

## Not a bad metaphysics, eh?

An Interview with Oruç Aruoba

conducted by Yunus Tuncel

and Rainer Hanshe

Though he trenchantly refers to himself as “only a writer of sentences,” Oruç Aruoba is not only a respected writer he is also a prolific translator of poetry and philosophy into Turkish. His first translation, David Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, was published the year he gained his master’s degree. Aside from translating books of Hume, Nietzsche, Rilke and others, he has made compilations of Celan, Kant, and even Basho, making him one of the few philosopher-poets to navigate both in Western and Eastern waters. His translation of Basho, *kelebek düşleri* (Butterfly Dreams), is his most recent (Istanbul: Metis, 2008). He also has the honor of being the first translator of Wittgenstein’s works into Turkish, including the *Tractatus*, and selections from his *Vermischte Bemerkungen*.



Born in 1948 in a farmhouse across from the sea in Karamürsel, Turkey, Aruoba is the son of Muazzez Kaptanoglu, a poet/novelist/journalist, and Fahir Aruoba, one of the last representatives of a traditionally military family. After his family moved to Ankara, he studied psychology at Hacettepe University, which is where he also earned his Ph.D. in philosophy, writing his dissertation on Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein. While at Hacettepe, he was an assistant to İoanna Kuçuradi (*Max Scheler ve Nietzsche’de Trajik, Nietzsche ve İnsan, Schopenhauer ve İnsan, etc.*, UNESCO Chair of Philosophy of Human Rights), who introduced him to Nietzsche. At Tübingen, he was a student of logicist Bruno Baron von Freytag-Loringhoff, Ernest Bloch, and others. From 1973 onwards he taught at Hacettepe, Tübingen and Victoria-Wellington universities. When studying at the Goethe Institute in Germany in 1976, Aruoba intended on visiting Heidegger, but the philosopher died during the second week of his arrival. Though Turkish bios of Aruoba we found neglect to note this, through our personal correspondence with him we learned that he worked as an ‘apprentice’ in the craft of writing and translating under renowned writer Bilge Karasu, who is often referred to as the ‘sage of Turkish literature.’ Ending his academic career and severing all ties with such institutions in 1983 because of the military regime of 1980 (the year of one of Tur-

key's worst coups) and the YÖK-administration it brought to the universities (he could have easily died as an Emeritus Professor of Philosophy), Aruoba settled in İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında and worked in different publishing houses as a director and editor. He was also a member of a publishing committee and served as a publishing consultant. His works have appeared in numerous journals including *Free Man*, *Text*, *Formation*, and *East-West*, and he also made and conducted a radio program for Açık (94.9) called "Philosopher's Gossip" (*Filozof Dedikoduları*).

Aruoba is the author of numerous books, including *uzak* (far), *yakın* (near), *yürüme* (walking), *kesik esin/tiler* (broken muses), *ol/an*, (be/ing), *Geç Gelen Ağıtlar* (belated elegies), and *sayıklamalar* (Deliriums), amongst others. As noted on Metis, his publisher's website, his works have "played a pivotal role in familiarizing younger generations in Turkey with philosophy by giving it new life outside the strict confines of the academy," yet, Aruoba never panders to the timely whims of his age and, as this interview will make clear, he is not prone to concessions of any kind, nor does he mince words. If this mere writer of sentences has given philosophy a new life outside its ivory confines, it is certainly not through diluting, popularizing, or compromising it in any way.

Aruoba lives in Turkey and continues to work as an independent writer when not tending to his dogs and cats. His most recent book of poems is *Meşe Fısıltıları* (Oak Whisperings). When we contacted him to discuss his work as a poet and translator and engage in a dialogue with him, he generously agreed. The interview below is the result of a series of e-mails dispatched throughout 2009, spanning New York, Leigné-sur-Ussau, Gümüşlük, and İstanbul.

## Translation Work

**Q:** *Your translations clearly reflect a diversity of interests: into Turkish you have translated books of Hume, Nietzsche, Rilke, von Hentig, Wittgenstein, and made compilations of Celan, Kant and Basho. In your own books, there are translations from Spinoza, Herakleitos, Hegel, Nietzsche, Shelley, Arnold, Dowson, Pound, e.e. cummings, Stefan George, Rilke, Hölderlin and many others as epigraphs. In translating this broad scope of material, all of which is certainly challenging, you must have developed particular viewpoints about translation. What can you articulate of your own translation practices and your relation to other views of it, such as Benjamin's?*

**A:** The epigraphs (mottoes, I would call them) are easy to explain: In the course of my writing I encountered sayings—sentences—of other writers, which were sometimes much better renderings of my thoughts—these I adopted as mottoes. Further others are from texts I had read *before* I wrote and hadn't registered as such. At one point I had to compile a historical 'Retrospective Source Index' for one of my books (*yer, yön, yol*, in the volume *yürüme*) with quotations from other writers, which contained the relevant concepts ("place", "direction", "way") dealt with in the book. I did this as a sort of tribute, and perhaps also to show that I was not the first and only writer who had treated of these issues.

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I don't recall reading Benjamin on translation; but, in general I think 'theories' of translation are both useless, and in the long run, harmful to the practice of translation itself. It is alright for academicians to ruminate about pseudo-concepts like 'object-language', etc, but all of that is neither here nor there when it comes to going into the work and doing it. —I never tried to 'theorize' about translation; I just did it...

**Q:** *It's not so much a theory of translation we have in mind but more a method, or certain viewpoints, even things that you don't do. Benjamin's essay was surely not a strictly academic exercise but born of his own experience translating Proust and Baudelaire. To him, real translations are transparent, meaning they don't obscure the original, nor obstruct its light, but allow "the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all," he avows, "by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade."*

**A:** I don't know the full article, but I don't agree with the "syntax ... proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element" bit. That "rather" is wrong. The sentence *is* the "primary element" of translation, simply because it is the "primary element" of writing itself, of constructing meaning. Also, words have meaning only as components of a sentence; the "wall/arcade" metaphor does not work—"literalness", O.K.; but, syntax, too, is meaningful only in the framework of the sentence...

**Q:** *What compelled you to make the translations you have?*

**A:** Nothing 'compelled' me—except perhaps, like, "This is wonderful; people should read this in Turkish" sort of feeling—; but, more soberly, at one stage in the writing of my first academic texts, I realized that I was writing—in Turkish, naturally—things that could be understood only by people who could read the relevant books in their originals—which—I thought—I was doing ... So, what to do? I decided (at least at my doctoral dissertation ("The Relationality of Objects", dealing with Hume, Kant, Wittgenstein); maybe earlier, at my M.A. thesis on Hume) to translate the relevant texts of the philosophers I was writing on, before publishing my own texts on them. —Well, I managed to finish and publish Hume and Wittgenstein; but Kant, I couldn't (except for a compilation from the *Opus postumum*); so, I haven't published those academic texts up to now.

**Q:** *What attracted you to Hans von Hentig? Did someone ask you to translate him or was the impetus your own?*

**A:** He's *Hartmut* von Hentig—a couple of my friends, the van Gents—a Hollander/Swiss and his Greek wife—, Werner and Amalia, gave the book (*Paff der Kater*) to me as a Christmas gift, saying, "You will understand"— —I did... I don't think they expected me to translate it.<sup>1</sup>

**Q:** *What did you "understand"? And what more can you say of von Hentig's work, which is probably largely unknown to English readers?*

<sup>1</sup> In biographical listings of Aruoba, von Hentig's first name was not listed. There is however a connection between the two: Hans von Hentig, a criminologist, was Hartmut's paternal uncle.

**A:** To me too... I have read only a sprinkling of his extensive professional writings on education and educational institutions. From what I understand, von Hentig is (was—I hope he’s still alive— I never could meet him, had only a telephone conversation with him, just after he had gone back to Germany from a holiday in Istanbul), a veritable force at the crucial position the German *Volk* found itself at, in the aftermath of NAZI Germany as the perpetrator of the greatest human crime in recent history: von Hentig tried to bring the German consciousness to an understanding and reckoning—*not* reconciliation—with this fact, with his writings and institutionalizations on/of Education.

My translation—what I “understood” from the small gift book—was merely the account he had written many years later—in his old age—of his relationship with a cat in his youth, with which he had lived at Chicago during, or just before, or just after (?) the last war, while writing his doctoral dissertation on Ancient Greek texts. The book is, *Paff der Kater/oder, wenn wir lieben* [when we care]...<sup>2</sup>

I should be surprised that there is no English translation— it is a very profoundly austere and sincere text, brilliantly written...

**Q:** *Valéry attests that the translators who were skilled in transposing the ancients into our language are who raised poetry to its highest point. “Their poetry,” he said, “bears the mark of this practice. It is a translation, a faithless beauty—faithless to what is not in accord with the exigencies of a pure language.” Has working on translations affected or changed how you write poetry or prose? Do you think your writing contains the trace of your translation practices?*

**A:** Of course—you know that it does— in asking that question you are merely prodding me on to elucidate a metaphysics of language and meaning... O.K., here goes: I think I understand what Valéry could have meant by “pure language”. Chomsky too has something, which (if I remember correctly) he calls “universal grammar”. Wittgenstein, of course, tries to grasp the roots of meanings which cannot be “said”, i.e. *put to* language, but can be “shown”—seen—*with* language.

I think translating enables one to cultivate such an ability: to see the (O.K.) “pure” meaning *behind* the actual sentences you have in front of you. That ability is what we put to use when we “philosophize”; and, to be able to write those meanings in a ‘concrete’ language with ‘imagery’, etc. is what we call “poetry”. So I am saying, in a way, that “philosophy” and “poetry” are fundamentally—*mutatis mutandis*—the same activity, and, further, that doing translation is somehow akin to this fundamental activity, as a ‘meaning-transferring-activity’. Think of what you do when you compare a translated sentence with its original—or, better, two or more translations of an original in a language you *don’t* know. I encountered this sort of thing while comparing translations of Kierkegaard into other languages, and while trying to translate Basho from translations. The “pure meaning” would sometimes ‘come into focus’, so to speak, behind the actual texts—I am tempted to say, ‘without language’... (Not a bad metaphysics, eh? ...)

**Q:** *You have translated Der Antichrist and Dionysos-Dithyramben as well as Nietzsche’s “Lenzer Heide” notebook and his essay on “Lüge” into Turkish. The painter*

<sup>2</sup> This was translated into English in 1983 and published by Fjord Press of Seattle, Washington as *Poff the Cat, or When We Care*.

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*Francis Bacon said that it is near to impossible to translate poetry—only when the translator is a real writer, a great writer does he believe a real translation occurs. Do you think that holds true for prose, too? And what were some of the particular challenges you encountered when translating Nietzsche?*

**A:** If I bring my above ‘metaphysics’ to bear on this question: Of course no actual sentence (prose or poetry) can be rendered *as such* in another language. (Western languages seem to be privileged in this respect, because after centuries of interaction, thanks partly to Latin, it seems to be easier to obtain convenient correspondences, say, between French and English, or Italian and French; but these too can be deceptive—think of the rubbish produced by computer translation-programs... But the “pure sentence”—*that* can be translated (i.e. re-written) in any language, as far as the translator is able. I don’t know about being a “great” writer, but the translator must of course be a “real” writer of sorts himself, to be a good translator. An excellent case in point is Celan’s poetry translations into German from almost all European languages—of course, from—themselves—“great” poets. For, the “greater” a writer is, the clearer (that is *not* to say, easier) is the “pure” meaning contained in his writings—that’s almost a tautology...

Now, Nietzsche is *the* writer—put in a favorite idiom of his—*par excellence*. What would that mean? ...

We have to take another look at—revise our view of—the so-called ‘History of Philosophy’: Writers of philosophy, i.e. philosophers (not cud-chewer academicians who easily call themselves that... ) went out of existence at Hegel—actually, Kant was the last one before Hegel, but the latter tried to salvage something from the wreckage the former had wrought—tried to transfer philosophy from being ‘the love of wisdom’ to being wisdom itself—being “science”... Thereby—becoming also Professor of Philosophy (and “Member of the Royal Mineralogical Society” (*sic.!*) and “other learned communities”...)—he paved the way of the henceforth ‘professionals’ of philosophy—academic philosophers... Whereas Nietzsche blocked that way, once and for all and for good: both with his—wayward (?) *and* undeniable (?), *and* intangible (?)—‘theories’ (*Wille zur Macht, ewige Wiederkehr, Jenseits von Gut und Böse, etc...*), and with his incisive criticism of almost all—actual and possible—‘theories’ to be advocated in the name of philosophy—all sorts of ‘metaphysics’...

Now: translating Nietzsche: As *the* writer, what he does in his writing is to bend and twist language to accommodate his thinking; i.e. *not* to ‘use’ language to ‘express’ an idea, but to *form* a sentence *by* an idea. The ‘mechanism’ of this feat is, naturally, syntax, i.e. the procession of words—concepts—in a sentence. Thus, a sentence of Nietzsche’s, *thinks in itself*. Now, two disciples of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, have learned this feat from him—though Heidegger somewhat overdoes it... Wittgenstein notes something like, “I think with my pen, for my brain does not know anything about what I write, before I write it.”

Therefore, while translating Nietzsche, what one is to be careful about is the syntax, even above grammar. (Finding correspondences to individual words is another matter.) Turkish, being a very ‘flexible’ language, is able in most cases to follow what German does—or, rather, what Nietzsche does *with* German...

**Q:** *What led you to translate the Antichrist and the Dionysian Dithyrambs? Were the*

choices personal? The decision to translate those two books in particular is intriguing.

**A:** Yes, of course I chose them, because they were the last books Nietzsche wrote and wanted to publish, but couldn't, and were distortingly published, *posthum*. (I would have liked to translate *Ecce Homo* also, which belongs in the same category; but it was already brilliantly translated by Can Alkor.) *Antichrist* was willfully censored and distorted by the evil sister; the *Dithyramben* was not published according to his plan at all—all until the pioneering work of Podach, which was afterwards taken over by Colli and Montinari.

Now, by “last” I don't only mean ‘terminal’, but ‘conclusive’, in the sense that Nietzsche in a way concentrates all his previous accumulated thinking and intellectual methods—not to mention his achieved brilliance as writer—in these texts. *Antichrist* is e.g. his interconnectedly longest (‘single-breath’) text, even above each of the three “Essays” making up the *Genealogy*. And *Dithyramben* is the epitome of his poetry, in a way transversing all his life-experience, turned into imagery.

**Q:** Do you know how the first translation into Turkish of *Also sprach Zarathustra* was received? And did you ever consider translating Zarathustra? While some Turks may have read him in German, or in French or other translations, the event of translating Nietzsche into a non-Christian and non-Western language certainly seems significant. If even today certain websites that feature Nietzsche's writings are not accessible in Turkey, and I have experienced that myself, his announcement of the death of God must have been controversial.

**A:** I don't know—that was before I was born... But, the first full translation (there was at least one partial translation before that) was by a haywire professor of medicine educated in Germany, and later by a philosophy student (a class-mate of my teacher İoanna Kuçuradi), who later became an important playwright. The former knew German, but understood nothing about Nietzsche or philosophy; the latter translated it from Hollingdale's English—he didn't know German... The latter was first published by the Ministry of Education... At present there are five translations of *Zarathustra* in Turkish.

Yes, I did start translating it, but something personal happened that induced me to abandon it.

Now, the “death of god” presented no great problem for the Turkish reader, because, obviously, what Nietzsche meant was the *Christian* god, not *Allah*... About the forbidden websites—are you sure? I know of a lot of forbidden—prohibited, access hindered—sites, but none of Nietzsche...

**Q:** As for the idea of God dying, even if Nietzsche speaks specifically of the Christian God dying, he of course suggests the possibility of the death of other gods. And Islam is the last of the salvific Abrahamic religions, the further or final revelation of the very same monotheistic God. In the Arabic translation of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, “Gott” is rendered as “Allah” or “Rabb.” Ali Mosbah rendered the phrase “God is dead” as “Inna' allaha qad Mat.” Nietzsche surely meant for it to resonate beyond strictly the “Christian God.”

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**A:** Of course; what I meant was that to Turkish ears it didn't sound so blasphemous, because of the Christian connotation. Then again, (at least in *Zarathustra*) it is not only a remark on the Christian "God", but on the conception of a single ('mono-') god—remember all the gods dying of laughter because one of them proclaimed himself the only god...

I know Arabic only from what has infused into Turkish; but I think to translate *Gott* as *Allah* is wrong; because that's a proper name, like the Jewish *Jehovah*. There's the word *ilah* for "god" (*deity*) in Arabic—and according to Islam, *La ilahe ill'Allah*: Of all the gods, *Allah* is the only [one]... "Mat" is interesting too—in Turkish it is used in chess, when the King (*Shah*, from the Persian) is "checkmated": *Şah-mat*... *Mat [olmak]* is also current as '[being] vanquished/ enabled/ useless'...

I can only wish Mosbah Godspeed...

**Q:** *Are there Turkish or Ottoman thinkers that made a remotely similar critique of religion to that of Nietzsche's? What of Beşir Fuad, Baha Tevfik, or Celâl Nuri?*

**A:** Answering that question might lead us into a history that would hardly interest your readers; but let me make a few points: In the Ottoman intellectual milieu, being a "*filozof*" meant being an atheist. Now, towards the end of the Empire, and at the beginnings of the Republic (after 1900, up to 1940), some defiant writers—mostly early Marxists—with a grudge against religion and an inclination to secularism, drew on the first sprinklings of Nietzsche then rampant in Europe. They didn't get too far, though...

**Q:** *One of the concerns of the Stanford University Press edition of the complete works of Nietzsche, which Alan Schrift and Keith Ansell-Pearson are editing, is maintaining a degree of translation consistency in order to retain the specificity of Nietzsche's word choices. For Nietzsche scholarship in English, as in all languages into which he is translated, this is of great importance, especially when many readers only encounter writers in translation, which is clearly not the purest encounter with a writer. Is there a concordance among the Turkish translators on the translation of key terms that Nietzsche uses? What do you think of other Turkish translations of Nietzsche's works?*

**A:** Now, before I learned German, I had read almost all the then (1960's) existing English translations: The Faber (?) Works, Hollingdale, Kaufmann... When I was able—to flatter myself—to read him in the original, I realized that I had *not* read him at all—though, of course, I had gleaned a lot *through* the translations... Kaufmann, e.g., being a non-native English speaker, had merely conformed his translations from his native German into the American he had 'emigrated' into. He renders Nietzsche 'harmless', so to speak—his is a 'docile' Nietzsche, domesticated, I am tempted to say, simmered down, into an acceptable current idiom: American academic jargon...

I think Americans are still labouring under that in translating Nietzsche into English. (I haven't yet seen the new *Zarathustra* translation, which, from what I glean from reviews, seems to be different.)

I would rather not go further into Turkish translations and Nietzsche in Turkish—in

order to make myself intelligible to your readers I would have to write a full dissertation...

**Q:** *The syntax of Nietzsche's work is extraordinarily rich and complex—it affects how one reads Nietzsche and reveals how he wants to be read. As perhaps with no other philosopher, syntax becomes music in Nietzsche. He underlines a voluminous number of words, capitalizes words where in German they would normally not be, uses ellipses frequently for aposiopesis and other rhetorical effects, and his use of dashes is astonishingly manifold. There is a key, tempo, and tone to his texts that is unmistakable. In many translations however, such syntactical devices are often not honored through being eliminated entirely (as with Kaufmann frequently eliminating Nietzsche's use of dashes), or altered, (as in Faber mutating Nietzsche's dashes into parentheses), which borders on an abuse of his texts, if not at very least a strong distortion of their subtleties. How did you navigate this particular problem? When translating Nietzsche into Turkish, to what degree did you honor his syntactical devices however much that was possible?*



**A:** Always—what you or I call 'syntax' is, with Nietzsche, the tempo (gait, way, direction...) of thought itself—that is not meant as something *übermenschlich*: In reading any sentence in any language, you encounter 'meanings'—of the individual words—one after the other, in a certain order—the total idea you form at the colon—the 'sense' of the sentence, (*im Freges Sinne*)—is not merely a mixture—with grammar—of these individual word-meanings (*Bedeutungen*); but a *constellation*, as the outcome—sum-total—of their accumulation and connections, in that order, in that sentence. That is what Nietzsche consciously does—constructs a sentence with an idea...

So, while translating him, the translator has to (yes, slavishly) follow and obey his syntax and punctuation—to the peril of committing crime in his (the translator's) native language. That is what I do in Turkish—but, as I said, thanks to Turkish being a 'steel-like' language (both flexible *and* durable) it is not always perilous when one carries similar bendings and twistings Nietzsche commits on German into Turkish.

**Q:** *Schadenfreude, Geist, and Aufhebung are particularly difficult to translate into English and in fact have no exact equivalents in that language. Wehe, which Nietzsche uses often, may be translated as woe but Wehe also refers specifically to labor pains or birth pangs, which woe does not at all convey. Ali Mosbah, who is translating Nietzsche into Arabic from German for the first time, noted that the possibility of joining words like "über" and "Mensch" in German, and there are a plethora of compound words in Nietzsche's texts, makes translating Nietzsche into Arabic extremely difficult for "that possibility neither exists nor works in Arabic." Since you are now working on translating Nietzsche into English for the first time, what is easier and what more difficult to translate from German into Turkish as opposed to into English?*

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**A:** I was once fascinated by a placard placed in front of the front ‘riders-seat’ (is that how it is called in English?) of a German touristic ‘midi bus’. It went: FAHRGASTSITZ-PLATZ! That could run in English, like, “journey’s-honour-guest-seat” (!): “seat of the guest-of-honour of the journey”; whereas Turkish can form a compound noun of similar description: *Onur konuğu oturma yeri*.

Turkish is very resourceful in forming compound words. Take the famous rendering—which is actually a complete sentence; a question—*Çekoslavakyalılaştıramadıklarımızdan mısınız?* Which in English, means, literally, “Are you one of those whom we could not render Czechoslovakian?” Again, e.g. *Übermensch* is no problem for Turkish: *üstinsan*—prefix and noun in the same order...

So, yes, it is (for me) much easier to translate Nietzsche into Turkish than into English—but, then again, I am a native Turkish speaker, whereas English is a ‘learned’ language for me. However, ‘objective’ comparisons can be made between the abilities of the two languages.—I am no linguist, so I can make only a ‘subjective’ one: It has always struck me that English ‘talks too much’ to say something Turkish says much more shortly, ‘economically’.

**Q:** *How also are the sense, music, and rhythm of Nietzsche’s texts, what he signifies and communicates through syntax, tone, and tempo, affected in Turkish?—Whose “inner tension of pathos” is it one hears in your translations of Nietzsche into Turkish—yours or Nietzsche’s?*

**A:** His, of course—mine are only imitations; I hope, good ones... But, as I said, the feat stems from Turkish, not me—I am merely the vehicle...

## Nietzsche and Aruoba’s Works

**Q:** *There are common themes and parallel thoughts between your work and Nietzsche’s. The relationship between philosophy and poetry for instance is a concern in de ki işte. This is an important, complex relation that has concerned philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche to Heidegger. In the same book you criticize academic philosophy as well and suggest that philosophy can move away from concepts. In the Nachlaß, Nietzsche counsels that we must no longer accept concepts as gifts, “nor merely purify and polish them, but first make and create them, present them and make them convincing.” Do you stand in opposition to Nietzsche on this point in thinking that philosophy can move beyond what were or still are its fundamental tools?*

**A:** Not at all—on the contrary, as you yourself mention in your question, I am of that opinion. I think that in the several centuries up to Nietzsche, starting with Descartes and Bacon and running all through the Enlightenment, all the way up to Kant, philosophers were *infected* with science. (Maybe one should start the line with Aristotle.) They were fascinated with the deludingly glorious achievements of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, *et al.*... And they wanted to be like them, while doing philosophy—they thought that they *were* actually doing what they had done: science: constructing

objective, universal, secure, certain knowledge... —Ironically, the former themselves thought that *they* were doing philosophy: *philosophia naturalis*...

Kant was the first one to dispel this illusion, and Nietzsche went, in his own fashion, all the way back to Herakleitos and Parmenides and continued on from there.

**Q:** *In hani you also discuss the relationship between philosophy and poetry but within the context of imagination and reality. While you define philosophy as a combat among equals between the imaginary and the real, you describe poetry as “a command that puts the existing real in line with the imaginary” (§87). If philosophy is also a super illusion and imagination is in a position to be the most fundamental determinant for philosophy, can’t one then claim for philosophy what you claim for poetry?*

**A:** I can only call on Kant for help: Although he has all of these ‘faculties’ (*Sinnlichkeit, Verstand, Vernunft, Urteilskraft*) at hand, he occasionally asserts that *Einbildungskraft* is the most fundamental faculty, “lying in the unfathomable recesses of the human mind”, etc. Hume, by the way, (skeptical as he was) also considers the “imagination” as the fundamental cognitive faculty, bridging the gap between “impressions” and “ideas” by “copying” the former as the latter—i.e. as a bridge between the human perception of the “world” and “reasoning”. Both, I think, have in mind the ability of humans to *connect* the meanings of things, and so to make up objects, in their ‘semantic/cognitive’ relationship to the world.—That ‘connecting’ is the work of imagination...

—*A propos* the “claim” you ask about: As I said above, I see no *semantically fundamental* difference between philosophy and poetry; one can “claim” for philosophy whatever one can “claim” for poetry—and *vice versa*...

**Q:** *In hani you assert that poetry determines the world before philosophy and that philosophy limps behind poetry—is this not to fall into the metaphysical poetry/philosophy dualism, left as a legacy, or contagion, from the ancient Greek world (since Plato)? If one of Nietzsche’s primary tasks is to fuse philosophy and poetry and overcome that dualism, are you at odds with that task? For Nietzsche, neither art nor philosophy has privilege over the other.*

**A:** You would have noticed that the “limping behind” metaphor stems from *Zarathustra*—I must differ from you: poetry *does* have precedence for Nietzsche: I would dare to say that if he had been able to render his “pure thoughts” as poetry to his satisfaction, he would not have written prose. Now, *Zarathustra*, of course, is telling in this regard: except for a series of “Songs” etc, it is not poetry; but it isn’t prose either—at all... It is ‘beyond poetry and prose’... —Maybe the nearest thing it can be compared with is the libretto of an opera...

One example: All through the three ‘Book’s, he postpones the articulation of the fundamental thought of the whole book, ‘eternal recurrence’, until he finds a proper *poetical* rendering of it at the end—in the section “Der Genesende”, from the mouths of his “animals”: “*Alles geht, Alles kommt zurück...*”

**Q:** *But it is “articulated” or rather, presented quite earlier, in “On the Vision and the Riddle,” as a riddle. In all actuality, it is too profound to be articulated; thus,*

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*Nietzsche presents it inaudibly, and he illustrates this silence graphically as I've argued, with a special configuration of two tensely spaced Gedankenstriche: — —.<sup>3</sup> I believe that Zarathustra never articulates the eternal return precisely because to do so would be woefully reductive. Is this not but one reason why he refers to the animal's interpretation of the eternal return as a hurdy-gurdy song?*

**A:** Yes, “*ein Leier-Lied*”. Your double *Gedankenstriche* are also there, at the ends and beginnings of the two previous paragraphs. And before his “animals”, in the section you mention, upon the mockery of the “dwarf”, Zarathustra tries his hand at the “articulation”, in front of “the gate Moment”, but his voice gets dimmer and dimmer (*immer leiser*), because he “becomes afraid of his own thoughts and hindthoughts”—then he hears the howling dog that leads him to the “shepherd”...

**Q:** *In de ki işte you note that philosophy has a very special relationship to language. This relationship is manifested differently in every philosopher. Some philosophers feel the anxiety of that relationship more than others. How, according to you, is it manifest in Nietzsche?*

**A:** A direct answer: In his—justified—consciousness of being a great philosopher and a great writer. —You cannot be the one without being the other...

**Q:** *There is a concern expressed in many of your works with the kişi (person, or individual). Individualism is considered by many to be of great importance to Nietzsche, so much so that some readers refer to him as a radical individualist. Yet, the existence of the individual is put into question in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's first work, and in a late work such as *Twilight of the Idols* he explicitly states that belief in the individual is the philosopher's error. Despite that, in the very same passage of the latter book, he values individualism physiologically and according to ascending and descending lines of life, stating that it is only the individual who contributes to the entirety of culture who is of value. Taking into consideration that Nietzsche uses several different words to denote different kinds of 'subjects' (Einzelne, Individuum, Persönlichkeit, Selbst, et cetera), how do you interpret his nuanced views of the individual within the context of your understanding of the person/individual, and how has his view of the empirical status of the person/individual affected your own view? And what for you would be an accurate translation into English of kişi?*

**A:** To begin from the end: *kişi* is, naturally, *person* in the European (Latin-based) languages, including its root-meaning in theater—*dramatis personae*, e.g., is simply the plural *kişiler*, in Turkish. The “mask” origin, of course is forgotten. A player, since ‘time immemorial’ but at least since Ancient Greek theater, while impersonating (you see? ...) the individual he was in the role of, wore his/her mask: Antigone, was she with her mask and Creon *he*, with his...

Now in Turkish, the word comes from the conjunctive *kim* (*kimi*: ‘certain who’ in the plural), which later turned into the question form *kim* (‘who?’), and shedding the “-m”, became *ki* (‘that/which’). *Kimse* (‘whom/someone’) is another development (from *kimesne*: ‘whomever’). *Nesne* (‘object’) is an affiliated form, from *ne-ise-ne* (‘what-ever-is’); *ne* being ‘what?’.

<sup>3</sup> See Rainer J. Hanshe's “Invisibly Revolving— —Inaudibly Revolving: The Riddle of the Double Gedankenstriche” in this issue of *The Agonist*. (6-24)

All of this happened in Ancient Turkish, in some 10 alphabets it went through, but is embedded in Anatolian and Ottoman Turkish, all the way up to ‘modern’ (post-Republic) Turkish, which recovered—rediscovered—ancient roots living in old texts and the spoken language and developed them.

At present there is an ambiguity between *kişi* and *birey*, similar to the one in English between *person* and *individual*. *Birey* is a construct from the root *bir* (the numeral ‘one’; *biricik*: ‘unique’); *biri*, being ‘one of [them]’ and *birisi*, ‘someone’...

In my view—which is eminently shaped by Nietzsche—*kişi* (the single, living, mortal human being) is *both* the fundamental object *and* the subject of philosophy (—and this is in *no way* ‘individualism’...)—in contrast with or in opposition to “human nature”; a common ‘universal-substantive humanity’ existent in each and every single “human being”, which was presupposed in almost all of pre-Marxian and pre-Nietzschean philosophy.

Think of a grave-stone: A name, a date of birth and a date of death (and a whole life in between...) — that *is* a person.

**Q:** *In the Section “The Meaning of the Life of the Person” (Olmayalı), it is possible to see the elements of askesis that one often encounters in Nietzsche’s works. For example: individual-society relations (§7), power dynamics (§8), agonism (§23), et cetera. Is this a coincidence, or does it have a direct link to the theme of askesis in Nietzsche’s thought and the new kind of askesis that he strives to cultivate?*

**A:** The individual chapters (sentences) of that section were written in a common ‘mood’ that might be termed ‘ascetic’—a mood in which, having reached a sort of silenced solitude, the person (the writer of that sentence) almost inaudibly contemplates the “meaning of [his] life”, building up from a thought he had encountered—experienced—because of an incident of his life.

I think Nietzsche’s concept/perception of—one type of—the “Asket” can be applied to the ‘existential situation’ of that person—hence to “me”, i.e., the writer of those sentences...

**Q:** *In §29 of the Section “Felsefe (işte)” in de ki işte, you discuss both silence and solitude and their place within philosophy. You state that philosophy is contingent upon both silence and solitude: “Philosophy is the art of being silent amidst noise and of being lonely amidst a crowd.” How for you do they impact and affect one another and what for you is the role of silence in philosophy?*

**A:** They are inseparably intertwined: Just as crowds and noise (English, unfortunately, does not measure up to the ‘acoustics’ of the Turkish words *kalabalık* and *gürültü*) go together, so do solitude and silence (*yalnızlık* and *sessizlik*).

Silence—the silent person—is the medium of philosophy.

**Q:** *How for you do silence and solitude function within Nietzsche’s philosophy?*

**A:** Think of all the situations at which Zarathustra becomes silent (*schweigt*) and “listens to his own heart”—“Hush”... (Whose song was that: “There’s a kind of hush all over the world tonight...”)

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The greatest Nietzschean of the XX. Century (—No: *not* Heidegger), Wittgenstein, says something like this about his book: “What I haven’t written therein is the important part.” And of course the last sentence of the book is, in English, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereon must one be silent.” The rendering isn’t ideal; because the German *schweigen* is a verb, whereas English has no such verb. —You asked above about Turkish and English. The Turkish of §7 of the *Tractatus* runs, in my translation:—

Üzerine konuşulamayan konusunda susmalı.

**Q:** Wittgenstein’s statement about what he has not written is very akin to a striking avowal Nietzsche makes in one of his letters, a statement which Heidegger lent particular interpretive force to, though he neglected to deal with the entire avowal. Oddly, not one scholar has addressed this extremely selective gesture of Heidegger’s. What Nietzsche states is that everything he has written hitherto is foreground, and that’s where Heidegger stops, but the end of the sentence is deeply illuminating, and not to be ignored: “for me,” Nietzsche continues, “the real thing begins only with the dashes.” It’s astounding if not at least very careless of Heidegger to ignore that, and as far as I have researched, no commentator to date has addressed this.

**A:** I don’t think that’s a case of “neglect”—Heidegger, when quoting other writers, often has the rather bad habit of giving only portions that support his current argument or interpretation, and (O.K.) “ignoring” the rest. Moreover, his ‘monumental’ *Nietzsche-Buch* (actually lecture-notes of *Seminare* between the years 1936-1941) is partly ‘strategic’, to challenge the abuse of Nietzsche by the NAZI ideology (Bäumler, etc.); in disappointment with, and to atone for, his involvement with the regime in 1933—he indicates (I think in the *Spiegel*-Interview) that he knew that the lectures were followed by GeStaPo agents— —poor fellows: think of the torture they were dealt out, sitting there, listening to all the verbiage—trying to assess whether he was saying something subversive of *Nationalsozialismus*... ; and partly to constitute a chapter of the “de-struction of the History of Philosophy”, which was meant to furnish the historical justification for *Sein und Zeit*.

**Q:** What do you think of Heidegger’s view that Nietzsche is the last metaphysician and that his conception of the will is somehow eschatological? And why to you is Wittgenstein the “greatest Nietzschean” of the XX Century as opposed to Heidegger. One could also think of Deleuze or Foucault.

**A:** Well, again, that view is also partly strategic— —like when he quotes Nietzsche (*SuZ* §31; S.145) “*Werde, was du bist.*”, without giving his name... However, I think he is right, apart from his use of the interpretation. Nietzsche indeed developed (several but interconnected) ‘metaphysic’s to end all ‘metaphysications’ (!). *Wille zur Macht*, e.g., terminates all the answers to the question, “What is the single and ultimate end/goal of all animal activity, human or otherwise”... And *ewige Wiederkehr* is his answer to Kant; to the question, “How can I know that my (present) action is ethically correct?”—seeing that everything happens “beyond good and evil”...

About Wittgenstein—being Nietzschean does *not* mean being ‘influenced’ by him or giving him weight in one’s deliberations. —How did it run (I am translating from memory): “Brethren, you had sought yourselves; then you found me. Now, abandon



me and go away from me, and find yourselves—then, I will come back to you with a new love”...

Foucault, of course, is a genuine Nietzschean—built his ‘optics’ on top of Nietzsche’s. His conception/perspective of “pouvoir” is a direct development and brilliant elucidation of Nietzsche’s “Wille zur Macht”. Deleuze is also very acute, but keeps a Hegelian stain... —Whereas Wittgenstein is a *great* Nietzschean—pure and simple...

**Q:** *The philosophers’ relationship to death is another theme in de ki ište and the first Section of the book concerns death. After stating that philosophy is a difficult and painful endeavor, you observe that philosophers may appear calm, joyful, and happy at the moment of death and give the examples of Socrates, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein. From the early 1880s on, Nietzsche used to conjecture that he would die soon and this sense of death is according to you particularly evident in his last writings, which you proclaim ‘smell’ of a yearning for death. In what way does Dionysos-Dithyramben smell of death? What further do you think of Nietzsche’s relationship to death?*

**A:** All of the nine poems resound with death, and the third one—the shortest—works immediately on a particular possibility of dying as the manifestation (testament?) of a “Last Will”. I can point this out line by line; but that would take us too far afield, would require a full-fledged article— —the reader should do it himself...

“Further”: I think Nietzsche was constantly conscious of death—mostly, his own; but also others’. I can dare to say, that wherever he looked, he looked for, and saw, death. —That wasn’t a personal ‘morbid interest’—it was his philosophical ‘optics’... For example, the whole idea of ‘eternal recurrence’ is built on the conception of death. Again, I would interpret the formula, “Remain true to earth”, as, “Don’t delude yourself into believing that you will go on existing at someplace else after death”... It is hard for me not to hear an undertone of death while reading any sentence of Nietzsche’s...

(*A propos* Wittgenstein: Russell notes (in his *Autobiography*) that he “knew that he [Wittgenstein] could go and commit suicide at any moment”...)

## Nietzsche and Poetry

**Q:** *Many scholars often discount Nietzsche’s poetry based on evaluative terms of good and bad; due to this approach as well as prejudices many academic philosophy professors have towards poetry, his poetry has received little analysis. Kaufmann for instance goes to great lengths to express his dislike for a poem such as “From High Mountains: Aftersong” yet, however one may qualitatively evaluate it, it is a fascinating poem. Aside from the separate volumes of poetry, the poems in The Gay Science and the concluding poem to Beyond Good and Evil are not dispensable supplements but integral parts of each book, elements of the whole. Instead of good and bad evaluations what is surely more valuable is to ask, What is being communicated with those poems? And how do they relate to the entirety of each book? What as a translator and poet is your view of Nietzsche’s poetry?*

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**A:** Nietzsche has only one book of poetry—which was the last—intended—publication he was able to work out in full. Before that, he contemplated making independent volumes of some of his poetry (“An den Mistral”, “Prinz Vogelfrei”, etc), but didn’t. Instead, he included sections of poetry into each of his books after *Zarathustra*. Now, *Zarathustra* itself, includes poetry (“songs”—sections ending “Also sang Zarathustra” instead of “Also sprach Zarathustra”); in fact, three of the *Dionysos-Dithyramben*, which he initially wanted to call—name—“Songs of Zarathustra” (*Lieder Zarathustras*)— —but is itself not poetical. I have dwelled on that above.

Now, Nietzsche’s situation in the history of poetry should be evaluated from a similar standpoint with his situation in the history of philosophy: He was standing—he *knew* he was standing—at a great junction, if not dead-end, from which several ways diverged. He took to almost all the possible philosophical roads, and walked them to some sort of end; but he did not do so with the poetical ones. He took several steps in some of the directions, but did not walk the whole length of the way. —That might have been impossible, anyway: It might be impossible humanly—or supra-humanly!—to become a great philosopher *and* a great poet, for one person, at the same time... Not only that the total energy—will-power!—needed for the two endeavors would be inadequate, they might have hampered one another as well.

So, I surmise, at one point in his life (at the “initial crisis” that is talked about? ...), Nietzsche decided to put his energy into philosophy and to leave his beloved poetry to work out as something that would take care of itself—perhaps wisely; for one can-



Arture 532, Nietzsche, 1999, 30 x 40.5 cm ~ Yüksel Arslan

not *strive* to write poetry, whereas one *can* do that with philosophy.

We can see the historical outcome of this ‘walking the road’ process in the works of Stefan George and Rilke, who both built immediately on the philosophical backdrop created by Nietzsche to develop the first great modern German poetries—with the impetus of the first great French—Baudelaire *et al.* . . .

**Q:** *Well, let me push you further on the poems that conclude GS and BGE in particular because I don't think he is just tacking poems onto the ends of those books simply because he didn't make independent volumes of poetry. He is too precise an architect of his work to resort to that. At very least, he seems to be doing something quite specific with the poems at the end of the GS and BGE. In the concluding aphorisms of each book, he questions the very value of words, of their ability to communicate his thoughts, and he seems to be speaking specifically of prose. Before reducing his thoughts to words, he notes that they were once “so colorful” and “full of thorns and secret spices” which caused him to sneeze and laugh. But when he transforms (or deforms) such thoughts into words, they lose their fragrance or sensorial as well as musical dimension. Following these critiques, he offers us “songs,” the songs of Prince Vogelfrei, and “Aus hohen Bergen,” which as you know he refers to as a “Nachgesang”. Poems are different of course from prose, fragments, and aphorisms and are more akin to music. In this way then, is he not attempting to surpass or overcome with his poem-songs the very limits of prose, which, as he proclaims, steal the color, prickliness and fragrance (!) of his thoughts? If each book spiders out into others, the question or rather, demand, of reading each book as a unique totality remains and Nietzsche's individual books are rarely considered in and of themselves. Lampert is one of the few scholars to do this, at least in English. The scholars who think one can read Nietzsche's books in any haphazard order and that they lack an overall sense of design are quite mistaken.*

**A:** I will start from the end: Each book of Nietzsche's is of course to be considered “in and of itself” (none is like any other); for, as you say, he was an architect, or, a poet (as you know, the verb *poinein* means “making with the hand”). Each one is a construct, and not a mere ‘flow of text’ chopped up into sections and paragraphs, *oder gar*, a random compilation of aphorisms. —So, O.K., I will say “of course” to all of your remarks and rhetorical questions above: I did *not* say that Nietzsche's practice of including poems into his books was merely a case of appending packs of verse to compilations of “prose fragments and aphorisms”. It was like telling the reader, by giving the poetry, something like, “You see; I could have—maybe should have—written all of this like *this*, but didn't—couldn't”...

**Q:** *Do you think Nietzsche resolves the tension of his critique of the poet and poetry while continuing to write poetry himself and to write poetically as in Also sprach Zarathustra? How is Nietzsche different from the poets that he critiques and how is his poetry different, if you believe it is at all? Do you think he achieves his goal of becoming a different kind of poet?*

**A:** Now, to continue from the previous question: I am no expert in the history of poetry, but seeing that someone so eminently unqualified as Kaufmann could walk into judgment on Nietzsche's poetry, I can try my hand, too: If with the instances of Stefan George and Rilke, we understand the transition from traditional poetry into

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the modern as the achievement of (almost) absolutely novel poetical practices and constructs, then, starting from Nietzsche's *Liebling*, Hölderlin, who paved the way for all to come, we can conclude that Nietzsche did take several steps towards modern poetry, but didn't reach "the goal of becoming a different kind of poet", as you ask. For example, Ferdinand Freiligrath, whom Nietzsche parodies in "The Daughters of the Desert", or even the great pioneer of the classical, Goethe, whom Nietzsche admires, stood at the end of the traditional, but stayed there. So did Nietzsche, except for several—interesting—steps in the other direction.

This transition to modernism can also be traced in his—meager—compositions, in which, even I, as someone 'with no ear at all', may surmise to hear the beginnings of modernity—but *only* the beginnings...

**Q:** Which poems in particular, if that's what you're referring to, do you think make such steps? And if you can elaborate, why do you think they achieve that? It's intriguing that you make similar remarks about his music. What relation do you see, or how instrumental do you think his knowledge of music was to his knowledge of language, or, how do you think his knowledge and understanding of music bear upon his interpretation of language?

**A:** You don't expect me to vivisection single poems, I hope; but I can point e.g. to the unusually long "Aus Hohen Bergen", the "Nachgesang" of *Jenseits*, which can be compared with the last poem in the "Anhang/Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei" of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, "An den Mistral"; all moving towards the *Dithyramben*. To "elaborate"; without writing a treatise:—

The first step was the move away from rhyme and meter, which were the fundamental classical *sine qua non* of being "poetry". Rhyme was almost done away with by Hölderlin in the late hymns and elegies; but he had kept meter; whereas Nietzsche took the step away from that too. (I surmise both of them took as model ancient Greek poetry, especially the texts of the choruses in tragedies, which they both knew first-hand—but I don't know for sure, I can't read Greek...) Instead of rhyme and meter, Nietzsche moved towards constructing *rhythm*, the flow of sound; but achieved that in (only some of) the *Dithyramben*. (Rilke was to become the first master of that...)

The second step was to displace the subject of the poem: Instead of the classical unanimous writer of it, who *is* there but keeps himself *behind* what is said in it, who could be anyone; to *posit* his own person as the subject—the speaking "I"... Now, of course, there were other poets who tried their hand at this (e.g. Ernest Dowson—who of course Nietzsche did not know; but Hölderlin too occasionally uses this sort of "Ich"...). Nietzsche's "ich" is—again limitedly—authentically himself as the subject of his poems.

I could go into further details, technicalities actually, but I don't feel competent enough to assert them. Let me just mention one:—

In classical poetry, the grammatical sentence begins with the beginning of the line and, even when it runs several lines long, it ends with the end of a line, and the next sentence begins with the next line. I.e., you hardly ever have a period and a capital letter *inside* a line. Nietzsche begins to tentatively play with the sort of *flow* of the sentence among lines which will become a novelty of modernity. Now, again, there

are the beginnings of this form in Hölderlin, and again, Rilke perfected it in his (last) *opus magnum*, *Duineser Elegien*.

Now, for Nietzsche's music, I am in no position to point to anything concrete; but a young Turkish composer who is also a researcher, Mehmet Nemutlu, once remarked in a radio program we made on Nietzsche's compositions (some of which had been performed and recorded at the time), that he had started to do the sort of thing that Mahler, e.g. was to develop. I can't say *what* that is, except that it's something modern...

As to language and music, I can only point out that for Nietzsche reading is something you do with your ears.

## Nietzsche Today

**Q:** *Nietzsche died over 100 years ago. Since then, interest in him has been growing throughout the world. Ali Mosbah said he is deeply convinced that "Nietzsche holds the most important answers to the questions posed by the 21<sup>st</sup> century at the ready for us. I believe," he said, "that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of Nietzsche." Laurence Lampert made a similar proclamation when he referred to Nietzsche as "the philosopher of our age" and said that not only are his "aspirations are the aspirations of a Plato," but that his "teachings may come to be as historically important as Plato's." Are these visions of Nietzsche in accord with your own vision of him? According to you, in what ways does he shed light on the problems of our age if not offer counsel as to how to navigate through them?*

**A:** He does both: He has tackled questions to which we have still not yet come to, but have to, and has devised intellectual tools which we are not yet able to handle. Starting exactly at 1900, it became impossible for any creator in any branch of the written word *not* to take up from him in one way or the other. And this wasn't simply 'being influenced'—it was complying with Nietzsche's call to "become what one is"... There's the excellent study *Heirs to Dionysos* (whose was it? ...), which deals with, but hardly exhausts all the 'great' writers who took to the road with Nietzsche in their Rucksacks—I think there was none of note who didn't...

Today, most of present-day academic philosophy, I would dare to generalize, still labours under remnants of problems Nietzsche had solved—perhaps, resolved, one should say, or better, dissolved—long since. To mention only one example, which is actually an acute study, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* by Mark Warren. He comes very close to articulating the sort of political/social ideal for modern society that can be learned from Nietzsche but is unable to cross the threshold of traditional 'political theory'. Again, the theoreticians of the European Union (if there be any...), are unaware of what Nietzsche called being "a good European".

**Q:** *What do you think of Nietzsche's vision of the future and his desire to create Übermenschen? Are his desires, such as redeeming humanity from revenge, which is for him "the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after lasting storms," at-*

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*tainable in some distant future, or do you think them purely utopic?*

**A:** None of that: the *Übermensch* is historically very real (cf. §§3-4 of *Antichrist*)—it—he—is neither something to ‘create’ (a new species of homo sapiens, *etwa...*), nor ‘utopic’. He is the creative person—he is Leonardo and Michelangelo, he is Thomas More and Erasmus...

From the point of view of Zarathustra—“the teacher of the *Übermensch* to come”—what is “future” about him is in which way he could be willed, educated, shown direction, in the desolation Nietzsche saw in *his/our* present age—how to rear—yes, breed!—the new transvaluators of values, the new creators of values— —that was the task Nietzsche set to himself, to Zarathustra...

I can presume to give you contemporary examples of *Übermenschen*, whom, as Americans, you can appreciate: How would you like, Orson Welles and Stanley Kubrick, or Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen? ...

**Q:** *In the Anglo-Saxon world, of all of Nietzsche’s work, it is the Genealogy of Morals in particular that receives the most attention; more books are certainly written on that text than on any others, such as Daybreak or The Gay Science, which both demand to be engaged with more thoroughly. What texts of his are of primary importance in the secondary literature on him in Turkey? And what areas of his thought do you think have been neglected in Turkish philosophical circles?*

**A:** The responses Nietzsche found and finds in Turkish circles are very various. In academia, there is a range of views from, “no philosopher, mere poet”, to blind adoration and lip-service. In leftist circles, he was considered, for a time, as the mastermind of Fascism—as was the mode all over the world in the ‘60s and ‘70s. In the last 20 years he became extremely popular as (a) guide to a secularly meaningful world-view. He “sells” good, but I am sceptical of the ways he is “read”...

**Q:** *And what secondary readings of Nietzsche had the most decisive impact on you?*

**A:** Hardly any—except perhaps my teacher İoanna Kuçuradi’s book *Nietzsche’de Tragik Olan (The Tragical in Nietzsche)*. From an early stage on, I developed my own—rather strict—view of Nietzsche and tended to disregard, if not ignore, “secondary readings” of him. Through the years, as new sources came into light—the extraordinary development of the *KGW* and new secondary work with sounder foundations—I did not find reasons to change my view; on the contrary, it was reinforced. (That probably makes me a fanatic...)

**Q:** *Since there is a close connection to Arab culture in Turkey, are there more studies of The Gay Science and the influence on Nietzsche’s thought of troubadour culture, which was not only a European but a Middle Eastern phenomenon?*

**A:** There is a far looser “connection to Arab culture in Turkey” than is considered in the West. Nietzsche is read in Turkey solely as a European philosopher.

The possible connection with the—originally Homeric—Anatolian *âşık* (bard) tradition is hardly considered, which wasn’t “a Middle Eastern phenomenon”, but one which was an amalgam of the ‘Turcic’ *ozan* (singer-poet) tradition of Middle Asian/

Shamanistic origin and the Anatolian traditions of various cultures, including probably Dionysian cults.

## Aruoba Today

**Q:** *With the difficulties you encountered in academia due to the political situation in Turkey when you were teaching, how do you view the current situation there and its impact on the university? With the rise of the religious party, what is the situation like now in relation to when you were teaching and essentially forced to leave or sever your ties with academia?*

**A:** Well, the university was done away with—there’s a pun I think I coined and have repeatedly used: “*yökedilmek*”: *yökedilmek* means “being annihilated” (*yok*: ‘nihil’) and the abbreviation of both the “Law of Higher Education” brought into force by the military regime and the “Council of Higher Education” which it established, is “YÖK”... My first article on the issue (published in Bülent Ecevit’s *Arayış*; the only critical magazine of the time) was entitled “The Death of the University”.

As for the (‘Mild’?-)Islamist party now in power: It has, naturally, brought the “Council” into its own circle of influence, together with the President of the Republic (elected by it), who nominates the rectors of the universities, proposed by YÖK after inconsequential ‘elections’ at the universities.

I am of the opinion that there are at present no universities in Turkey (with the possible (?) exception of one or two, which have tried to keep themselves afloat in the deluge), and that the 100-and-some institutions that bear that name are cross-breeds of Kindergarten and state Scrivens’ Bureaus. Nowadays, they are in the process of being invaded by scholastically reared Islamist “scientists”—*ulema*, in Arabic...

**Q:** *Most of our English speaking readers are surely not aware of this, but you had something of a literary tête-à-tête with Orhan Pamuk upon the publication of his Kara Kitap (The Black Book). This involved another writer, Tahsin Yücel, who criticized the value of the book, which he didn’t think deserved the praise it received and provoked him to raise a question about the status of literature and of what makes a writer, of what is populist versus Unzeitgemäß. What can you tell us of this affair, which prompted you to write the brief article “Stephen Pamuk and/or Orhan King”? And did Pamuk ever respond to you?*

**A:** Tahsin Yücel (who is an eminent linguist, well-known e.g. in French professional circles too, who also writes novels) in a critical book-review, asked the fundamental question, “Can a writer who uses language badly be a good writer?” and pointed out the deficiencies of Pamuk’s Turkish. Pamuk’s response (in an interview, without mentioning names) was, to remark that he from time to time “cleansed his library” by ridding it of books written by Turkish literature writers who were “between their fifties and sixties, doomed at birth, half successful, half clumsy, male and bald”, all (at least the physical side) of the description fitted almost exclusively Yücel. So I wrote the comment; in it I drew a parallel between Orhan Pamuk and Stephen King, whose *Shining* I had read because of Kubrick’s film. Comparing King and Pamuk, I concluded that they were in the same category of writers of novels as “light consumers’ goods

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to be sold in supermarkets” and had no “significance or importance as genuine literature”. I wrote that, if King would give an interview to *Newsweek*, and claim to be the third point on the extended line of American literature between Herman Melville and William Faulkner, he would find plenty of critics and experts who would grab him by the neck and drag him up to the Manhattan Bridge and throw him down from it. Extending the parallel, I asked, “Now what if Pamuk, giving an interview to *Aktüel*, should claim—once and for all, without mincing words—to be the third point on the extended line of Turkish literature, between Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Oğuz Atay; who would do what?” I concluded, “Well, they don’t allow pedestrians on the Bosphorus bridges...”

No, he did not respond to my comment.

**Q:** *Our concern is not with literary squabbles but with the larger question the issue raises, which is that of values and of the reception of artworks. How does the commodification of art, which presumes to make art available to all, possibly endanger art or reduce and diminish the experience that it can offer? Cezanne used to visit the Louvre frequently if not every day when he was in Paris but now that most museums have become veritable shopping malls, it’s difficult to impossible to imagine that as solitary an encounter with a work of art as Cezanne had is ever at all possible. What do you think of the democratization of art? Is there an art for all, or is that a total fallacy and the cry of elitism a specious criticism of effete liberals?*

**A:** Well, all these considerations revolve around the concept “bestseller”. That was the point I started from, to show that precisely the fact, that, when a book becomes popular and hence a bestseller in its own day is an indication of its inferiority—i.e. “selling” is counterindicative of being “good”. That’s not ‘elitism’, but is based on the historical fact that none of the books which are considered (afterwards) to be “best”, “sold” in their own day; and contrariwise, none of the bestselling books popular in their own day lived on to become important and enduring for posterity. I gave as example the contrast between the case of Kant’s *C[K]ritik der reinen Vernunft*, which was deemed worthy of a print of 750 by its publisher in 1781 and sold about 200 copies in six years (Kant had to contribute to the expenses when he wanted a second ‘corrected’ edition in 1787), and the cases of the works of Moses Mendelssohn and Christian Garve, who were bestselling ‘philosophical’ authors of Kant’s day, going into—for the day—immense numbers of print, but are hardly known today and are not printed at all. (I remarked that I, as professional philosopher, knew their names from Kant’s letters and biographies.) Then the contrast between Melville/Faulkner, and bestselling King; likewise, Tanpınar/Atay, and bestselling Pamuk...

This issue, as you will know, was confronted by Benjamin in his deep-sighted “Reproducibility” text— —how much did *that* “sell” in its own day?... (I remember that it wasn’t even printed in its own day but some thirty years later.)

**Q:** *With the violent technological transformations now occurring, and at terrifyingly swift paces, what future do you think the book has in an epoch where more and more people refuse to purchase physical books, but download them instead (open sharing, etc.), and where entities like Google sorely threaten copyright laws? What do you think of the new technologies of the book and how they have changed and are changing the way people read and encounter “books”, or how they might—*

*will—be written?*

**A:** I think the “violent technological transformations” are far less “terrifyingly swift” than you feel them to be—the span between Gutenberg’s Bible and the Heidelberger “off-set” printing is much greater than the one between “physical books” and “scanning/downloading” on the Web. —Now, to be able to be ‘downloaded’, books have to be first ‘loaded’; for that, they have to have become ‘physical books’, and for that they have to have been written first, with the hand. You would say, books can be typed directly on a computer. Apart from certain texts that require no styling or forming (notary documents, like), I don’t think handwriting will—or can—go totally out of fashion and disappear— —e.g. are children to be taught reading and writing in primary school via computers?

Writing with the hand—handwriting—is something very fundamental to culture itself; as well as being the hallmark of the person—it is personality *in concreto*. (Think of the importance of an ‘auto-graph’...) I don’t think handwriting can become obsolete.

**Q:** *Do the critiques of technology and the commodification of culture offered by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Adorno or other thinkers serve in any way as guides for you as to how to respond to such forceful shifts, all of which seem to be beyond our control, except perhaps for how we engage, or **refuse** to engage with them?*

**A:** My son, when he was a kid, had concluded in his mind that eggs, like electric bulbs, were manufactured, and asked me, “How do they put the yellow ball into the shell?”—he had never seen hens... Of course the thinkers you mention have important thing to say on technology and human beings’ rupture from nature—e.g. Heidegger saying that farming has become “motorized food industry”. We have to resist these developments, but as you say, they are largely out of our control—actually, they are not even in the control of the so-called ‘leaders’ or ‘aim-setters’ of capitalist society. They arise out of man’s distorted view of nature as his property, coupled with his ‘natural’ greed. As individuals we can counter this view by trying to live *with and in* nature as much as possible and to cultivate our *regard* of it—of what is left of it...

Then again, I am of the belief that if left sufficiently on its own, “nature” can still get rid of man and his ‘doings’; “the skin-disease of earth” (*Zarathustra*) and cleanse itself. Man sitting at the controls of a bulldozer is still a pitifully weak thing when compared with the “nature” he is in the process of disrupting—as he has to be reminded of by earthquakes and tornadoes...

**Q:** *We know that you served as an apprentice of sorts to Bilge Karasu, who is far less known in the Anglo-Saxon world than other Turkish writers. What can you tell us of your relationship to him and his impact on your life?*

**A:** Actually, I adopted him as master; and he, not reluctantly, complied to having me as apprentice. We worked together at various writing activities and, would also show each other ‘completed’ texts that we had written, to read. For example, we went over my translation of Hume’s first *Enquiry* together. Or, e.g., the motto from Hegel in front of his *Gece (Night)* is something I found as a response his setting me a riddle on the novel.

He has deeply influenced me—sometimes to a degree I cannot fathom—both by his

interviewed by:  
Yunus Tuncel  
and  
Rainer J.  
Hanshe

superb mastery of Turkish, by his endeavor as a writer and by his incomparable personality.

**Q:** *Do you intend on translating other works by Nietzsche in the future? What are you currently working on?*

**A:** I am now past 60—so, any hope of ‘creative’ work (including translation) is very much out of the question for me. (Wittgenstein sets the limit at 25 for creative work in philosophy—although he himself goes on to write, past 60, awaiting certain death, one of his best texts, “Über Gewissheit”...)

At present, about Nietzsche, I am trying to finish a Dialogue I wrote—am still writing—between Marx and Nietzsche, as they meet and talk ‘up there above’. I also have a plan and notes on a text which would establish the proposition “Society is organized hypocrisy”; but I doubt whether I will be able to finish it. The rest will probably be bits-and-pieces of a ‘History of Philosophy’ I feel I owe my readers, and, occasional haiku, when and if they want to come— —until I rest...



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Interview