

That Photo of a Gathering Over Raki By Gökçenur Ç.

Translated by Saliha Paker and the poetry group,
attended by the poet, CWTTL, 13 September, 2014

If I die, and I may,
bury me in a violin case
in a geranium evening, under a pear tree
If I die, and I may,
don't set up a poetry prize in my name

If I die, though I never have,
bury me in the great vowel harmony of Turkish,
in its docile rhymes
in a gazel's refrain, "won't go, will stay,"
If I die, though I never have,
don't publish my selected poems

If I die, for dying's the fashion this year,
bury me in that photo of a gathering over raki
look, how thrilled we appear
as if about to bring out a magazine
as if arguing over its name
If I die, for dying's the fashion this year
the commemoration should be cancelled due to rain

One can't transcend poetry when alive
if possible, no street should be named after me,
and if it's absolutely a must to set up
a statue, place it in a seaside park
so that seagulls may freely shit on my head
beaten by the salty winds
let the rusty plaque blacken underneath:

Gökçenur Ç.: Poet

Date of Birth: unknown
Date of Death: don't tell him, he doesn't know he's dead

Bir Rakı Sofrası Fotoğrafi

Ölürsem, ki ölebilirim
bir keman kutusuna gömün beni
bir sardunya akşamına, bir armutun altına
ölürsem, ki ölebilirim
adıma şiir ödülü düzenlemeyin

Ölürsem, ki hiç ölmedim
“gitmez kalır” redifli bir gazele gömün beni
Türkçe'nin büyük ünlü uyumuna, uysal uyaklarına
ölürsem, ki hiç ölmedim
yayınlanmasın seçme şiirlerim

Ölürsem, ki bu yıl modaymış ölüm
bir rakı sofrası fotoğrafına gömün beni
heyecanlı çıkmışız hepimiz, bak!
yeni bir dergi çıkaracakmışız da
tartışıyormuşuz gibi adını,
ölürsem, ki bu yıl modaymış ölüm
yağmur nedeniyle iptal edilsin anma günüm

Şiir yaşarken aşılmıyor anladım
hiç bir sokağa verilmesin mümkünse adım
ve illa dikilicekse
heykelim bir sahil parkına dikilsin
martılar kafama rahatça pislesin
kararsın altında tuzlu deniz rüzgârlarının
aşındırdığı paslı bir levha:

Gökçenur Ç.: Şair

Doğum tarihi : Bilinmiyor
Ölüm tarihi : Söylemeyin öldüğünü bilmiyor



Gökçenur Ç. is a poet, translator, editor and poetry activist based in Istanbul.

A note about Translating at the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature by Poet and Translator Gökçenur Ç.

When I was first invited to CIWTTL, I was already doing a lot of poetry translation from English to Turkish and participating in different poetry translation workshops. It was the first time I was invited to a workshop where poets translate each other over a bridge language, usually English. While it was a shocking experience, I was thrilled to see a room full of brilliant translators who were also translation scholars or poets, working together to translate my poems. The discussions over the translation of a verse or even a single word sometimes took hours. I must say that, on the one hand, I felt flattered as a poet and, on the other hand, I realized how much I had to learn about translation. I had my doubts about the translatability of “That Photo of a Gathering Over Raki” since I knew it was a complicated poem with local irony difficult to preserve for a translator, perhaps even an impossible task. More than that, the first line of the poem would be a challenge. The speaker—taking his death not as a certainty but only a possibility—expresses this as such an “ordinary” thing that you need to identify the arrogance—the parody of the arrogance—behind it. Besides, it’s a short, rhythmic, melodic line. Saliha managed to translate the poem perfectly and when I first heard the translation, I felt like I had written the poem in English myself.

As a Poet

He has seven poetry books in Turkish and was awarded the Arkadaş Z. Özger Best Debut Poetry Book Prize with his first book. His latest book received the Sabahattin Kudret Aksal Literature Prize and the Metin Altok Poetry Prize. His selected poetry books are published in Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Italian and his poems have been translated into 30 languages. A handwritten bilingual book in French and Turkish was published as a single exhibition copy for the Lettres Capitales Project of a European Capital of Culture, Marseille, in 2012.

As an Editor

He is the editor of the Turkish magazine *Çevrimdışı İstanbul (İstanbul Offline)*. He is the co-editor of the Turkish domain in Poetry International and is on the editorial board of the Macedonian-based international literary magazine *Blesok*. He has also edited countless poems in translation books.

As a Translator

He has translated into Turkish selected poetry books by Wallace Stevens, Paul Auster, Ursula Le Guin and many other poets. He is a member of the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature.

As a Poetry Activist

He has participated and/or organized poetry translation workshops and festivals in many countries. He is the curator and co-director of Word Express; co-director of international poetry festivals Offline Istanbul, Mosaic of Metaphors Gaziantep, and Turkish American Poetry Days; and a board member of the Nilüfer International Poetry Festival, the Crete International Poetry Festival and the Kritya International Poetry Movement.

Saliha Paker is a retired professor of Translation Studies in Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, who continues to teach her PhD course on History of Translation in Ottoman and Modern Turkish society. Also involved in translating modern Turkish poetry and fiction for 30 years, she ran the Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature (CIWITL) from 2005 to 2016. She co-edited (with Mel Kenne and Amy Spangler) a book of translations produced by the Cunda workshop *Aeolian Visions / Versions. Modern Classics and New Writing from Turkey* (Milet Publishing 2013). Her English editions of Enis Batur's poetry in *Ash Divan* (2006) and Gülten Akın in *What Have You Carried Over* (2014, co-edited with Mel Kenne) were both published by Talisman House. She served as an editor with Mel Kenne and Idil Karacadağ, of *Turkish Poetry Today 2016*, published by Red Hand Books. More recently, she co-edited (with Mel Kenne and Caroline Stockford) and translated a selection of poems by Haydar Ergülen, *Pomegranate Garden*, published by Parthian in 2019.