanbul. Only when I saw the telephone on the table here in Germany did I start to cry. Now I understood the pain and unease of my father. A while ago I saw a film about Glenn Gould. He composed and was very depressed and telephoned constantly with his girlfriend. One time he signaled a taxi driver to stop; he went into a telephone

¹³ Raki is a spirit popular in Turkey that usually has an anise flavor

both, telephoned perhaps an hour long with his girlfriend, and the taxi waited. Without any light on.¹⁴ The driver smoked in the dark. For years I too, like Glenn Gould, had always telephoned with my parents or friends. As if the birds that sit on telephone poles could pick up the love of these people in their mouths and bring them to me with their feet. My father's telephone in Istanbul was always busy now. Only when my father too died a few days later was the telephone no longer busy.

Like a bird gone blind with longing, he hit his head against all of the walls in his closed room, searched for all of the voices from the past with the telephone, lay his feathers on the table with every phone conversation, one after the other, and then he was gone. One time I found him on the telephone.

-Father, what are you doing?

-I'm sitting here in the dark.

-Me too, Father.

The dark room. The fortieth room like in a fairy tale. You're allowed to open thirty nine doors, but you are never allowed to open the door to the fortieth room. That's where death is. But the hero always opened the fortieth room.

Herr Volker's steps going up the stairs were not so loud in past months as they had been earlier. The handsome young man, who had sewn nice costumes for himself and for him, had left him, and Herr Volker had lost twenty kilos.¹⁵ When he went up the stairs at night, his body sometimes grazed against my apartment door. When he had then closed his door upstairs behind him, I opened the door downstairs, and the staircase smelled like alcohol.

¹⁴ Original reads, "Ohne Licht," "Without Light."

¹⁵ About 45 pounds

One night, when he hit the wooden floor up there and cried loudly, I went to him. He said to me, he had lain down on the wooden floor next to the telephone, so that the telephone would have sympathy for him. But the telephone had no sympathy for him. “He doesn’t call.” He told me: “Joseph Conrad’s character Marlow says in *Heart of Darkness*: ‘The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don’t you see? your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in---...’”¹⁶

I went downstairs and called him. “Herr Volker, your phone does have some sympathy for you.” He laughed upstairs.

A friend in Paris, who worked at the university as an Urban Studies professor, came home, gave his wife and me two blank pieces of paper and said, “I found out from one of my pupils¹⁷ today what he is doing for his dissertation: He’s handing out pieces of paper to lots of people in Paris and asking them: “Draw your personal map of Paris.” All of the drawings were very different from one another. In every city everyone has their own personal city.” His wife and I drew on the paper the places that meant Paris to us. These too were very different. If I were to draw my own personal map in this city here, then it would look like this: First the parrot store on the big street. I went into the store at the time when I had moved here. “Excuse me ma’am, how many languages does your parrot speak?” The saleswoman said, “We speak German.” Then the bakery, where the baker

¹⁶ Translation quoted from the English original, *Heart of darkness: complete, authoritative text with biographical and historical contexts, critical history, and essays from five contemporary critical perspectives* by Joseph Conrad and Ross C. Murfin. Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p.65.

¹⁷ In the original “Schüler,” a German term which does not apply to university students. Here I maintained the odd lexical choice

woman would almost open the door for me with her large bosom when I come in.

“Hellooooo!” If I go to her shortly before closing, she tells me of her love affair with a Polish man and gifts me with a piece of cake. “Take it, otherwise it will become pigs’ food.” Then the bookstore, where Oriana Fallaci and I had readings. There Herr Rupp, the handsome book salesman, who, after the bookstore had changed into a travel book store, looked for work in a different city.

Then the homeless man, who spent Christmas alone with his plastic bags on a wooden bench under the light bulbs, which hung from the trees, directly across from Armani on the luxus shopping street Königsallee. The three kings have to come by him sometime too. On this evening there was no one on this famous street except for us two. I gave him three hundred mark. The homeless man said, “Oh, oh, oh. Are you from this city?” “Yes, but I don’t love the city.” He still held the money in his hand, his face, which had forgotten how to laugh, tried to find muscles to express his joy. His face didn’t manage it, but his voice, his voice changed suddenly into a eunuch’s voice and said, “The city in itself is very nice, but the people are dumb.” I said, “You know, maybe it’s not the city’s fault. In other cities I used to always work at the theater. In this city I don’t have a theater, I don’t have friends, I only work at home.” Sometimes I searched the streets for this man. I encountered him two more times. The first time we encountered each other he said to me: “I can’t take it anymore.”

A few years later he didn’t recognize me anymore and yelled at me: “I want to have my peace.”¹⁸

¹⁸ “Ruhe” can also be translated merely as “quiet.” It generally describes a calm, quiet, peaceful state. I chose the English hyponym as a likely main meaning

Then the Butcher Shop Carl. The house was painted pink, and over the entrance hung a pink pig sculpture. The old butcher woman, her son and her daughter in law worked there. When I went by on the other side of the street, they greeted me, even if they were weighing ground meat or cutting cutlets. One evening the old butcher woman was standing alone in the store and was holding on to the counter as if she were in a room without air so that she wouldn't fly back and forth through the air. Normally the butchers was always full of customers, but on this evening she was standing alone there. She looked me in the eyes, and although I didn't want to buy anything, I went into the store. Cling, cling. The door opened and closed. In the glassed-in refrigerator I saw nothing but a few frozen chickens.

"Do you not have any fresh chicken today?"

"No."

The old woman looked me in the eyes for a long time. An hour later I went back in and bought a frozen chicken. She stuck both of her hands in the freezer to get out the chicken, and for a few seconds her hands looked like marble under the neon light. When I saw her the next day alone in the store again, I went to the Moroccan shoemaker Omar. "Omar, where are the young butchers?" Omar's shoe making machine was very loud. He was sanding the soles of an old cowboy boot and spoke loudly over the sound of the machine. They died in their BMW on the highway. It was raining hard, there was a tree branch in the road, and they died in the woods." I brought the old butcher woman three flowers. "Ah, the actress," she said as she opened the door. It smelled like cooking meat in her dark apartment behind the butcher shop. The next day I saw the three flowers sitting in the display window. On a spring evening I saw the old woman talking to a man. She had

lost a lot of weight, and the flesh of her thighs hung like stockings that were not pulled up, casting large folds over her knees. She looked at this old man, smiled and nodded. It looked to me as if she were smiling in a high fever. The man with whom she spoke was a priest. Soon she too died. Someone took down the pig sculpture that hung over the butchers and the house was painted white. When she died, I cried in the kitchen mirror and telephoned with my mother.

“Mother, the old butcher woman is dead too. Why did she have to see her children die before her?” My mother cried in Istanbul and said, “Poor woman, poor woman. People die, my daughter.”

“Mother, I want to die before you, I couldn’t take it if you someday aren’t there anymore.” My mother said, “My child, the sentences you have spoken should be carried out of your mouth by a strong wind. Never say something like that again. Do you know what it means for a mother to lose her child?” “Mother, how did my brother die?” “I don’t know. He was still dancing on top of the tables at a wedding, the next morning his throat was swollen, and he couldn’t breathe anymore. The evil eyes had met him...”

As my mother was telling me this on the telephone, I saw a bee crawling along the kitchen window in the mirror. Maybe a bee had stung my brother’s tongue.

My mother told me: “After that I became sick for the next two years. The doctors said, bone tuberculosis. I walked on crutches, and the doctors thought that I couldn’t have any more children. One night one of my father’s wives saw the holy Ali, Mohammed’s son in law, in a dream. He said about me: ‘She will have a son again. She must then name him Ali after me.’ And it is true, eight months later I had your brother Ali.”

“Did you scream a lot when you gave birth to me, mother?”

I turned the cassette recorder on, and my mother imitated on the telephone how she had screamed when she gave birth to me. Then she laughed just as long as she had screamed before. “You really should have been a boy, you only played with the other boys under the bridge, and your brother helped me cook. If I’d let you, you would’ve even slept under bridges.”

In this city too I love the bridges. I run over them to the other side of the city and hold my skirt tight. Joseph Beuys lived on the other side of the river.

These bridges are also a part of my personal map, like Heinrich Heine’s birthplace, the Bambi-movie Theater and the central station. When you sit in a café in the station’s hall, the people run in front of you as a mass to the trains. They look as if they were wearing an electronic conveyer belt beneath their feet. Then everything is empty, and you only see a few bums drinking beer as a group. Then the belt starts up again and carries the masses in the opposite direction.

Downstairs in the apartment building where I lived there were two men who repaired television sets. The whole day long many tvs were on. Sometimes films were playing, some just showed snow. One time the smaller man rang my doorbell and said, “We almost all just got burned up. A tv exploded and went up in flames. Right under here.” I touched the parquet wood floor, it was very hot. Both of these men used to be pilots for rich whites in South Africa. “No television can report what goes on there,” they said. They were a television news service. They knew everything about the people who lived in the street, because many people brought their tvs to them for repair, bought a new tv from them, or the two of them would go to the people in their apartments. If I wanted to know something, I went to them. “Is Herr Volker sick? Why has he gotten so thin?” One

of the two was flipping through all of the channels, and in between the actor Horst Tappert, the crime-solver Schimanski, the soap opera *Lindenstraße*, the Milka chocolate cow, Hollanders playing billiards, the folk chorus Fischerchor, the crime series XY Ungelöst and Heidi, he answered me: “Didn’t you know, his young friend¹⁹ left him. Volker has been suffering from it.” “Who are the women who live in the corner house in the courtyard?” “Six nuns. And a priest. The nuns rented a tv from us for the oldest nun. I was in their room. Do you know what book the old nun was reading? *Alice in Wonderland*.” “I love *Alice in Wonderland*.”

After I knew what the old nun was reading, I stood in front of the kitchen mirror, in which I could see the old nun’s light, and grinned like the grinning Cheshire cat²⁰ from *Alice in Wonderland* and turned the light off. The Cheshire cat disappeared like in *Alice in Wonderland*. Then I turned the light back on, slyly grinned like the grinning Cheshire cat again and imagined the old nun. She held the book with both of her hands in front of her face;²¹ she had her long, white, long-armed pajama shirt on, but in this pajama shirt she had no body. A long pajama shirt with a head and two hands reads *Alice in Wonderland*, and I grinned²² at the pajama shirt in the mirror as the grinning Cheshire cat. At some point the old nun turned off the light. Immediately I stopped grinning; she had closed the book. Sometimes, when the old nun’s light was just going out, Herr Volker would come up the stairs. The light came on in the stairway, the wooden steps

¹⁹ Here I chose the superordinate instead of translating “Freund” as “boyfriend,” although it also can have this meaning

²⁰ I chose to retain the alliteration and repetition in “grinste wie die Ginsekatze” by adding the otherwise unnecessary “grinning” before “Cheshire cat” and modifying the English “grinned” with “slyly” to get the German connotation of “grinsen,” which has an expressive meaning closer to “smirk”

²¹ Here what appears to be a German grammatical mistake. “Ihre beiden Hände hielten das Buch vor ihr Gesicht” should be “vor ihrem Gesicht”

²² Differences in tenses between “reads” and “grinned” retained from the original

creaked, his door upstairs closed, I opened the door downstairs, and the stairway smelled like his cologne.

That was my personal city map. But there was something else. One time I was running in the direction of the train station. A thin German man was walking along the street as if buckled in the middle, stooped down towards the ground. Next to him was his Yugoslavian friend, a tall man, who bent down to his friend. I said while passing: "You have to have acupuncture done for your back. I know a doctor who was cured by acupuncture." Then I kept walking. A few minutes later the two of them suddenly got off a bus, with which they were following me, because the bent man couldn't walk fast enough. They offered to buy me a drink. I drank a can of beer with the two of them at the snack stand behind the bus stop.

Then the frame maker on the corner, who made a lot of frames for my self portraits. He had lost his left thumb in an accident, the doctors had sewed it on again. When they bent over a picture to look for a matching frame, this sewed-on thumb trembled and looked like a child's thumb in a rubber glove. One day his girlfriend called me. I stood, telephone in hand, in front of the mirror again. "I'm sorry, Herr Rüdiger is dead, can you pick up your picture? He didn't get to framing your picture."

The girlfriend, Renate, gave me the picture.

"How did he die?"

"He took pills."

"Why?"

“He was sick, cancer of the mouth. And he was a very fine, proud man, you know. He couldn’t take it. He was Jewish. We wanted to get married soon, he wanted to take care of everything for me.”

“Mother, the Jewish frame-maker is also dead. He put the picture, the one where you’re thirteen years old, in a frame too.”

“Don’t cry, my daughter. Don’t cry. People die.” My mother in Istanbul and I in front of the mirror cried on the telephone.

All of the dead live in this mirror. The butcher woman, her son Georg, her daughter in law. The old butcher woman weighed 300g of ground meat, the young butcher woman gave me recipes for roast beef in the mirror. She talks to her husband, who’s butchering in the basement, with a microphone. “Georg, can you bring calf’s kidney up? The actress is here.”

Or the parrot that had spoken such incomprehensible German to me. The Jewish frame-maker, who wanted to marry Renate soon. He sticks his small nails in his mouth and takes a nail out with his trembling thumb and index finger. My mother. My father.

Everyone lives in this kitchen mirror.

And now, now I think the old nun in the courtyard has also died. The dead in the mirror make room when a new dead person comes. Sometimes a bee flies through the window and flies in the mirror between the dead. The dead see them; they see the steam of the boiling espresso machine on the stove. Or a bird flies through the open window and flies around in the mirror. I shower in the bath tub, see myself naked between the dead in the mirror. In the courtyard the postman rings a doorbell. Does he perhaps have a heart condition, like many Turkish postmen? It’s raining on the balcony and over the dead in

the mirror. Sometimes hundreds of little bugs come and spin like crazy around the light bulb that hangs in front of the mirror.

I wait a while longer in the dark, my back against the heater, but the old nun's light no longer went on. In the end I did turn on the kitchen light. In the mirror I saw myself, the kitchen, the bath tub and the balcony, which looked toward the courtyard. The courtyard looked exactly the same as it had many years ago, when I had seen it for the first time. Only the tree in front of the nuns' building had now grown very large. If this tree hadn't grown there, I could believe that the nun's house wasn't a real house, but a large photo hanging from the heavens. And this photo was reflected in the mirror that hung over the table, there, where the telephone stood. I always telephoned in front of the mirror while standing. The mirror showed me if I loved the people with whom I was speaking or not. If I didn't love someone, I would start to see the dirt on the kitchen shelves or on the picture frames or I saw that a picture was hanging crooked on the wall in the mirror. I'll have to hang that straight later. In the mirror I saw myself again, heard my voice, saw the kitchen, and the kitchen extended itself to the nuns' house in the courtyard. The urban expert in Paris had written once about living aesthetics in the orient. The people there extended their houses to the alleys. There would suddenly be a window in front of the neighbor's window. The houses blended with one another and so were labyrinths almost created. The neighbors woke up nose to nose. I too had expanded my apartment to the house in the courtyard with three mirrors. In the kitchen a mirror. From the kitchen you could go left and right into two rooms. In the room to the right there stood a large mirror in the corner, and in the room to the left there hung just as large a mirror over a painter's cabinet; it hung from the high ceiling. The three mirrors collected all of the windows and

floors and the nun's garden from three different perspectives. When I would stand with my back to the courtyard, I could see all of the nun's windows and garden in the three mirrors. We all lived in the three mirrors together, nose to nose. When I woke up, I didn't look at the courtyard from the balcony, but in the mirrors. I made coffee or wrote or cleaned and could always see my neighbors in my rooms. Sometimes little accidents would also happen because of the mirror. The nuns rented a few rooms on the first floor to a printer. I saw three printers there standing at their machines, and mornings and evenings when they took breaks they would stand at the three windows directly across from my apartment and drink coffee. One morning I walked from my bed to the kitchen naked and one of the printers who was standing at the window with coffee mug in hand saw me. I threw myself to the floor, and he threw himself almost simultaneously to the floor. I crawled over to the corner where he couldn't see me anymore and looked in one of the mirrors to see what he was doing now. He stood up, back to the window, and was continuing to drink his coffee. Other than the three courtyard rooms in which the three mirrors were, there were three more rooms in the old apartment building. But they looked towards a big street. The curtains were always drawn there. In the house across the way there was a Maltese ambulance service. From there boys dressed in white scrubs would drive with sirens on into the city. In one room was my boyfriend's²³ grand piano. He was always working in Vienna or Munich and only rarely lived in the apartment. When he happened to be there, he played the piano, and I listened to him while standing in front of the mirror and continued to look at the nuns or the printers in the courtyard. I seemed to have put my salon at their disposal so they could listen to piano music. I called my mother. "Mother, Karl's playing piano for the whole courtyard and for you."

²³ "Freund" could also be translated as "friend." The meaning remains somewhat ambiguous in the text

“Karl, please play ‘Maiden’s Prayer.’ Karl, please play ‘Oh, Love is a Sweet Light.’ Karl, please play ‘I Came a Stranger, I Depart a Stranger.’”

Karl played everything, and last he would always play one of the pieces Kurt Weill put to music as a Berliner folk song.

I’m sittin’ there an’ eatin’ Klops
 suddenly there’s a knock and a “klopps”
 I look, goggle, puzzle to meself
 suddenly it opens, that door
 We-ee-ell, thinks I, I thinks: we-ee-ell,
 now it’s open, but first were it shut!
 I go out an’ look
 an’ who stands outside?
 I does!

I loved the mirror that hung over the kitchen table. You could bring the room to speech. Only there did I hear my voice. My mother from Istanbul on the telephone, the espresso machine boiled, smoked, the chicken roasted in the lit-up oven. The moths flew out of the rice or hulled wheat when I opened the kitchen cabinet. The bees came in and ran across the fruit, and in the mirror the printers or the family from Africa, who the nuns let live downstairs, were moving around. “Mother, now the black woman is baking bread.” I told my mother in Istanbul on the telephone what was going on in the courtyard like a soccer commentator. My mother asked, “Does she have a lot of children?” “Yes, four. Listen to their voices. They’re going through puberty right now. Now the daughter is rolling up her

mother's sleeves so that they don't get into the dough." The African woman baked bread every day on the window sill, white dough between her black fingers. Flour wafted in a cloud out of the window screen into the free air, and the flour formed a cloud of dust in the mirror. The four black children played ball in the mirror. The woman often lifted her head while she was baking bread and looked over to my balcony. She didn't see me, but I saw her eyes looking for me in the mirror. I stroked her face.

"Mother, now I'm stroking the woman's face."

The nuns did not stand at their window very often. The tulle curtains were always closed. But in the mirror I often saw the hands of the old nun. She most likely no longer ate with the other five, but rather in her room in bed. For I saw her every afternoon and evening in the mirror, as a hand shaking breadcrumbs out of a kitchen towel out the window. For this reason, there was a pair of birds that picked up the bread crumbs directly underneath her window. It was on a spring evening that I saw her face for the first time in the mirror. She had leaned her head against the old, dusty tulle curtains and looked as if she were going to smell them. I said, "Virgin nun,²⁴ why do you eyebrows hang with fear when you stand by the window?" I had a fur cost, which I held precisely in front of her in the mirror. She looked like Greta Garbo with it on, who had leaned her head against a luxurious hotel's window and thought about her impossible love. Then I went to the balcony. She saw me now too. New wrinkles built on her forehead and mouth, as if she, like the bum on Christmas Eve on the lonely Königsallee, was searching for unfamiliar muscles with which to express her joy. Then she steered my gaze to the birds that were picking on her bread crumbs on the ground, as if I were her child, and she was showing me how nicely the birds ate together. We both looked on until they flew away. Then she

²⁴ "Jungfrau" can also mean maiden. I used virgin and added nun in order to portray her age correctly.

leaned her forehead against the window frame. I left the balcony and went back to the mirror, leaned my forehead against her forehead in the mirror and quoted Heinrich Heine:

Lone I wander on the shore
 Where the white waves break and leap,
 And I hear a voice so sweet,
 Voice so sweet upon the deep...²⁵

And the old nun said:

Ah, my heart cannot be still,
 And the night is far too long--
 Lovely nymphs, oh come to me,
 Dance and sing a magic song!²⁶

The face of the old nun had now disappeared from the mirror. I said, my forehead still against the mirror,

It drives you fair, now here, now there--
 You know not even why;
 A tender word rings in the air--
 You look round with wondering eye.²⁷

²⁵ Hal Draper's translation in: Heine, Heinrich. *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: a Modern English Version*. Trans. and ed. Hal Draper. Boston: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982. p. 173

²⁶ See note 13.

²⁷ Hal Draper's translation in: Heine, Heinrich. *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: a Modern English Version*. Trans. and ed. Hal Draper. Boston: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982. p. 362 with the exception that "stare" has been replaced with "look round" so that it would better fit with the courtyard scene

On some Sundays I would see a young nun in the mirror from behind. She was washing the priest's car in the courtyard. I called my mother.

"Mother, she's washing the priest's car, and I'm roasting chicken."

I tickle the young nun's back in the mirror so that she suddenly started to laugh in the courtyard below. "Mother, I'm tickling her right now."

My mother said, "And the sun is shining in my left eye right now." I heard the voices of the playing children on the steep little street in Istanbul through the receiver. The sounds of the ships' horns mixed with the children's voices, and a street vendor shouted,

"Watermelons!"

"Mother, shall I sing a German song for you?"

"Yes, sing, sing."

Ahoy! we're sailing off to Burma this morning

Whisky by the gallon at our elbow all day

As we smoke our fat cigars—Henry Clay

And I'm through with bloody girls ('scuse me yawning).

So at last we're really under way.

For other brands of cigar mean nothing to us

And we've only just enough smoke to take her to Burma

And as for God, we think He's not worth the fuss

And of religion you won't hear a murmur.

So now it's goodbye!²⁸

²⁸ John Willett's version in: Brecht, Bertolt. "The Sailors' Song." *Bertolt Brecht Poems & Songs from the Plays*. Trans. and ed. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1990. 76.

My mother laughed and said, singing, good bye!

I was happy in the mirror, because I was at multiple places at the same time. My mother and six nuns and a priest, we all lived together. The priest lived directly across from the kitchen mirror. One spring evening he too stood like the old nun at the window and breathed, as if he would marvel to still be alive. When I telephoned with my mother, I took my hair and made a mustache for him in the mirror; then I took the cigarette out of my mouth and put it in his mouth in the mirror. A short priest stood there unmoving, as if frozen in a photograph, smoking a genuine, large cigarette, and I gave him a kiss in the mirror. The priest had disappeared from the mirror. But my lipstick-ed mouth stayed in the mirror.

When my mother died, and I learned of this on the telephone while looking into the mirror, I saw this lipstick print in the mirror. A moth flew and landed on it. After the death of my mother and father I discovered in the mirror that my mother was an orphan child. I knew that she hadn't had a mother, but when her death made me so sad that I no longer wanted to live, but did live, I sometimes talked to myself through her voice.²⁹ And this voice was the voice of a stepmother. Because she hadn't had a true mother, but had had only a stepmother, she had learned the way of being a mother from this stepmother. And now there was the uneasy voice of a stepmother mixed with an orphan child's sadness.

"Eat something, I tell you, you understand, eat!" "Enough, you understand, I've had enough from you, you eat something now!" "Sit down at the desk, sit down, I tell you!"

²⁹ In the original: "sprach ich manchmal mit ihrer Stimme zu mir." The could not find a way out of using the reflexive in English, though it does not appear in the German

That's how her childhood had been. I had to move to a foreign country in order to discover her childhood as an orphan. When I felt sorry for myself, I spoke with the voice of my father's mother to myself in the mirror.

"Come, eat, my rose, I'll give you my life, my kidney, my eyesight, eat my child, I'll take all of your sins on my back, eat something, my child."

So that my mother wouldn't speak to me with a stepmother's voice anymore, I called one of her friends in Istanbul. I said, "I have so much pain because of her death, please help me, so that she'll come to me in a dream sometime and tell me what she thinks of me."

The old woman said, "There is a dead holy woman here. On Friday a few women should drink a milky coffee for her soul and ask her for your mother to show herself to you."

That Friday night I dreamt of my mother. I stood in the corridor of a train and next to this train there was another train traveling in the opposite direction. My mother stood on top of this train with lots of newspapers in her arms. As both of the trains passed close by one another, my mother said to me: "If only you knew how I love you." I didn't hear her voice, but I read these words on her lips behind the train window. Since this dream I've spoken silently with myself in the mirror, only with the movement of my lips.

"If you only knew how I love you. Eat something, or you'll get sick!"

While I was busy dealing with my dreams, so my mother's voice would return to normal, I had somewhat neglected the courtyard in the mirror. When I spoke to myself with the sweet voice of my mother once again, I noticed that the face of the African woman who had always baked bread at the window didn't appear in the mirror anymore. When one morning I saw the nun who always washed the priest's car and whose back I had tickled in the mirror heading towards the street, I ran down the stairs barefoot and asked her in

front of the house: “You know, I had gotten used to the four children. Where did this family go?”

“They moved back to Africa, the husband was a doctor.”

The nun had skin like unloved leather. I couldn’t stroke this leather. In order to please her, I said, “Now he can help the poor there.”

That afternoon the nun rang the doorbell and gave me religious booklets to read. I knew that I wouldn’t read them, and so I gave her five marks. Karl said to me on the telephone:

“You gave her money, now she’ll come back like the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

I had once opened the door for the Jehovah’s Witnesses and given them a mark. When they came back I said,

“I not German.”

“Indian?”

“No.”

“Turkish?”

“Hm, hm.”

They got a small Jehovah’s Witness bible in Turkish out of their bag. When they came once again, I said to them: “The one who always opened the door for you was my twin sister. She moved back to Turkey for good. I personally don’t even believe in my Allah.

How should I then believe in your God.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses had come up

laughing. Afterwards they went down the stairs as if they had taken out their teeth.

But the nun did not come again. She had only climbed out of the mirror once and rung my doorbell. Then she had climbed back into the photo of the courtyard.

In the summer I also heard how many plates the nuns took out of the cabinet. I counted six and placed my plate on the table too; I said, "Seven."

But they didn't eat much. The sound of the knives and forks moving on the plates didn't last long. I ate longer. The youngest nun drank a glass of red wine; I toasted with her in the mirror and heard her fresh laughter from the window. I was always happy when she laughed, and I always wanted to then go out and give the other people my love. I then went around the corner to a small supermarket. A woman who had too little hair was sitting at the register. When she typed in the prices, I looked down on her half-bald head. She often told me that her shoulders hurt from typing in the prices.

"Ruth, shall I massage your shoulders? How is your shoulder doing today?" Today she didn't look me in the eyes. Her eyes looked like the eyes of a hen that I had seen on tv. These chickens lived from the day of their birth to their death in very tight cages with other chickens, and while they were being transported out to the slaughterhouse, they pecked each other's heads. Some chickens already lay dead on the bottom of the cage. And that's where I'd seen this hen. It had such tired eyes, as tired as those of a wise grandmother who wants to prevent a war, but whose words no longer have any worth. That's what the small supermarket cashier woman's eyes looked like.

"Ruth, is something grieving you?"

"My brother is dying in the hospital, cancer."

"Mother, the cashier woman's brother is dying in the hospital."

"Yes, my daughter, people die."

"His name is Werner."

Then Werner too lived with all of the other dead in the mirror.

The owner of the beautiful old house I lived in died one day too. He wanted to fix everything himself. He could always be seen in all three mirrors because he stood on a ladder left, right, in front of all the walls and had keys to all of the houses. Sometimes I woke up and Herr Kürten was in the bathroom on top of the toilet lid. Often whatever he took into his hands broke. When he fixed something on the walls on the rooms I held the ladder still for him.

“Herr Kürten, I’m afraid you could fall down.”

“Doesn’t matter, I’m a pharmacist.”

He had a skilled worker, a very thin man.

“Willy, why don’t you eat?”

“I have stomach trouble from painting walls, and Herr Kürten pays me with medicine.

They don’t help, I’ve already painted too many walls.

He painted the balcony that overlooked the courtyard yellow and said, “I’m painting with yellow, it gives a sun-effect. I’m going to Turkey soon.” Willy had a Turkish girlfriend.

He said, “I know a dentist in Izmir. He’ll fix all of my teeth for 350 marks.” When Willy came back with new teeth, Herr Kürten had already died. His son worked exactly as his father had and fell off the ladder even more often. Willy said to me: “The son pays me with radio, he gave me his old radio, and I’m allowed to listen to music the whole day while I’m working.”

It was a good day: Willy listened to music, the owner of the house fell off the ladder, the young nun laughed behind the curtains, the old nun shook the breadcrumbs from the kitchen towel out the window, the birds picked at the bread, a cat ran in the courtyard, and a new renter, an older man with full bags under his eyes, moved into the courtyard’s

basement apartment, which only consisted of one large room.³⁰ I saw him at night in all three of the mirrors, walking back and forth underneath of the weak light of a bulb. His shadows strolled back and forth, back and forth through all three mirrors. When I went to sleep, I still saw the light and his shadows in the mirror from my bed. Maybe he's cold there. I asked him after a few days: "Do you want a mattress and a few blankets?" He listened to me, but kept walking back and forth and said, "I haven't gone down that far yet."

I was ashamed, cooked lamb with beans, invited him to eat with me. His name was Hartmut. Hartmut walked back and forth between the rooms in my apartment too, and suddenly he rolled up the legs of his pants and showed me the wounds on his knees and legs. Then he rolled up his shirt, showed me the wounds on his back. He said, "I had a window shutter company, but my employees left me in a bind in Wiesbaden while the shutters were being put up. I fell down from the third floor; I have smoker's legs."³¹ He came from a noble family and quoted Baudelaire's "Le Balcon" to me while he walked back and forth:

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,

O toi, tous mes plaisirs! Ô toi, tous mes devoirs!³²

³⁰ In the original, the modifying phrase is unusually placed separately from its object ("die nur aus einem großen Zimmer bestand, ein älterer Herr..."). This text has moved them next to their objects in order to be more readily comprehensible.

³¹ "Raucherbeine." The official term is peripheral artery occlusive disease (PAOD), which refers to a disease that involves the obstruction of arteries, blocking blood supply to appendages, typically the legs.

³² Özdamar does not offer a translation. Here is one taken from Baudelaire, Charles. *The Flowers of Evil*. Trans. James McGowan Oxford University Press: St. Ives, 1993. P. 73 : "Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses, O thou of all my pleasures, all my debts of love!"

Then he ate while standing, said, “Hm, hm, well seasoned.” Then he continued the quotation:

Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs.³³

With the last sentence he stood in front of the mirror and looked at me in the mirror. The old man, who I had seen and observed for days through the mirror, suddenly stood next to me and invited me to dance in the mirror. We danced the tango through all of the rooms, and I saw us appear in all three mirrors. Then he sat down at the grand piano and started to play Chopin. While doing so he asked me: “What rolls have you played?”

“Cleaning ladies.”

“What do you mean, cleaning ladies?”³⁴ You have to play Carmen,” and he immediately switched from Chopin to Carmen.

Later, when he had gone, I looked in the darkness from my bed into the mirror and his apartment. Tonight he turned the light off.

The next day he whistled from the courtyard up to the balcony and threw me up a stuffed animal. A monkey. This monkey whistled whenever the light when on or off. Every night, when I turned the light off, he whistled few-feweee...I whistled back few-feweee...One evening Hartmut brought me rotten mushrooms and cauliflower. “Take them, you can make use of them. The owner informed me I have to move out.”

³³ See note 20. “Call to your mind the gentle touch or our caress, The sweetness of the hearth, the charming sky above”

³⁴ Original reads “Was, Putzfrauen?” The addition of “do you mean” is my own

He had wrapped the rotten mushrooms and cauliflower in a newspaper. The newspaper had gotten wet, and the brown juice dripped onto his shoes. I had a cup of coffee in my hand. Hartmut was speak very excitedly. His spit sprayed into the coffee cup. It seemed to me as if Hartmut were swimming in this black sea and a whirlpool were pulling him under. He left again, I lay the newspaper down on the wet table and called the owener up in front of the mirror. His mother said, "I have to hold the receiver up to his ear, he broke both of his arms."

"Herr Kürten, why does Hartmut have to move out?"

"He hasn't paid any rent to this day. And one night he peed in the nuns' flower pots and cried, 'Les fleurs du mal – Flowers of evil.'"

"That's just one of Baudelaire's sentences, Hartmut loves Baudelaire."

While the owner was talking, my hand that held the receiver smelled like rotten mushrooms. Hartmut had to leave. He rented a large moving van, which then didn't move from the courtyard for eight days. He hung his suit up in the courtyard. His suit hung in the courtyard for eight days too and moved with the wind. I still saw his light in the mirror from my bed, but he didn't walk back and forth any more. One night I went downstairs quietly and looked in his window. The large room was filled to the ceiling with old newspapers. Hartmut sat between the stacked newspapers, once and a while he would pull a newspaper out of the pile and read it for a long time, then he would pull out a different one and read. After eight days he moved out with all of these newspapers.

When he was leaving, he stood in the courtyard under my balcony and called:

Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.

Que ton sein m'était doux! Que ton cœur m'était bon

[...]

Je croyais repaïr le parfum de ton sang.

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!³⁵

When he moved out, he had forgotten to turn off the light behind him in his apartment. I slept, I woke up, saw his light in the mirror and said:

Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! Sans ces étoiles

Don't la lumière parle un langage connu!

Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!³⁶

One day I visited Hartmut in his new apartment. I boarded a bus, the bus driver explained to me where I had to change buses, but I went in the wrong direction. The traffic light was green, but the bus driver got out of the bus, grabbed my arm, laughed and said, "Girl, are you lovestruck? You're supposed to go left."

In front of the next bus stop there was a Chinese restaurant. The bus came, the driver got off and went into the Chinese restaurant. When he came back, I asked, "Did you eat Chinese food?" "Yeah, ching, chong, gong. I wanted to pee, the little one didn't want to let me in. I said, peeing's allowed in all of Germany. Then he let me in. But it was nice, good and clean, nice mirrors, it worked."

³⁵ See notes 20 and 21. "Evenings illumined by the ardour of the coal, And on the balcony, the pink that vapours bring; How sweet your bosom to me, and how kind your soul! [...] I thought that I could breathe the perfume of your blood. How beautiful the suns! How warm their evening beams!"

³⁶ See notes 20, 21 and 23. From the poem "Obsession," p. 151 "But how you'd please me, night! Without those stars Whose light speaks in a language I have known! Since I seek for the black, the blank, the bare!"

At the address there was no Hartmut. Someone told me that Hartmut used to live here. I returned back home. The monkey whistled few-feweee..., and I whistled back few-feweee...

Ever since I could no longer call my dead mother, I called an old poet in Istanbul, Can. “Can, I can’t find Hartmut, the address he gave me was his old address.”

Can said, “Then this man doesn’t have an apartment at all. He was probably ashamed, and that’s why he gave you his old address.”

Then he poetized for me: “You carry the sun in your stomach” and gave me a recipe: “Grill the eggplant in the oven, peel off the skin, stir the eggplant in milk. Brown ground beef, tomatoes, pepper and salt together in a pan...”

When one day Can is also dead, he can trade recipes with the old butcher woman in the mirror, and my mother must look on to make sure it doesn’t get too salty. Can told me he was once in Romania with his friends. A Romanian hen flew through the car window, laid an egg and flew away. At the Hungarian border the customs officer asked, “Do you have anything to declare, weapons, munitions, tobacco, alcohol...?” Can was a socialist, he showed the customs officer the egg and answered in English: “I have only this egg, but this is a Rumanian egg.”

I went downstairs to the two men who repaired television sets.

“Have you heard anything from Hartmut, he gave me his address, but it was his old address.”

“He was very down-and-out. He’s gone, but the mice are here now. Today little mice came to us. They probably moved in with Hartmut back then.”

“How can I find him?”

“We don’t know. He was a very interesting man, but he didn’t have a tv, so we don’t know anything about him.”

I went upstairs. In the mirror I saw the light still glowing in Hartmut’s abandoned room. Since the owner had broken his arms, he didn’t come around. I slept, I woke up, saw the light in the mirror, opened the balcony door and called into the courtyard:

“Hartmut, where are you?”

Then I looked at a Marx Brothers volume of photos in bed and fell asleep with the light on. Suddenly something ran really quickly across my breasts and legs. I saw a little mouse now sitting next to my bed over the open Marx Brothers book, next to the photo of Harpo Marx. One of Hartmut’s mice. I picked it up with a towel and brought it into Hartmut’s apartment. The door was open, the room was empty, not even a sheet of newspaper lay there. I let the mouse into the empty room, and it ran back and forth like Hartmut.

The next evening I went out on the street. There were a few pubs across the street from the building. I asked one of the owners if he had known Hartmut. He was washing a beer glass. “No.” I went to the next pub, where a woman was sitting at the counter with two friends. They were somewhat drunk. “Where’s the owner?” She looked at me and yelled, “Whaaaaat!” I ran straight out, my heart between my hands, and outside in the night I swore to myself that I wouldn’t speak to any German from now on. And in the apartment I swore to myself in the mirror for a second time: “I swear, from now on I will not speak to any German.”

I called Can the poet in Istanbul. “Can, I swore to myself not to speak to any German ever again.” Can said, “Love, you’re going to go outside right now and meet ten different

Germans at ten different places. If one of them treats you badly, you won't speak with any anymore." Then he gave me another recipe.

The next morning I went to various department stores, talked to salespeople, bus drivers,...and didn't find one, who did me wrong.

When I came back home, it smelled like two different kinds of men's cologne on the stairs. I heard Herr Volker laughing on the stairs. Tonight he didn't climb up the stairs alone. Herr Volker sometimes came after the old nun had turned on her light. Maybe she was still alive, and the book *Alice in Wonderland* now had the warmth of her fingers on its pages, maybe a few of her eyelashes lay between the pages.

When I unlocked the apartment door, the telephone rang. Can. He asked me: "Did you find anyone who treated you badly?"

"No one."

Can poetized:

Yes, that's how it is, Your Honor
 Don't want to bother you any more
 Otherwise I'd still have lots to say,
 a lot worse than all that
 I know I'm guilty, I accept my punishment
 I neither robbed nor did I murder
 Nevertheless I've done something much worse
 You know what, Your Honor
 I simply loved the people

“Now tell me a German word.”

“Sehnsucht: Sucht nach Sehnen, addiction to longing, Can, there’s not such a powerful word in any language. Addiction to longing. Sucht nach Sehnen, Sehnsucht. You know, Can, my grandmother told me in Istanbul, don’t look into the mirror at night, or else you’ll go to a foreign land. I was nine years old then. Now I only live in the mirror. I talk to you in the mirror.”

Can said, “Say hello to the pretty woman you see in the mirror for me. What’s the old nun’s light doing?”

“It’s not on.”

The stars multiply in the night,
 the longer you look up
 And if you want to count them,
 they slip through your fingers;
 Some you can hear and some one doesn’t hear
 They multiply so in the night,
 the longer you listen in:
 Voices that come to you, ringing
 Or quietly on tip-toe

While Can read his poems to me on the phone, the old nun’s light went on in the mirror.

“Can, wait, wait, the light went on.”

I lay the receiver next to the phone and went to the balcony. The old nun’s light was really on. I saw a few shadows.

Shortly thereafter the two men who repair TVs downstairs came out of the nuns' house. They were carrying a television set, looked up to me on the balcony and nodded their heads in unison. I ran down the stairs. The two men said, with the TV still in their arms, "She's dead. The nuns gave us the book *Alice in Wonderland* too. Do you want to have it?"

I found a bird's feather in the book, the old nun had probably used it as a bookmark. The feather was on page 103. I read, "'Will you walk a little faster!' said a whiting to a snail, 'There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail. See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance! They are waiting on the shingle – will you come and join the dance? Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?'"³⁷

The last sentences on this page were "'There is another shore, you know, upon the other side. The further off from England the nearer is to France.'"³⁸

I went back to the apartment; I heard Can's voice and the voices of the children in Istanbul from the receiver.

"Can, the old nun is dead – she read *Alice in Wonderland* up to page 103, there was a bird's feather on this page."

Can said,

On top of Sevdâ Tepesi, the mountain of love

Underneath the opposite table

³⁷ Here I used the original English. Taken from Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*. The Barta Press: Boston, 1897. P. 47. The German translation seems to be written in somewhat more common language. A "whiting" is a "Weißfisch" (literally "white fish," a kind of cod) and the "shingle" is translated into a form of "Strand" (beach).

³⁸ See note 25. P. 48.

I saw two chickens
They washed themselves with the earth
In the hole they'd dug out
For people death is,
If possible, nothing other, I thought,
Than a way
To wash oneself with earth

Everything speaks in the language that's its own;
And even when darkness covers it
It carries on, the color, in the night...

Then Can said, "My days on this earth are also numbered, come soon, come tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, I want to see you."

"Yes, Can."

On this night the nuns sang behind the wall, and I held *Alice in Wonderland* in hand. I dreamt of the old nun. My mother and my father and my grandmother flew from a hill into a red sky. And the old nun stood there in her nightshirt and looked towards the heavens. I thought, she's freezing, and I put my fur coat on her. Before she flew, she took the book *Alice in Wonderland*, and reading she flew behind my parents and my grandmother wearing the fur coat. The book fell out of her hands and flew into the sky. I cried, "Alice, Alice, Alice..." When I woke up, I saw a young cat next to my bed. She had come in threw the balcony door and was looking at me with her brow furrowed. I furrowed my brow too, the cat said something to me. I said to her:

The neighbor's old cat often
 Came to pay us a visit;
 We made her a bow and courtesy,
 Each with a compliment in it.

After her health we asked,
 Our care and regard to evince –
 (We have made the very same speeches
 To many an old cat since).³⁹

The cat went strolling through the room after she had heard Heinrich Heine's poem. She came back again, saw herself in the large mirror in the corner, and began to occupy herself with the cat in the mirror. Behind her in the mirror I saw a shadow in Hartmut's window. I immediately went to the balcony and saw a new renter in the basement apartment where Hartmut had lived. He sat in profile behind nice shades at a table and looked like a silhouette. His profile was similar to the young Goethe's, he had his hair put up in the back. I went downstairs to the tv repair place. "Who lives there now?" "A new renter, a modern photographer. He processes his photos on the computer. He brought his cat with him."

When I called Can in Istanbul, I saw the new renter, like Goethe's shadow, in the mirrors from three different perspectives.

³⁹ Translation taken from Heine, Heinrich. *Heinrich Heine: His Wit, Wisdom, Poetry, Preceded by the Essay of Matthew Arnold*. Trans. Matthew Arnold. Ed. Newell Dunbar. J.G Cuples Company: Boston, 1892.

“Can, there’s a new renter in the courtyard. He’s a photographer and has a cat. He looks exactly like the young Goethe. I think he’s a nonsmoker.”

Can said, “I’m smoking a cigarette right now.”

I saw a few birds in the mirror looking for breadcrumbs there on the ground where the old nun had in the past always shook out her kitchen towel, and they flew back away into the sky.

Can asked, “When are you coming?”

“Tomorrow.”

A heaven, completely soaked

Caught itself in the nets

Sky-blue now all of the

Fishers

Uli's Tears

In the year 1977 I lived in both Berlins. I worked at the East Berlin Volksbühne theater with directors Benno Besson and Matthias Langhoff, lived in East Berlin, sometimes traveled over to West Berlin. I got on the S-Bahn at the Friedrichstraße station in East Berlin and arrived at the Wedding-Gesundbrunnen Station in West Berlin. I always marveled on the street and said, "Aha, it's raining here too, like in East Berlin." "Aha, it's snowing here too." When I called my friends in the West from the East, I asked, "Klaus, is the sun shining for you guys in Wedding today too?"

When the wall had fallen and I, like many people from the East, went along Ku'damm, I met a woman from East Berlin in a bus. She looked out the window up at the West Berlin sky and said aloud to herself: "And what⁴⁰ wonderful sun here."

In the first days after the opening of the wall I loved Berlin: In the trains – I very often took the trains – the people from the West started for the first time to speak loudly with one another. Conversations formed like they do in performances in the theater: A man called out to the waiter in the onboard restaurant: "Coffee, please, I'm anti-woman, like Oscar Wilde."

All of Germany was suddenly like a stage; true, you didn't know what piece was being performed, but everyone wanted to have a role in it. In West Berlin you saw lots of people from the East on Ku'damm, their clothing didn't fit with West Berlin, their outfits looked so passé in the chic West Berlin scene. The people from East Berlin looked like

⁴⁰ "Diese"/"this" replaced by "what" in order to sound more natural

actors from a Maxim-Gorki⁴¹ play who had suddenly lost their stage and landed on a different stage in a very different play.

On Ku'damm I heard two French people speaking with one another: "Pourquoi il y a beaucoup de clochards aujourd'hui dans la rue?"⁴²

The rhythm of the city had slowed itself, capitalism in the role of the zoo, KDW department store playing the lead. At the entrance of the Wertheim department store it stunk of farts. The people from the East had eaten and drunken foreign foods, McDonald's, Döner Kebab, Coca Cola. There's a saying in Turkey: The neighbor believes his neighbor's chicken is a goose and his neighbor's wife is still a virgin. I stood at the bus stop, four East Germans came my way, and one said quietly to his friends: "There are very pretty women here too."

At the bus stop there were a few Trabants in the no parking zone. A woman said, "Look, they even parked their cars in front of the bus stop. You know why? Because they think that's what freedom is." Then she quoted Marx. So not a West Berliner, but an East Berliner.

On Ku'damm, near the KDW department store, no cars at all were moving. Everything was crowded with people from the East. The trash cans on the street, which used to be searched through by West Berliner bums, were now full of banana peels. A West Berliner Ku'damm bum, who looked like an intellectual, walked over to one of these trash cans, saw the piles of banana peels and made a dramatic silent-film gesture of disdain. He put one of the banana peels under his shoe and feigned slipping on it like Charlie Chaplin.

⁴¹ A theater in the central district of Berlin (in the East), known for experimental and modern theater.

⁴² Why are there so many beggars on the street today?

I went to a kebab store, where people from the East were eating Turkish kebab for the first time, it was packed just like at McDonald's, only one free chair left. I asked, "May I sit down with you?" The woman rose from her seat twice: "Please, please," and wanted to go ahead and offer me her chair, as if all of the chairs were my property.

Then I got onto a bus and went up Ku'damm; I was wearing a fur coat. A fat East German woman sat down next to me on top of my fur coat. She immediately got up again and cried, "I'm sorry that I sat on your mink." "It's not mink," I answered. "Thank God, that would be too bad for the mink," she said.

A bum got on the bus with a lit cigarette. The bus driver said to him: "If you show me your GDR passport, you don't need to pay." The bum bought a ticket and yelled into the bus: "GDR citizen? Do I happen to look like that?"

I went to my apartment in Dahlem⁴³. In the villa next door lived rich crazy people with their nurses. One of them was crying loudly, and I asked the nurse: "Why is Uli crying?" She said, "Oh, Sevgi, he thinks he has to leave because Honecker's moving in soon."

I lived in a glassed-in studio in the basement of a villa. The gardener, notorious among the neighbors as an old Nazi, said to me: "From now on, curtains closed; they're all coming over, wife dead." He drew his hand across his neck as if he held a knife, as though now someone could slit open my throat.

⁴³ An area in the Southwestern part of Berlin and an especially affluent location

