

Introduction to Special Section on Selim Özdoğan

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In fall 2018, author Selim Özdoğan visited the University of Notre Dame for one week as writer in residence through a generous fund from the *Wunderbar Together Deutschlandjahr* initiative of the German embassy and the Goethe-Institut. During a public reading, a creative writing workshop, as well as countless personal conversations, Özdoğan deeply engaged with students and faculty on a multifaceted variety of topics. At the core of all these conversations, however, was a focus on the power of storytelling: What stories do we tell? How do stories emerge? And how do they survive, even the fake ones? What motivates writers to tell stories, and what inspires them?

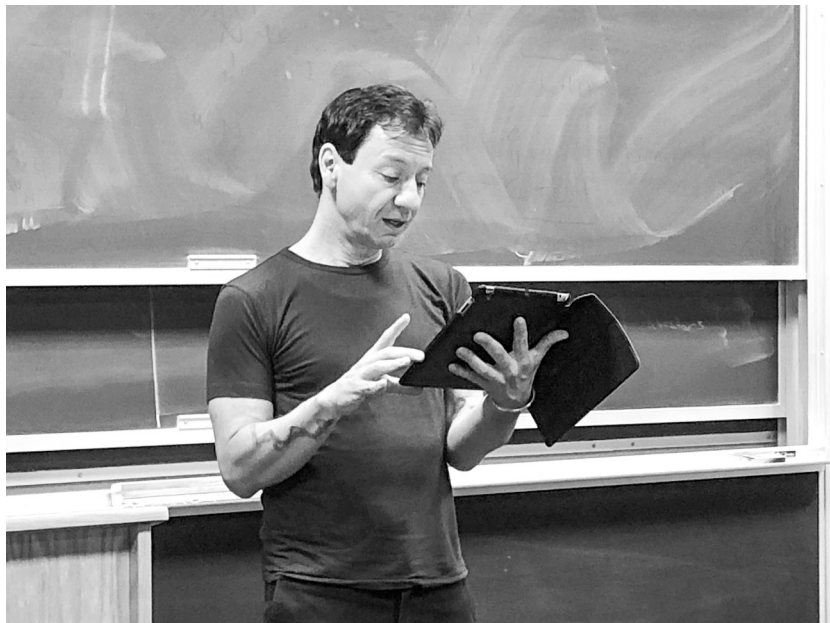
With this special section on Selim Özdoğan, it is our goal to capture but a small sample of the insightful reflections from Özdoğan's visit to Notre Dame. In the interview with Steffen Kaupp, translated into English by Andrew Fulwider, Özdoğan recalls the very moment he considered himself a writer for the first time, at age 14, as he discovered how words are weaved into sentences, sentences connect to paragraphs, and paragraphs become the building blocks of fascinating literary worlds. In the interview, Özdoğan also reflects on the label »German-Turkish« or »migrant« author, and how he rejects such a categorization but also needs to engage with it whether he wants to or not, since it is forced upon him by readers and critics alike.

At the core of the interview, again, is the question of what inspires, or rather informs, his stories. This reflection becomes a beautiful testimony to the power of literary worlds, in that Özdoğan remarks, »What sets literature apart from all other forms of art is the ability to see directly into the head of the narrating figure. This ability then also implies, if you want it to, a significant form of intimacy.« With this intimacy of the fictional worlds, the reader is also confronted in Özdoğan's short story *Die Depressionen der anderen* (*Other people's depressions*). In an almost stream-of-consciousness-like narration with a fast beat, Özdoğan gives us deep insights into his narrator's mind, pain, and suffering at the hands of mental illness. While this story tackles a very real societal problem through a powerful fictional narrative, it also becomes yet another allegory for the complex process of writing when it ends with the following lines: »I would love to want something. But you can't learn to want. And without wanting anything, every-

thing empties out. Empty. That describes the absence of feeling well. Every page of me is empty. Every single one.«

We hope that the interview and the short story can give you a glimpse into Selim Özdoğan's deep love for the story worlds that he creates, and the magic in which he enthralled his audiences at the University of Notre Dame.

Selim Özdoğan performing a live reading during his week as writer in residence at the University of Notre Dame



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