

Interview with Selim Özdogan

STEFFEN KAUPP (translated by ANDREW FULWIDER)

Steffen Kaupp: Did you always know you wanted to be a writer? How did you decide on writing as a profession?

Selim Özdogan: It's always interesting to see which points in one's life can be connected to answer this question. If I connect the right points, though, I think I always knew I wanted to be a writer. I can actually remember the thought processes that led me there because they were very childlike, free from adult rationality. I first had these thoughts in primary school. I still remember how I read back then. I could clearly see that there were paragraphs, but I couldn't understand when you were supposed to make a paragraph. Then the thought process was this: If I don't know when to start a paragraph, I can't become a writer. – I can remember that well. The conscious decision, as I would call it, came when I was 14. That's still quite early. You could call it an inner voice. I always find the concept of an inner voice to be problematic, because experience shows that most people have many of them, many inner voices that contradict each other. But this voice was one of the loudest in me.

Steffen: You were, of course, born and raised in Cologne, but you have Turkish citizenship as well. Because of that, you're often described by researchers and reporters as a German-Turkish author. My first question here would be what you think of such a categorization. The second question would be if you think that categorization influences your writing and the stories you write.

Selim: Yes, it has an influence for sure. I can't really do much to resist the influence it has. I have to react somehow to the expectations that are projected onto me. My reaction could be that I exercise my freedom not to react, but that's already very difficult because that means something has been triggered within me. On the one hand, there's no getting around the fact that I normally have to react to this categorization. On the other hand, it's also a part of my world. I can't get around that either. But for me personally, it doesn't belong to the variety of themes that interest me. To put it differently: The question of identity is one I find to be completely overrated.

Steffen: With authors with so-called »migrant backgrounds«, the perspective of the narrator is often equated to the perspective of the author. Where do you think the ten-