What happens when fact and fiction overlap? Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei*

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What I will attempt to do first in this text is to share with the reader my personal adventure with Özdamar's text—an autobiographical report of the process of reading an autobiographical novel[1]—and then, the once again personal yet this time "agonizing" adventure of turning this process into a "meaningful" article...

October 1998: I am in Germany for my PhD, my first days in Tübingen. I don't recall exactly how or why, but I am reading Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Life is a Caravanserai*.[2] Following a four month German course, this is the first German book I am reading in Germany. Considering the language Özdamar uses, a rather unfortunate choice for me! Many critics define Özdamar's language as a "strange" or "Turkish accented" German. There are also those who refer to it as "Broken German."[3]

Anyway, let me get back to my initial adventure of reading the text. I had picked up the book from the university library without knowing why I chose it—of course, later on I did consider the possibility that it could have been an un-

1 I find exploring this personal experience significant in two ways. First, how I approached this controversial text as a beginning German reader and as someone who knew very well one of the two languages and cultures the text is constructed upon—Turkish—and just beginning to know the other—German. Second, within the context of fact and fiction, how "my fact" and "my fiction" relate to the "fact" and "fiction" of the text.

2 Even though I primarily use the original German text as my point of reference, I will also use here the English and Turkish versions. Both because the article is in English and also because I insistently stress the differences created by this language issue, in some footnotes I will include quotes from the book in all three languages.

3 Karen Jankowsky, in her article, which also discusses the controversies arising from Özdamar receiving the Bachmann award in 1991 as the first "non-native speaker of German," also examines such "positive" and "negative" criticisms of the book. Jankowsky also raises a discussion on the issue of multicultural understanding, pointing out that many critics read the text circumscribed into absolute orientalist frame (See Jankowsky 1997). A very good definition for the text comes from Luise von Flotow, who has translated the book into English. She calls it a *Zwittertext* (Hybridtext), which literally means a hermaphrodite text. On the language of the text, also see Seyhan 1996. In her article, Seyhan writes "Although written in German, the literary discourse of Turkish-German writers reflects the living memory of their first language; in fact it exists in the hospitable idiom of Turkish. Therefore a genuine understanding of this literature requires both historical reading and semiotic analysis," in reference to Turkish writers living in Germany and writing in German (418). And Musa Yaşar Sağlam (Sağlam 2001) regards Özdamar's use of language as a part of the narrative technique.

conscious association... The name Özdamar rang familiar somehow, but I couldn't be sure. I started reading the book: on the one hand I was mesmerized, on the other, confused. The language was very strange, almost defiant, challenging me: "Go on, understand me if you can." I wasn't able to figure it out: "Was my German really bad, or was this text very different from those I was accustomed to reading?" Besides these reactions, I was constantly trying to figure out the Turkish translations–sometimes merely two word phrases–of the long German sentences I was reading.

To give an example: "Mir geht es ein bisschen besser als einem Schwiegersohn, der bei seinen Schwiegereltern wohnen muss" (in English "I feel a little better than a son-in-law who has to live with his parents-in-law," and in Turkish "içgüveysinden hallice"–only two words). How frugal and how much it says to "us" Turks! Actually, just this example can give an idea of the kind of language used in the book. The author translates some Turkish sayings mot-a-mot to German, as well as writing some of the Turkish codes in German.[4]

I had a Norwegian housemate in Tübingen. She loved to read out loud passages from this book with long Turkish sentences, Arabic prayers, and Turkish children's songs. Every night, she'd walk around with my book in her hand and ask, "Tamam mi?"[5] Though I couldn't understand why exactly, the book created a magical atmosphere for my Norwegian friend. Even though she had not read the entire book, she said she associated it with *A Thousand and One Nights*. Özdamar's text kept calling me, on the other hand, to a culture and geography I knew all too well, yet was forced to re-discover through a bizarre and hybrid language. Graveyards, prayers, fairy tales, legends, old wives' tales, the beauties of Istanbul, years of the Democrat Party... All of these are familiar to me, but I need to "jump over" the language of Özdamar's text! And what Özdamar is doing is not just "translating" all these to another language, but to another culture.

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4 Almost all the researchers who have written on the book have discussed this point in great detail. "Obwohl der Roman auf Deutsch verfasst und für das deutsche Lesepublikum bestimmt ist, stellt er in Wirklichkeit einen orientalischen Bildungsroman dar, in dem die Autorin den Versuch unternahm, eine neue, ihrem eigenen Status einer deutsch schreibenden, aber türkisch denkenden Schriftstellerin gerechte Erzähltechnik zu entwickeln. Ein Merkmal dieser neuen Erzähltechnik sind türkische Ausdrücke, Sprichwörter und Redensarten, die die Autorin in grosser Zahl verwendet und nach den Regeln der 'formalen Äquivalenz' ins Deutsche übersetzt, um auf diesem Wege die Kultur und Denkformen der türkischen Gesellschaft, die in Deutschland nicht allzu bekannt sein dürften, dem deutschen Leser zu vermitteln" (Sağlam 2001: 143).

5 This word appearing before us in Turkish throughout the text is one of the refrains of the book. As the author is describing her relationship with her brother, she frequently repeats this word of approval her brother uses when he is trying to convince her to do something: "Tamam mı?" A small anecdote on the subject came from Louise von Flotow, who translated the book from German to English, during her speech at the Boğaziçi University. The translator, who doesn't speak Turkish, has learned the meaning of "*tamam*" once and for all.

December 1998: This time I am on an Istanbul-Ankara bus trip with my grandmother. I ask her about the Özdamar family, which I vaguely recall her being acquainted with personally. My grandmother, who loves to make up tales, collect family stories, recount memories, begins to tell the "story" of the entire family. I am aware of the fact that she is making up the parts she can't remember, and anyway each recollection is a rewriting of its own, that she is embellishing the bare and slim truth with her style, but I don't let her see this. What actually astonishes me is the resemblance between what my grandma tells, the sentences she constructs, and even the adjectives she chooses with those Özdamar employs in her autobiographical novel. This is almost like re-hearing the same story from a different perspective.[6] Yet the world this different perspective creates, even the adjectives picked out for this world, are identical to those of the author. Of course my grandma does not go through the various Turkish equivalents of the word penis one after another the way Özdamar does or try to depict the sound of one eating sunflower seeds by writing "çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit çit" for pages... She does not because my grandma is a different sort of player than Emine Sevgi Özdamar. My grandma does not know that Emine Sevgi Özdamar is a writer, that she has written a book and that in that book she has written her own story, her family's story, and the story of Turkey of the time. I wait until she finishes her own version of the story to tell her this fact. I do not want to disrupt the magic of her storytelling. When I tell her about the situation, it's my grandma's turn to be surprised and excited. She is more stirred as I tell her about the details of the book. She utters one sentence after another, makes suggestions: "I will show you the photograph of the sky eyed grandmother mentioned in the book when we get home." "Sevgi's father Mustafa, yes yes, he was very handsome. I must have a few pictures of him as well."... "Well, right, they did have a very different life. And we used to always say it would make a good movie." ... "Do you know that your mother and the girl in the story used to play together in Istanbul? The neighborhood she is talking about is Kadıköy..."

6 In his paper in which he explores the difference between a literary figure (writer, poet) writing an autobiography and any other famous/popular person (soccer player, politician, etc.) writing one, Codrescu (1994) also proposes questions like: What is significant in an autobiographical text? What is recounted, or how are things recounted? And whose story is it? Codrescu depicts how when memories are in question, people who have been at the same place at the same time can tell such different stories through examples from his own life. The author, who underlines the significance of perspective when referring to a period of time or a specific event, argues that if you ask someone to tell you about yourself, the incidents and moments they speak of will not be centered around you but rather around those moments of the person you've asked for the opinion. And he diversifies the situation with examples. In an exactly similar fashion, the moments my grandmother emphasized in the life of the Özdamar family were the moments when she or someone else from her family was the "hero."

As I gaze out the bus window, I have (had) this question on my mind: "What happens when fact and fiction overlap?" That day, during that bus trip I had envisioned that I could write a beautiful autobiographical text under that ostentatious title, but actually I wasn't really working on autobiography. When Börte Sagaster came to me a few years after that bus trip with the autobiography project, and we started reading on the subject, I would return to that bus trip, now long out of my mind, with the speed of lightening.

September 2002: We are in Mainz at the WOCMES.[7] Our informal discussion with Börte to organize a symposium on "Autobiography in Turkish Literature" has by now been formalized. We had decided to organize the symposium on a date to be determined as the Boğaziçi University Department of Turkish Language and Literature in collaboration with the Orient Institut. Now the time has come to establish the framework, themes, and participants of the symposium. (In consideration of the mental well-being of the readers, I will not mention the tedious details of how to find funding, arrange accommodations, etc.).

Like all initial stages, our preparatory phases were rather disorganized. When we decided this couldn't go on this way, Halim Kara suggested we form a reading group. This way we would also create the space to improve ourselves academically and establish a theoretical background while concurrently taking care of the technical preparations. During the following weeks and months, with Halim Kara, Börte Sagaster, and other friends in our reading group,[8] we undertook theoretical readings on autobiography.

January 2003: As is the case with every autobiographical text, I am sure there are distortions and gaps in relation to dates and events in this text I am writing as well, but if I remember correctly, the sessions of the symposium and presenters were more or less determined in January. As the steering committee we were "harassing" the participants to finalize their paper topics and titles, but meanwhile, I myself hadn't even yet decided on what topic I would speak. The many months of reading and discussion on a topic I hadn't really thought around before—autobiography, self, etc.—seemed completely futile, and so I was looking at my friends disconcertedly and saying things like, "I have so many other things to do, maybe I shouldn't present a paper after all." Each time, I got the same evident answer: "No, as one of the organizers, you don't have such an option." Thus I was going home every evening preparing myself for yet another sleepless night.

Around this time I also went back to Özdamar's book. I recalled the discussions in our reading group on Latife Tekin's novels about the similarities between

7 World Congress of Middle Eastern Studies.

8 Since we are in an autobiographical and sincere text, I see no problem in saluting them in this footnote. After all, aren't the identities we acquire, the lifestories we write for ourselves determined to an extent by other people and memories that enter our lives? Our other friends: Fatih Altuğ, Arzu Atik, Nüket Esen, Özkan Ezli, Ayten Sönmez, Derin Terzioğlu, Zehra Toska.

the curious child narrator of *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm* (Dear Shameless Death) and the naive, "untamed" narrator of *Life is a Caravanserai*. I was thinking I could compare the two texts. As I was lethargically lost in reading and meditation, Sibel Irzık's presentation had already made its way into the symposium program: "Narratives of Collectivity and Autobiography in Latife Tekin's Works." "No," I said, "let me give this up as well." I was persistently rereading Özdamar's text. This time I read it both in Turkish and in German. Our weekly discussions and each text I read were making me think that the question "what happens when fact and fiction overlap"– which had initially fascinated me so–was not really a very meaningful question. First of all the answer to this could very easily be: "So, let's say they overlap, so what?" Furthermore, who could argue that my grandmother's version of the story was the "factual" one? Wasn't the version she recounted another fiction of her own construct? Maybe the question had to be posed differently: What happens when one fiction (narrative) overlaps with another? Let's say the two fictive texts overlapped! What could happen, except for a sense of "awe," of surprise? One is also in awe of the crimson of daybreak, so what?

Anyway, I did not ask the second question, I was stuck on the first one, and by the time I realized the dead-end I had entered by naming my paper as such, it was too late to turn back. It was so late; I'd be ashamed to put down the date here. Of course the fact that one of the themes of the symposium was "Fact and Fiction in Autobiographical Writings" was another incident propelling me down my dead end street. There, the session for this ostentatious title was also in place.

Another problem was whether Özdamar's text could be considered within the scope of Turkish literature or not. Should I rather make my presentation in the comparative perspectives session? When the day of my presentation arrived, I didn't miss the opportunity to utilize the problematization of situating the text in my speech and thus gain time.

13 May 2003: I guess somewhere up above someone was feeling sorry for this pitiful soul struggling at a point of no return. As I was checking my email in distress, I was a little enlivened by a presentation announcement from Saliha Paker. Luise Von Flotow, who had translated the novel *Life is a Caravanserai* from German to English, was at the university and she was holding a speech the next day under a title which promised to explore the issues I was interested in. Now, all my hopes geared towards Flotow's speech; I am waiting. I get up from the computer. "Flotow's speech," I say, "will, I'm sure, open up my mind, and inspired by that, I will finish my own text."

14 May 2003: I listen to the speech entitled "Translating Marginality: A Turkish-German *Zwittertext*" with great excitement. First of all, it feels good to listen to someone who has derived as much pleasure from the text as I have, and as Flotow is speaking I take a lot of notes. Listening to her on one hand, on the other I am thinking about how to complete my own speech.

15 May 2003: The first day of the symposium. We are all very tired and excited. Everything goes really well. The presentations are enriched by rather fruitful discussions. In the evening, as the time of the last session approaches, a slight cramp in my stomach is making itself felt. I do not say this to anyone, but except for the two pages I have written about our bus trip with my grandmother, I don't have a text yet. Of course I have a hard time confessing this, being one of the symposium organizers who have suffocated the participants with "deadline" e-mails. There is a welcome cocktail for all the participants in the evening at the Orient-Institut. During the few hours I spend there, all that's twirling around jumping in my head is, "I need to go home, I need to write my speech, this is the end."

16 May 2003: Wee hours of the morning... There's still no completed presentation text. I write a two page introduction: more accurate to call it a rambling. As I am referring to the undefinability of the text, I am considering and how I don't know under which section I can classify it, I also briefly summarize the symposium at large. Following that, I add my grandmother's story which is an "all ready" and the final point I reach: "So what if my grandmother's story and Özdamar's text have overlapped." Feels as if the font of the words "so what" keep getting larger and larger on the screen. I call Börte and Halim. Not to panic them as well, I only tell part of the truth. That I'm coughing a lot and have a fever–which is true–and that I'll be able to make it only around noon, but that everything is okay, and I will deliver my presentation at 16:00. They console me with assuaging words.

16 May 2003, 11 o'clock: "So what" is still flashing on the screen in large fonts. Across the screen, me as a ruined soul on the chair, we stare at each other. Suddenly, a flash of lightening in my mind. I tell myself to stop the self-torturing, be honest and decide to confess that the speech actually undermines its own principal argument. And I write down the confession sentence and conclude the paper as such: "End of my paper." But due to academic regulations I was supposed to speak for 15 more minutes and, having read the novel twice, I know that I can't fill up this time searching for the answer to my beginning question. But I've still got a shot because *Life is a Caravanserai* is also a rather interesting and rich text even just in terms of its narrative structure. If there are any questions regarding the relation between narrative techniques and autobiography, my answer would be to highlight how Özdamar has interwoven the public and the private. Actually, following the line in which I confessed that the question I posed wouldn't take me anywhere, my hands type incessantly for an hour and I finish my speech without further agony.

As to what I've written:

> As Özdamar is recounting her own story within the context of Turkey's history, the private and public spheres overlap. Azade Seyhan defines the book as a self-declared novel in veiled autobiographical form.[9] – Wasn't I doing something along the same lines? I was writing a kind of speech autobiography. As I've said the ostentatious question had self-destructed and there was only one thing to be done: to tell the story of this speech, and then this article.
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> I quote Seyhan: "In a symbolic, poetic, and folkloristic reordering of the past, she restores for the second generation of Turks living in Germany the history of their now foreign homeland."[10] The best example of this is the surrealist section, where the grandfather weaves a carpet from his beard. Through the symbols woven on the carpet, the reader has the opportunity to follow roughly the history of the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. But this story has been woven around/into the grandfather's own autobiographical story. Just like the bowknots of the carpet, the symbols and events form an inseparable whole. On one hand the grandfather is living his personal adventure on the carpet, while on the other historical events, which can be considered milestones, are taking place. [11]

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9 Seyhan 1996: 420

10 Seyhan 1996: 420. With Seyhan's point, another question arises: the target reader group. Did Özdamar have a certain reader profile in mind as she wrote this book? It is obvious that authors cannot ultimately decide who the "actual readers" of the literary texts will be. Depending on in which language one reads Özdamar's book, there will be many different "readings." We have known since Barthes's "plural text" that there might be as many different readings and interpretations as there are different readers. Maybe if we limit ourselves here to the different readings based on the text's language, we will have a situation that is easier to deal with. Reading the book in German without knowing any Turkish will be a very different experience from reading the book again in German but knowing Turkish. Around the same time I was beginning to take an interest in Özdamar, a joint master's thesis was written on the subject in Tübingen. A Turkish student living in Germany and a German student who didn't know any Turkish had examined some of Özdamar's texts around the questions they formed and discussed the answers together. I had noticed how different the perspectives of a second generation Turk brought up in Germany and a Turk whose only relation to Germany was the two years she spent there for her PhD (me) could be through my discussions with these two friends. For one of us, the native language was Turkish and German was a language learned later on. The other was more comfortable speaking and writing in German than in Turkish. Once again affirming the target audience Seyhan refers to, Mukaddes (the student with Turkish origin) was completely unaware of Ottoman-Turkish history since she hadn't gone to school in Turkey. That is why she also expected to learn something concrete from the historical events Özdamar recounted in a magical reality.

11 "Soldiers said in unision, 'Grandfather, tell us a story!' Grandfather began to speak and his unshaven beard started growing on his face, and the beard began to weave a carpet. The soldiers lit a lamp to see the pictures in the carpet. At the beginning of the carpet it was snowing in the mountains. My grandfather was walking through the mountains as a very young man with a very young girl and many animals. […] The dying animals were lying on the carpet, making the path Ahmet and the young woman from the Caucasus took to Anatolia. […] then a German flag was fluttering next to a Turkish flag in the carpet. Now Bismarck was building the Baghdad railway on the carpet, to the Turkish oil fields, and on his way Bismarck saw the city of Pergamon and politely asked the Sultan, who was so afraid of opposition from the people that his suits always fitted poorly because his tailor

The narrator of *Life is a Caravanserai* is a child. This, combined with the strange and broken usage of German, makes the language of the book naive and childish to a great extent. But when this language is translated into Turkish or English, it loses its most powerful weapon in its original form, namely the childishness and innocence. The poetry of the sections thought out in Turkish and translated mot-a-mot to German lose all their poetry in the translations. The double stratum inherent in the original book (a Turkish German mixed text) is lost when it is translated to Turkish. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of a sub-text in Turkish. Maybe this can explain why the book hasn't been read a lot by Turkish readers. With the vanishing of the double plane, we must accept that the Turkish version of the book is a bit boring, which explains why it is so hard to find on bookstore shelves in Turkey.[12]

If we read this text as the life story of a girl child, we can say that the narrative begins at the earliest point possible: in her mother's womb. "I was standing there in my mother's belly between the bars of ice, I wanted to hold on grabbed the ice and slipped and landed in the same spot, knocked on the wall, nobody heard" (Özdamar 2000: 1). The narrator sets forth in her story by telling us what she has perceived–or to be more precise, things she could have potentially perceived–in her mother's womb. She talks of what she's heard, what she's smelled. She recounts dialogues between her mother and

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was only allowed to take measure from a distance. Bismarck politely asked the Sultan whether he could take a few stones from the city of Pergamon back to Germany as a souvenir. 'In my kingdom there are so many stones, let the heathen have a few of them too.' […] At the head of the horseman a very handsome officer, blond hair, blue eyelashes. The soldiers in the black train were looking at the carpet suddenly stood up and saluted this officer. The blue-eyed man spoke from carpet, 'Soldiers, how are you?' The soldiers in the train said in unison, 'Very well, Atatürk!' and remained at attention, their right hand at their foreheads. […]

"The enemy's gone, they said. Long live the Republic, they said, the men in tails and bowler hats."

[…]

My grandfather took a drag from his cigarette and his beard continued weaving the carpet. He was smoking on the carpet too" (Özdamar 2000: 24-32).

[12] Maybe the "ideal" reader of the book should know both languages. The richness resulting from "double" languageness of the text gets lost not only in the Turkish translation of the text, but also when it is read without knowing any Turkish. What is at stake here is not only the not having access to the subtext. The mot-a-mot German translations of Turkish sayings create a completely different space. A reader who doesn't know Turkish for example is alienated from the text when s/he reads the word by word German translation of the saying "*kurtlarını dökmek*" (shedding one's worms). What do those people have in mind going to the movies to shed their worms (*seine Würmer ausschütteln*), s/he starts to think. On the other hand, another reader who knows of the saying, merely smiles at the absurdity and sometimes poetry of this direct translation. Sağlam 2001 explores such direct translations in the text and how they may be percieved through examples. Translating all these marginalities and plays on words into a second language has been an effort in itself. In her article in which she relates this experience, Luise von Flotow states the following on the translation of the novel she considers under the catagory of minority literature: "Özdamar's 'broken' German presents the greatest challenge in translating *Karawanserai* into English. Preserving or rendering this foreigness seems to be desirable, since it is an integral part of the source text" (Flotow 2000: 68). And then she explores the translation issues she titles syntactic disruption, imagery, obscenities, and the direct use of Turkish idioms and expressions with examples.

> others. They are on a train; her mom is going to Malatya–her father's hometown–to deliver her second child. Then all of a sudden a more imperious–an omniscient meta-narrator's–voice recounts to us a paragraph on the characteristics of traveling in those years. "I lost consciousness and only woke up one August morning and cried immediately. I wanted to go back to the water room and see the film with soldiers again, the film was torn, where did the soldiers go?" Our narrator is born by now. Two pages later we see her gazing at the sea for the first time –she and her family move to Istanbul. From her mother's sentences, we understand that we are in the 1950s–"The Americans are coming! We are going to look at the Americans." (Özdamar 2000: 11)–and immediately thereafter, describing the ceremony held for the Americans, she says: "They were not Americans; it was the Persian Shah Reza Pehlevi and his wife" (Özdamar 2000: 11).
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> When the narrator's older brother asks his mother what an American is, she replies: "An American is someone who does not have to eat, they just take pills. Americans take one pill, that's their lunch, in the evening they take another pill, that's their supper" (Özdamar 2000: 11). Thus the narrator has both made a reference to a popular urban legend of the era and raised another small question in the reader's mind regarding strangeness, otherness and alterity.
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> I have chosen this example to signify the speed of the text, because all of this plus a few events I skipped take place within the first 20-22 pages of the book. As the author attempts to tell her own personal narrative in conjunction with public history, she is also privatizing and personalizing the public in a sense. What is implied with the word privatize: we follow the historical events and political agenda of the era through the child-narrator's eyes and with her naive language.

The post-conference period: Some time after the conference, we send the participants e-mails saying that we will publish the papers and stating the requirements and deadlines for the articles. And anyway, whatever happens happens in the following months and years. While we are pursuing our own ongoing work and responsibilities, we are also trying to turn our own presentations into articles and following up on articles that we receive from other participants. In this period, Halim Kara is living and teaching in Oxford, and Börte Sagaster first in various cities in Germany, then in Cyprus. Istanbul continues to be my primary residence, travelling to Tübingen now and then because of my PhD. Thanks to the merits of technology, we often hold virtual meetings over MSN Messenger.

At the same time, both we as the editors of the book and Louis Fishmann, who is working with us as the English language editor–and who within this period was first based in Istanbul, then went back to the States–are carefully reading the drafts of the articles we receive at different times (inevitably deadlines are postponed). Scattered all around the world, we are trying to coordinate the book. Of course there is nothing of interest in all this. This is the customary publication preparation phase following a conference. There is something that doesn't change. Though slowly, all the articles accumulate. The revised drafts are sent back to the participants. This time they send us back the final versions. Louis goes through the edited versions and sends them to us. The folders I create on my computer are multiplying. "Autobiography-book," "Articles-first drafts," "ar-

ticles-final from Louis," etc.... What does not change is that the only article that has not made it into any of these folders is my article.

A rainy night at the beginning of the summer of 2004: My "fellow traveller" Birhan Keskin and I are speaking of work and such and unfinished projects. She tells me about some of her projects and after a while timidly I open the "Özdamar Autobiography Article" folder on my computer as if unwrapping my wedding dowry, and print out my speech, which I've worked on a bit. I show Birhan what I've written and tell her that I need to make an article with a beginning and an end from it, but that this does not really look possible. It is as if I am waiting for her approval. For her to say, "Leave it Olcay, you can't make this into an article," and my mind will be put at ease. And yet my friend urges me on, skimming through the pages. She tells me how if I work persistently and don't give up on the playful material I have, of course I'll get somewhere. She gives me some clues. She even proposes a title that summarizes the situation. (The title "what happens when fact and fiction overlap" had enticed me at first, yet this ostentious signpost turned out to be a dead-end street, and so I turned back and found myself on the "someties the article creates its own story as well" street…) I tell her at length about the novel and what I am trying to do. I am happy and excited to have the approval of a poet.

February 2005: We decide that we've had enough of our "long-distance working relationship" and so we plan to meet in Istanbul for a three day retreat to finalize the time plan for the book, write the introduction, and find the book's title. In the past months we have gotten together in various combinations of two (Olcay-Louis, Louis-Börte, Börte-Halim, etc.), but we need an ultimate meeting to finalize the book, as virtual meetings are no longer sufficient. We also deserve to pull all-nighters, and drink wine as we work all together.

8 April 2005: We are finally all together at my place in Istanbul. I give Börte and Halim the news I got a few days before our meeting, that Hülya Adak has had a baby. Since the conference in 2003, some of the participants have had babies (Halim, Hülya, Derin), some have started new jobs in completely different places, etc. Life goes on; this book has to be published and I have to somehow record this process.

8 April 2005, evening: The first day, we work on all the material that we have. Three computers are on simultaneously in the apartment. We write the necessary e-mails to clarify some missing points with the authors. I am aware that we need to speak about my article before we move on to work on the introduction. I first want to read a few lines from my attempts so that I can give it up for good if there is no chance anything will come out of this material. As I am reading aloud to Börte and Halim, I also try to explain what I'm trying to do, what the "catch" of the work is. I tell them that since I used an autobiographical technique in my presentation, I have tried to elaborate on that and tell a story. But I am in trouble. I feel like I am neither a gifted narrator like Özdamar nor an excited story-

teller like my grandmother. I can't make it work. That is why whenever I reach an irresolvable point in my writing attempt, I immediately give up, quarreling with my computer, if not life.

Yet as Juliet Mitchell says, "We tell stories to survive." I should also keep telling my story. Actually, beyond this autobiographical narrative structure, there is something else I intend–or rather dream–to do: To make this piece have a language parallel to the one Özdamar uses. In some way I want to write with a Turkish accented English. Let there be no misunderstanding that I am doing this as a cover for my *already* Turkish accented English. I know that if I manage it, then the text will maybe say something. I think to myself maybe I can do this if I write in English and Turkish and then translate it into English, but I don't tell Halim and Börte this much. They are probably already uneasy about this mystery text they haven't seen a line of for months. Still since they are open to new ideas, they support my article to be, which will not resemble other academic articles. Perhaps also because I touch on the story of the symposium, we decide that this can be an "amusing" article immediately following the introduction, independent from the two main chapters of the book, and move on to work on the book's contents.

The next day, 9 April 2005: After a very nice dinner and intense brainstorming session for the title of the book, as our heads are a bit clouded from the wine, I think to myself that this is the right moment and begin to talk about why I can't finish the article, at which points I get stuck and fail to find solutions. One of the problems is that I am trying to both describe how the presentation came into being and the adventure of turning that into this article at the same time. I need to find a "trick" for the leaps in time. Of course there is also the question of overlapping the content with the article's framework. At this point I decide to risk the disjunctions within the text and use the presentation text in parts scattered throughout the piece. The solution I come up with in this respect is: to take a break after the section beginning with Özdamar's child narrator, and to return to the frame text in that interval and then write about the "identity" issue, which I hadn't really been able to address in depth during my presentation in a separate section.[13] In order to get help on the latter, which I haven't yet been able to write, I begin to describe my arguments on the identity issue at that late time of the night:

[13] I must mention that I owe this solution to my friend Christoph Neumann who has contributed to everthing I have written one way or the other. My apologies to him for not recording here the conversation we had at his house in Ortaköy on how I could overcome this perpetual state of work in progress out of concern for not lengthening this article any further.

To begin with, the author, as Azade Seyhan also points out, writes "outside the nation."[14] Furthermore, the narrator is also constantly an "outsider" or the "other" in different contexts throughout the text. As the daughter of a family constantly on the move, from one city to another, from one neighborhood to another, she tries to make herself accepted at each new place. As a child questioning and contesting everything, even within her family, she is always estranged and deviant. There is a rather amusing story about her constant questioning and contesting in the book. The narrator, who doesn't find the "fact" that God is everywhere, all-seeing, and all-knowing, convincing decides to test this. In the bathroom, somewhere where she thinks no one–including God–sees her, she constantly curses God. She keeps doing this while terrified that all-seeing, all-hearing God will hear her and punish her. Concluding that "If he'd heard what I've been saying, he definitely would have punished me," she refutes, in her own right, the argument that God hears and sees everything.

When she starts elementary school, her teacher asks if she has a tail on her behind because she is from Malatya. But a while later when she goes to Malatya where she was born, they call her the girl from Istanbul. For her teacher in Bursa, she is once again the girl from Istanbul:

"He called me girl from Istanbul and praised me everyday for being clever. For him I was the clever girl from Istanbul and for my teacher in Istanbul I had been a Kurd from Anatolia with a tail growing on my ass."

The child-narrator notices at a very early age how relative and random these identity perspectives are. Maybe what renders this text so unclassifiable and uncategorizable is that she is writing within such a relative, fluctuating jumble of identities.

Seyhan states that "tales where personal destinies meet historical forces are often the most powerful guardians of public memory" (Seyhan 1996: 419). In Özdamar's writings history is remembered and rewritten through textual memory. And this history remembered makes it possible for the "others" who live on the edge–in the case of this text the Turks living in Germany–to create their stuck in between identities. According to Seyhan, what Özdamar and numerous authors who live and write in two or more languages from various different cultures do is express the state of "in betweenness" and "hybridity." When we look at Özdamar's "real" life story, we can speak of three different geographies she has lived in and gotten to know: Turkey, East Germany, and West Germany. Naturally, as Özdamar looks at her "past" as a theater actress and writer who has lived in both Berlins accumulating such diverse experiences, she will not be merely a naive child narrator.[15] The story she is trying to recount is not merely a story of growing up. It is an uprising against the arbitrary and simplistic approach to issues of identity and belonging through an "accented" German used by an artist attempting to develop a critical view of the history of the Turkish Republic.

When we are looking at autobiographical texts, we pose questions that we do not ask other literary texts. One of these is whether the first person narrator is the same person who has lived the events. We assume that the writing I is the future of the narrated I. But in the context of the narrative techniques, what counts is the relation between the two. Whether the author Emine Sevgi and the "little" narrator we follow through her

14 Seyhan 2001, in reference to the title of the book, *Writing Outside the Nation*.
15 Jankowsky 1997 puts a special emphasis on this.

eighteen years are the same persons is actually not that important. What is worth exploring is how Özdamar[16] creates the basic dynamic of the autobiographical narrative by interweaving a multi-languaged approach in which the narrative techniques, languages, and images melt into one another, and the stance of that always-on-the-edge child narrator conscious enough to be aware that language cannot be monovoiced enough to say "onun Ana gı'sı ile benim Anacuğum, yan yana İstanbul'un Anneciğim'ine karşı durdular."[17] The content has determined the structure as well.

The novel ends with the train journey the narrator takes to Germany.[18] Was the narrator of the book on her way to Berlin aware that in fifteen years she would write a book and win the Ingeborg Bachmann prize?

16 May 2003, 13:00: I finish the speech with the last question and look at my watch. If I want to catch the afternoon session and get a bite to eat, I must rush out of the house. I don't get the opportunity to go over my presentation and as is customary at times like this, mishaps follow one after the other; I am not able to get a print out neither at home nor at the office. Trying not to panic, I print my speech at a copy shop and go to Kennedy Lodge where all the participants are having lunch. No way can I eat anything under that stress, but I try. Constantly the same voice in my head, "What are you going to do with such a last minute paper?" Also I am very nervous about having included stories of myself in the paper. I am worried it might be too informal. The other presentations we

16 As Özdamar says, "I was accepted, but merely as a guest-writer." Quoted in Jankowsky 1997: 261.

17 "Dayımın elini, dilimin altına bu şehrin şivesini yerleştirdiğim ağzımla öptüm. Tren İstanbul'a vardı. ... Annem karşımda duruyordu, ama onu kucaklayamıyordum. Aramızda, dilimin altında bu Anadolu şehrinden getirdiğim yabancı şivenin ördüğü bir duvar vardı. Annem 'Böyle konuşma, yine İstanbul Türkçesiyle, temiz Türkçeyle konuşmalısın, anlıyor musun?' ... ben 'Anacuğum' dedim annem 'Anneciğim' dedi. ... Ninem geldi, 'Anacuğum' ile 'Anneciğim' arasındaki kapışmayı gördü: 'İstanbul'un kelimeleri, dilde güzel bir tat bırakmıyor, tıpkı çürük dallar gibi ardarda kırılıyorlar' dedi. Annem 'Nasıl anacuğum dediğini duymuyor musun?' dedi. Ninem 'Evet Ana gı diyor' dedi. Ana gı, onun Kapadokya'daki köyünün şivesinde 'Anne' demekti. Onun ana gı'sı ile benim Anacuğum, yan yana İstanbul'un Anneciğim'ine karşı durdular" (Özdamar 1993: 35).
"I kissed my uncle's hand with my mouth, under my tongue I had fastened this city's dialect, these people's strange song of life. The train got to Istanbul. … My mother stood facing me, but I couldn't put my arms around her. Between us stood a wall made of the strange dialect I had brought back under my tongue from the Anatolian city. My mother said, 'Don't talk like that, you have to speak Istanbul Turkish, clean Turkish again, understand?' … I said 'anacuğum.' Mother said, 'anneciğim.' … My grandmother came, saw the sparring between 'anacuğum' and 'anneciğim,' said 'Istanbul words don't leave a sweet taste on the tongue, the words are like diseased branches, they break one after the other.' My mother said, 'Can't you hear the way she says Anacuğum?' Grandmother said, 'Yes, she is saying Anagı' which in her Kapadokia village dialect also meant mother. Her Anagı and my anacuğum stood side by side across from the Istanbul Anneciğim" (Özdamar 2000: 35-36).

18 The author's second novel, *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998), begins where the first book ends. A young woman going to Germany to work in a factory has now replaced the child and adolescent narrator of the first book.

listen to are so meticulously constructed and serious, I feel myself diminishing inch by inch. At the coffee break before the session I am supposed to deliver my speech, I am about to die of nausea and excitement. I, who am so calm normally, am not even sure whether I'll be able to hold this speech or not. I don't know whether it is because Orhan Pamuk is holding a speech at 18:00, but the auditorium is packed. I say to myself, "I wish we hadn't invited anyone." What I feel in all sincerity is "This is it Olcay. This is the end of your academic life. Nothing will follow..."

16 May 2003, 15:45: The session begins. Catharina Dufft, I apologize to you, but I was so tense I could not really listen to your speech. At the same time, I am reading my own presentation at least to familiarize myself with it and I add one final sentence in handwriting. Another question, following the questions concluding my speech, making the situation even more absurd: And who can guarantee that I have not invented all these?

I feel more at ease with this sentence. And yes, now it's my turn. I don't recall much after reading the first sentence but I got a really good vibe from the room and I realize once I ask the last question and finish my speech that I have done something autobiographical by writing my process of reading, and this speech recounting itself has pleased the audience.

A day in the summer of 2005: Trying to put the final point on this article attempt, I've kept sheltered for months, years, now I know that my actual concern was not to "write" this article but to tell its story. Are you still asking how this presentation turned into this piece? I gave up trying to "write" something and "told" it to you instead.

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