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## “Innere Unruhe”?

### Zehra Çirak and Minority Literature Today

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MARILYA VETETO-CONRAD  
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

A 1996 article from Berlin’s *zitty* magazine portrays three contemporary writers — Zehra Çirak, Aras Ören, and Zafer Senocak — as “genervt von Herkunftsfragen” (28). Ören, probably the best known of the three, is notorious for his refusal to grant interviews, and is quoted in the article as refusing to be treated as a “*türkischer Vorzeigekünstler*” (28) — a role often imposed on him. Çirak and Senocak, both younger and newer writers (and ones who, unlike Ören, write in German), echo that resentment. However, the article commits the very crime it was intended to condemn: it goes on to focus mainly on their heritage, not their literary skill.

Frustration with the portrayal in the *zitty* feature of all the authors, particularly Zehra Çirak, was one of many impetuses for this article on Çirak. The primary purpose there seemed to be to spotlight Çirak’s exotic origins; the purpose here is to accord this outstanding poet her due on the basis of her literary value. A useful accompaniment to this goal, however, is a brief examination of the status of minority literature and its history in Germany as well as Çirak’s view of herself within that context.

Though partially regrettable, the *zitty* article was also predictable and not entirely off the mark, given that many non-German authors published in the 1980s did not possess matured, developed literary ability. Therefore it was natural that the reception of minority literature should tend to be socio-cultural or socio-political. In retrospect (a perspective naturally more balanced than a diachronic perspective), many minority authors did not stand the test of time and can be said to have been relatively untalented. Nonetheless, they were published by the *Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag* editors Ackermann, Esselborn, Weinrich, Hulya, and Worle in the hopes of filling a void, or a volume, i.e., to sell books (other anthologies followed, but the *dtv* anthologies broke new ground by being from the first big, mainstream German publishing house to publish entire volumes of minority lit-

erature).<sup>1</sup> The former motivation was acceptable and laudable; the editors presumably sought to give minority writers publicity and to enlighten the German public. The latter motivation is unfortunate, however, as the uneven quality of the published anthologies leads the reader to suspect that the criteria may have been less than rigid, that a foreign name and ethnicity, coupled with subject matter such as “immigration experiences” (that is, descriptions of the immigrants’ reception in Germany, their workplace, their isolation in German society), would have been enough to secure a spot in the table of contents. Many of the writers were not seen in print again; or worse, as in the case of Sadi Üçünçü, they went on to produce volumes of largely repetitive content and style with scant redemptive literary value. It was precisely this glut of such *Betroffenheitsliteratur* that delayed minority literature’s reception among a wide readership and initially kept it marginalized and undervalued. According to another *dtv* author, Kemal Kurt, a kind of compassion fatigue occurred among the reading public, who tired of what some perceived as immigrants’ inability to integrate or adjust to German society.<sup>2</sup>

German minority literature has seen improvements vis-à-vis its marginalization by literary scholars, beginning with the United States and also recently in Germany. Çirak’s work — and the work of her peers including such widely-published and talented writers as Chiellino, Biondi, Kurt, Tekinay, and Özdamar — now has hopes of being allowed to stand on its own merits. The label “minority literature,” still persists — labels do at least supply categories for discussion and criticism — but the ethnicity-first thrust is being subjected to criticism: Italian Germanist Immacolata Amodeo calls “Schweigen über die Aesthetik der Literatur ausländischer Autoren in der Bundesrepublik” deplorable (199). Lamentable though it may be that minority writers continue to be examined less for their aesthetic value than for their ethnic origins, I, unlike Amodeo, do not propose a completely other aesthetic, for I believe the two can be usefully combined. Even Amodeo apparently finds the complete focus on aesthetics difficult, for in Eva Stroh-Cohen’s recent review of *Die Heimat heißt Babylon*, Stroh-Cohen criticizes Amodeo for not accomplishing her self-imposed goal of focusing on the above criterion (324-6). My view is that perhaps this is a pendulum swing, and the most helpful path is neither to exclude nor to make exclusive either ethnic origins or literary aesthetic.

Thus, as indicated in Narin Amrisedghi and Thomas Bleicher’s recent work, *Literatur der Migration*, scholars should perhaps not move completely away from the earlier designation of this literature as *Betroffenheitsliteratur*, though this approach does, admittedly, limit the scope of the discussion about it. Thomas Wagenbaur states in his review of the book, “In Deutschland erreicht [die

Rezeption der Minoritätenliteratur] — anders als etwa in Großbritannien, Kanada, den Vereinigten Staaten und Frankreich — selten die literarische Öffentlichkeit” (124). Though Wagenbaur is referring foremost to the terminology used in Germany about minority literature when he says too much emphasis is placed on the socio-political and too little on the aesthetic, minority literature scholarship should take heed, for it was not long ago that the socio-political was the virtually sole thrust of scholarship. Wagenbaur chides the contributors of the anthology for offering too little literary (as opposed to cultural) emphasis (85).

Thanks to work conducted since the late 1980s by Heidrun Suhr and others (cf. Suhr; Adelson; Teraoka), most U.S. or U.S.-affiliated scholars (Suhr spent many years in New York with the DAAD) of minority literature avoid subjecting minority literature to such an approach that — to borrow from the title of an article by Angelika Bammer, could be termed xenophillic. In his book, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Walter D. Mignolo criticizes literary scholarship that is “intermingled with national and linguistic identities” (6). It is important to heed Mignolo, as his criticism hits dead center our profession’s initial approach to what might be termed Germanophone literature. Some Germanists, especially in Germany, tend to view minority literature as a newcomer at best, and at worst, as a tag-along to so-called “real” German literature.

In Mignolo’s discourse, to benefit minority literature we must “question the positionality” of the definers. Thankfully, a redefinition of minority literature is underway in which its relevance as literature is forefronted over its ethnicity. In that sense, the positionality of minority literature’s scholars has matured, even as the literature itself has evolved from *Betroffenheitsliteratur* into a somewhat more varied one. Gino Chiellino, a theorist as well as an author in this field, proposes not a “Literatur der Autoren [sondern eine] Literatur der Werke” but more specifically, “Zugehörigkeitssphären aufgrund ihrer Sprachen,” resulting in five categories (306). In Chiellino’s new scheme, works are more important than the authors and presumably more valuable than their ethnic derivation. Chiellino is willing to allow ethnicity insofar as language of origin goes, but since at least 1988, he has appealed for minority literature to break out of its ghetto and be recognized as the part of German literature it is. In *Am Ufer der Fremde*, he presents deemphasis of ethnicity as the way to achieve that goal.

Deemphasizing the ethnicity of minority writers allows scholars to avoid, in Mignolo’s words, virtually colonizing “minority” writers by imposing a dominant view and thus “obstruct[ing] possible alternatives” (5). Chiellino, Çirak, Dikmen, and other minority writers have always expressed dismay at being perceived first

as a member of an ethnic minority group and second as *Literat*, presumably because emphasis on origin entails deemphasis of talent. Mignolo's and Chiellino's suggestions run parallel to one another, for Mignolo wants to avoid the us/other dichotomy, and Chiellino desires a more realistic updating of German literature's heretofore overly hegemonous image. In Mignolo's words, minority literature scholarship seeks to "represent the colonized faithfully" (5), though the sheer choice of the word "colonized" is problematic.

Among those who showed clear talent beyond (or even despite) the label of *Migrantenliterat* and whose gift has been nurtured and polished is Zehra Çirak. Çirak would fall into Chiellino's third category of authors who were socialized and schooled in Germany, but spoke another language in the home.<sup>3</sup> The recipient of a fellowship from the Berlin *Senator für Kulturelles* and of the *Hölderlin Förderpreis*, and a prolific and sought-after speaker, Çirak has, from the appearance of her first publications, resisted the tendency by publishers and critics to subjugate her work to her ethnicity:

Und bei allen Verlagen oder Herausgebern, die etwas wollten für so ein Buch, habe ich immer von zehn Texten mindestens die Hälfte, wenn nicht über die Hälfte, Texte geschickt, die nichts mit dem Thema Gastarbeiter oder Ausländer zu tun hatten. Und sie haben immer diese Texte aussortiert! Diese typischen wollten sie. Dann habe ich irgendwann mal angefangen, darauf zu beharren: *der* Text soll aber auch mit rein. Auch wenn er nichts damit zu tun hat.<sup>4</sup>

The perspective that focused on the writers' *Gastarbeiter/Ausländer* origins was intended to do the authors justice, to bring deserved attention to their works. As Gino Chiellino sarcastically pointed out at a conference on minority literature in Iserlohn, scholars and readers seemed to be discovering with amazement, "'unsere' Ausländer können schreiben!"<sup>5</sup> As a revelation regarding the role and capabilities of people once considered little better than menial laborers, this insight began to change the way non-Germans were perceived in German society. However, what was ignored was that these authors chose literature as their tool, not merely *Reportage* or documentary, but poetry and short prose, too. Literary merit is the ultimate basis upon which these writers who are incidentally members of an ethnic minority wish to be judged.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to the piece from which this article takes its title, "Innere Unruhe" (Janetzki and Zimmerman 33-4) is a deceptively lightweight text by Zehra Çirak — who uses the term "text" rather than "poem" when discussing her work — that warrants further analysis. The title of this article is not the same as the title of the text; I have added a question mark as a signal that the status of minority literature and the discussion of appropriate methods of studying minority literature are still

in flux. The question mark is also emblematic of Çirak's discomfort with the typical reception given her art as well as emblematic of the enigmatic quality that results from her characteristic manipulation of language and of readers' expectations. As I have stated above, I believe it is possible to include ethnicity and literary quality when examining such work; however, we have seen in the past that overemphasis on ethnicity is undesirable from the authors' perspective and limiting for scholarship. Thus, to forefront literary qualities of any given author's work may certainly be the most desirable route. The works by Çirak presented here are, therefore, examined primarily for their aesthetic qualities: horizons of expectation created by Çirak, her use of language, her use of literary allusions, the thematic complexity in her texts, and the qualities of visual and aural appeal she presents.

One of the qualities that makes Çirak so popular in readings and to her publisher is that her texts are accessible on several levels. Characteristically, a Çirak text has a visual quality that permits the reader or listener to imagine vividly the setting and thus immediately be drawn into Çirak's sphere. Çirak refers to this element of her work as pictures cloaked in language, as stated in her descriptions below. The pictures are merely one level, however; they serve to engage the readers immediately and motivate us to discover other aspects and levels within the text.

Once captivated in this manner, the reader is treated to new turns of established phrases and to frequent changes of meaning or direction of thought. The readers' *Erwartungshorizont* is cannily manipulated, as shall become evident in other texts by Çirak. Her visual quality described above is demonstrated best in the following text; later texts will demonstrate the other elements representative of her oeuvre.

"Innere Unruhe" depicts a writer sitting at her desk suffering a writing block. The author is paralyzed, unable to write. The utensils on the desk are anything but unable to act:

In einem durchsichtigen Schächtelchen erwachen eine Handvoll Heftklammern, doch sie kommen trotz größter Anstrengungen nicht voneinander los und auch nicht aus der Schachtel. So schauen sie zu, wie ein Lineal sich breit macht, es schleicht sich wie ein Spion an den Kanten des Tisches entlang und mißt schon zum dritten Mal, spazierend, Länge, Höhe und Breite des Tisches. Ein paar Filzstifte suchen fluchend ihre Deckel, einige von ihnen schon alt und ausgetrocknet. Aber die sind am eifrigsten bei der Suche. Sie haben es satt, so oft liegengelassen zu werden. (33)

The tools of the writer's trade are not affected by the paralysis; in fact, quite the opposite: all of the items on the desk perform acrobatics and engage in territorial disputes with one another until the writer opens her eyes to realize that — thanks to the description of the antics of the pens, erasers, and paper clips — the page is, indeed full:

Der Spitzer, des Bleistifts eifriger Untertan, ist gleich zur Stelle.... Da staunt das Lineal über die roten langen Linien auf dem Tisch. Es fängt sofort an, sie abzumessen. Das fällt ihm aber schwer, denn die Linien sind Kreise, und davor hat es Angst. So legt es sich zur Pause hin. Die Schere gähnt noch immer, sie rafft sich auf und läuft ein paar Schritte, zum Munterwerden. Da stößt sie aus Versehen an einen Punkt, den sie nicht mag, und ein Surren ertönt ... Nur die Heftklammern freuen sich, sie gackern in der Sicherheit ihrer Schachtel. Das Lineal springt mit einem Kopfsprung auf und fällt vom Tisch. Das wiederum löst Panik im Aschenbecher aus, die Kippen drücken sich verängstigt näher zusammen. Das Klappern hört auf, alles ist still. Hände befreien die Augenlider, und jetzt habe ich doch etwas geschrieben. (33-4)

The image of a writer is distilled in this text to the bare bones of the trade: paper, pen, and ideas — or the lack of them. The seeming disingenuity (a description of supposed inactivity in the writer's brain resolved by writing about the frenetic activity on her desk) is a conceit that is more than merely clever. It is as if Çirak is appealing in this text for reception of *l'art pour l'art*, as she describes the apparent art of the autonomous activity on her desk. The text also permits Çirak to display her virtuosity with language and images while appearing merely to tackle the topic of writer's block. In addition, the text displays the highly aural quality of her style — the reader hears the coy “ach so spitzen Bleistift” (33) in the mind's ear. The self-irony that often borders on the self-deprecating with Çirak — “und jetzt habe ich doch etwas geschrieben” (34) — is as clear in this text as in any she has written.

There is no reason to conjecture why a Turkish-born author has written such a text, and no interpretation of her status in Germany is reflected in the lines. She does not tempt the reader to discern one. Indeed, this text is a likely choice with which to emphasize Çirak's art over her origins, as its nonminority subject matter contrasts with the relatively few texts by Istanbul-native Çirak that did address racism and the status of minorities in Germany, such as “an den grenzen der gastfreundlichkeit” (*flugfänger* 17), “deutsche sprache, gute sprache” (Janetzki and Zimmerman 17), “doppelte Nationalitätsmoral” (*Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* 10), “Kulturidentität” (94), “Kleine Geschichten über Helden” (*Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* 80), “Notwehr” (*Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* 73), and “Kein Sand im Rad der Zeit” (*Fremde Flügel auf eigener Schulter*

44-5), all of which make reference to acts of violence or prejudice against non-Germans.

The content of these texts in which Çirak did address her ethnicity and the status of foreigners in Germany was mainly uncharacteristic, as demonstrated by her comment below, but they are characteristic in such pithy and provocative phrasing as “ihr könnt uns demnächst besuchen,” from “an den grenzen” (*flugfänger* 17), a pun that begins as if the speaker were telling Germans to kiss her/his ass, and ends with a twist that makes the insult an invitation. The line aptly sums up the ambivalence many non-Germans feel about residing in Germany and contains a certain degree of rebellion, despite the denouement at the end of the line. Similarly, there is an amount of arrogance on two levels in the first line of the eponymous “deutsche sprache, gute sprache/oder die denen ihnen,” from *deutsche sprache*” (*Anfang sein für einen neuen Tanz kann jeder Schritt* 42), in which the speaker spouts a mumbojumbo of German grammar in order to demonstrate on the one hand confusion with German sentence structure and on the other hand disgust at the way the language’s complexity is used as a means to subjugate those unfamiliar with it. More overt is the line from “Kein Sand im Rad der Zeit” “ein Neger-ein Jude-ein Ausländer” (*Fremde Flügel auf eigener Schulter* 44-5), in which the author hyphenates a lineup of victims of discrimination in Germany as if they were interchangeable in order to express her criticism at their being lumped all together in that society’s mind.

Not hyphenation, but word scrambling, is the device Çirak employs saying not victims, but perpetrators of prejudice and racial hatred are interchangeable in their continuing effect on our global village: “Napoler und Hitleon Musomeini und Khomelini/die ruhen sanft sie ruhen tief/und unter uns/ ihre Enkelkinder leben from ‘Kleine Geschichte über Helden’” (*Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* 80). The irony, wit, aural, and visual qualities of Çirak’s style permeate even texts whose topic is not typical. The very twists she creates allow even flogged dead linguistic horses to leap to life.

Unlike her compatriots featured in *dtv* anthologies, Çirak did not begin by writing about her status as a non-German, now a dead-horse topic too long flogged by writers with less talent or less ability to differentiate than Çirak. Nonetheless, she had to resist initial attempts by publishers to marginalize her. Her long-standing publisher, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, allows her the freedom she desires and deserves. And in a close study of even those few texts named above that do thematicize minorities somehow, the reader’s attention is held by the style and talent, and not merely the content.

Because the question of origin mentioned in *zitty* is not one that Çirak prefers to hear, when forced to address the issue, it is the style she implements in answering that underscores the point that origins are not as important as one's ability:

Das, was ich mit meinen Sprachbildern mache, das ist mit deutscher Sprache, auch von der Sprache sehr pragmatisch, praktisch ausgedrückt, einfache Worte, aber sehr bildhaft. Und dieses Bild kommt vom Türkischen her ... Die Sprachbilder sind Doppelbilder, weil ich über zwei Sprachen, zwei Heimaten und auch über zwei Ansichtsbilder verfüge.<sup>7</sup>

In quintessentially Çirak fashion, she does not stop this analysis at mere questions of cultural-linguistic origins, but goes on to a more literary analysis of her *Entstehungsprozess* with characteristically unexpected twists:

Die alltäglichen Bilder machen mich sprachlos. Die alltägliche Sprache macht mich bilderlos. Beides zusammen läßt mich Sprachbilder machen. Meine Arbeit ist, in Bildern zu sprechen, in der Sprache Bilder zu sehen. Das klingt banal, und ist es auch, aber das getrennte Gefühl von Bild und Sprache verschiedener Banalitäten will nicht alltäglich sein, denn zu sehen in Bildern kann ich deutscher Sprache, der deutschen Sprache türkische Bilder verleihen. Meine Zweiatmigkeit überläßt mir somit eine Einsprache in deutsche Bilder und einen Einblick in die türkische Sprache. So könnten meine zwei Heimaten sonstwo, z.B. Innen und Außen sein.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Çirak sees endless possibilities in working with the raw material of the German language, but that the juxtaposition of German and Turkish is a set of tools she has been handed arbitrarily, a set no more or no less significant than the manner in which she internalizes her external circumstances.

Her intent to deconstruct, for lack of a better word, any set of circumstances she meets is the underlying strength she possesses. It is this quality that attracts the readers, as acknowledged by Marcel Reich-Ranicki in his statement made on the occasion of Çirak's receipt of the *Förderpreis zum Friedrich Hölderlin-Preis* in 1993, saying that she plays

in ihren Gedichten mit vertrauten Worten und Sätzen, die überraschend in einem neuen Licht erscheinen ... und ... uns wieder das Staunen über eine Sprache und eine Welt [lehren], die wir von Kindheit an zu kennen glauben.<sup>9</sup>

Though Reich-Ranicki edges perilously close to a very unfortunate us/them dichotomy in his description of readers as "wir" (and in doing so very nearly excludes the author whom he means to praise), suffice it to say that Reich-Ranicki recognizes Çirak's ability. Her signature combination of surprises and possibilities crystallized into *Sprachbilder* are evident in her 1991 text, "Keine besonderen Geschehnisse" (43): this text demonstrates her skill by reworking the rhythms and



themes found in Goethe's famous "Wandrer's Nachtlid." Goethe's poem was in praise of Nature; in her new incarnation of his poem, Çirak lets Nature serve as a backdrop to the destructive impersonality of technology. Goethe's rhythms underscored the calm of Nature portrayed in his verse; the dawning horror of Çirak's scenario stands in stark contrast to the deceptively beguiling cadences she has borrowed from Goethe. The text illustrates what sculptor Jürgen Walter described in his *Hölderlin-Förderpreislaudatio* as Çirak's way with language, her use of it as a sculptor uses clay, kneading it until "das Weiße, das die Zeilen trennt, zu schillern beginnt."<sup>10</sup>

The first line sets the scene — a quiet train ride — but the second line immediately takes liberty with the reader's expectations in Çirakesque fashion, for the passengers occupying the choice window seats are flies. Though flies can typically be found on the window of a train compartment, this change is unsettling and leaves the readers with a sense of unease. The reverse, comparing humans to flies can be found in Borchert. Çirak may be making another another literary allusion here to heighten the suspense. The fourth and fifth lines revert to the initial calm by dint of the scene described and by the use of the pun on the verb *reservieren*, but the sixth line reestablishes the mood of dread: the train, described rather unsavorily as a fast worm, races onward and the reader's mood sense of an impending threat is underscored by the image of the tunnel as an animal's mouth in line seven. Lines eight and nine provide another mental picture that is deceptively calming, though the engineer's whistling smacks of foreshadowing. The enjambement of lines ten and eleven, though the first in the text, is actually quite common in texts by Çirak and adds to the overall anticipatory sense. The subsequent eerie descriptions of non-humans set the stage for the first allusion to Goethe's text since the first line, a marked juncture in the text that is as jolting as what it goes on to describe. The jolt is offset and highlighted by the immediate and third recurrence of the refrain "In den Abteilen ist Ruh." The chill felt by the girl in line seventeen is by now a mere echo of the cold dread built up within the readers' minds and the reaction of the conductor to the sight of her short skirt serves as a momentary distraction and unnerving contrast to the actual impending event, though the readers only intuit from the stage Çirak has set that a disaster may occur. In fact, Çirak distracts the readers from this expectation by jumping into the future in the next stanza: she writes of happiness, of waving off pesky flies; the readers think the order has been restored and that happiness prevails until the third line of the second stanza, in which the readers realize the fate of the *Wanderer* of line fourteen. Also typical for Çirak's work is the retrospective "aha" that occurs when upon completion of the poem. There are two realizations made

by readers. One is that the juxtaposition of the *Wanderer's* slowness with the speed of the train comprises the crux of the entire poem; the other realization involves discovering the reason for the refrain "In den Abteilen ist Ruh" and how it lends irony, foreshadowing, and tone to the poem as well as hearkening back to a famous line from Goethe.

In den Abteilen ist Ruh  
Fliegen haben Fensterplätze besetzt  
und putzen sich die Augen  
ein Platz in der Mitte ist noch frei  
die restlichen Fahrgäste sind reserviert  
so rast der schnelle Wurm  
aus dem Maul eines Berges hinaus  
in den Abteilen ist Ruh  
der Zugführer pfeift leise  
der Kontrolleur ist durch und durch  
geschaukelt  
die Fliegen reiben sich die Füße  
der schnelle Wurm hat leuchtende Augen  
den langsamen Wanderer aber  
hat er nicht gesehen  
und in den Abteilen ist Ruh  
ein Mädchen mit kurzem Rock friert  
sie steht im windigen Gang  
ein Durchzug berührt ihre Oberschenkel  
dem Kontrolleur wird es warm  
ein Zug berührt die Schenkel des Wanderers  
ein schneller Zug zieht sich eilig die Nacht heran

Morgen früh wird auf Bahnhöfen sich geküßt  
die Fliegen gescheucht  
im Bergdort ist demnächst Beerdigung  
der Wanderer hat seine Ruh.

Her term *Sprachbilder* makes clear the fact that she sees language as a plastic medium that can render up its nuances, contradictions, and possibilities at the hands of a capable and adventurous artist: herself. Small wonder that *zitty's* 1991 review of *Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* describes what she calls her *Lesep performances* as "Wort-Verrücktheiten ... mit virtuoser Leichtigkeit und schnoddriger Ironie vorgeführte dadaistische Sprachspielereien" (Farin 9).

Also small wonder that ranked high among her literary idols — Fried, Brecht, Tucholsky, and Hikmet — Çirak names Ringelnatz. It is not particularly suprising

that she does not name many Turkish writers, as her formal schooling in literature occurred in Germany; hence Chiellino's classification of her.

It is with the laconic wit and succinct *Keckheit* she cherishes in those models that she accepted the *Adelbert von Chamisso Förderpreis* — her first big literary prize — given to young authors of non-German heritage. Her speech on that day in 1989 was not a speech at all, but a poem that with its allusions to her “dayjob” of cosmetician put in perspective the fickleness of fame and those who would define it. “Es regnet Lob” (*Vogel auf dem Rücken eines Elefanten* 47) is a witty assertion of her independence from the need for fame if it comes at the price of being falsely categorized. The love Çirak has for making unusual metaphors is evident in the title; the visuality of her craft continues into the entire first stanza. Praise, no doubt the praise an author receives, is compared to the rain-like substance of hairspray that is carried on the wind and makes the ears wet. Being carried on the wind evokes the image of praise as transitory; making the earlobes wet refers to the English and German saying of wet behind the ears — meaning a raw beginner. The self-irony is obvious: in making reference to her vocation of cosmetician and by the allusion to being wet behind the ears, Çirak is poking fun at herself and reminding herself not to take the praise too seriously. The hair at the nape in line four, described as “das bißchen Haar,” is another form of self-deprecation, since the phrase is usually disparaging when used in standard speech. The wind continues to be present in line five in form of clouds who play children's games of arbitrariness (and contrariness) called *Fang den Hut* (Keep-away) and *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht* (Trouble). Again, the message is that praise is elusive and not to be trusted. In the second stanza, the metaphors shift from the recipient of the praise to the bestowers. The common phrasing of applause given — *Applaus spenden* — also alludes to *Spender* (charitable givers), as if the poet were a charity to be supported. This idea is continued in the second line of the second stanza, in which Çirak writes of the benefactors who are now merely composed. Now the precipitation falling from the clouds is critical and (again the enjambement device that allows for a twist of meaning in midstream) continues to fall. The verb to fall is has a dual usage once the enjambement is completed: it is obvious that no one is sweating any more — neither the poet from exertion or anxiousness over whether praise is forthcoming nor the audience in eager anticipation of the poet's work. The final stanza again portrays the symptoms of exertion or anxiety: sweating palms, backs of knees, upper lips, eyelids and armpits, but then mocks these symptoms slightly by adding a list of unusual, humorous body parts like the big toe and its next brother, the index toe. This neologism — *Zeigezeh* — is another trait she Çirak uses to deconstruct and mock in self-irony her own words. It is as if the

speaker were admonishing herself for being too dependent on praise. At the same time, as is clear from the last lines of the poem, the speaker acknowledges the inconstancy of the praise-givers. Perhaps it was the *Zeigezäh* that indicated this, a reverse kind of witching stick pointing to the lack of water. The winds of favor changed, the poet is no longer a newcomer. The dryness behind the ears may be a sign of self-sufficiency or a sign that the life-giving rain of praise has dried up or moved on to other recipients, as indicated by the final line of the poem.

ES REGNET LOB

Zuerst sprüht es wie Haarspray  
es trägt der Wind  
und hinter den Ohrläppchen wird es feucht  
das bißchen Haar im Nacken wird naß  
die Wolken spielen Fang den Hut  
von einer Straßenseite zur anderen  
Mensch ärgere dich nicht

Jetzt wird der Applaus nicht mehr gespendet  
die Wohltäter sind gefaßt  
es regnet Kritik aus allen Wolken für alle  
und es fällt und fällt  
schon gar nicht mehr auf  
daß keiner mehr da ist  
der jetzt noch schwitzt

Nässe in den Handflächen  
in den Kniekehlen  
über der Oberlippe  
in Augen und Achselhöhlen  
zwischen großem Zeh und dem Nebenbruder  
dem Zeigezäh  
der Wind hat gewechselt  
hinter den Ohren wird es langsam  
aber verdächtig  
wieder trocken  
es regnet  
woanders

No longer wet behind the ears herself, as an experienced and award-winning author, Çirak knows the pitfalls that accompany fame, especially fame linked to her heritage and not primarily to her talent.

“Innere Unruhe” and “Es regnet Lob” are not Çirak’s only texts in which she takes stock of her chosen metier, nor is “In den Abteilen ist Ruh” the only allusion

to the output of a famous German literary predecessor. In “Der Dichter und sein Schweiß” (*Fremde Flügel auf eigener Schulter* 18) the reader hears echoes of Dürrenmatt not only in the obviously borrowed title but also in the subtext of the piece. As in “Innere Unruhe,” Çirak’s subject in “Dichter” is the task of writing. When the subject matter is coupled with the literary illusion to Dürrenmatt, the message the reader begins to uncover is that writing is a stern taskmaster indeed – an executioner or a judge, as in the title. On closer observation, the reader wonders if the taskmaster alluded to is an external one or an internal one: who is it who is saying “Wehe/er riecht nach Arbeit nicht/nach hochgekrempeelten Gedanken/nach Muskelworten Schwielsätzen” (18)?

The aural and visual elements typical for Çirak are once again evident in this text, as are the twists and turns of language and thought. The final lines tie together nicely the themes of the author’s profession, of the trepidation that comes from the author’s — and her audience’s — expectations and the theme of success both in the sense of having an outcome and having made an impact. These themes are compactly, cleverly, and adeptly combined into the final eight lines of “Der Dichter und sein Schweiß.” The first line observes a physical symptom, but (again in typically Çirakesque fashion) given a twist, for a sweating tongue cannot exist unless one is willing to suspend disbelief. The tongue is the primary muscle — other than the brain — in the author’s body, and thus may be said to experience the symptoms of exertion — or anxiety, as the next line suggests. Rather than categorizing fear in its standard realm of emotions experienced as negative, Çirak portrays fear as a motivating factor toward movement and progress in the third and fourth lines below. She goes so far as to intimate that the writer would be disadvantaged without fear when she says “und wehe es hört auf.” She then turns the warning imperative “wehe” into its own noun “wehen,” meaning labor pains. This twist allows her to present the image of a writer as giving birth, a positive result of the fear. A screaming [brain]child is what she hopes for, as it entails the best kind of text, presumably because its presence in the world cannot help but be heard.

Dieses Schwitzen auf der Zunge  
 ist das die Angst?  
 sie treibt nicht nur die Schritte  
 auch Blüten treibt sie aus  
 und wehe es hört auf  
 wehen heißt doch  
 da kommt noch was  
 im besten Fall es schreit

Çirak's final line in "Der Dichter und sein Schweiß" conveys the feeling of an epiphany: the author has moved beyond mere fulfilling of commitments and now hopes for provocation — *im besten Fall es schreit* — as the end result of her mental and linguistic exertions. Thankfully, we scholars have acquired greater insight too, and thus we have moved past the understandable but limiting compulsion to study minority writers always in the light of their foreign heritage and status as foreigners in Germany. Now we are, to cite Enrique Dussel, truly "understanding subjects" (Mignolo 6) of writers well worth our attention as Germanists today.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Works Cited for *dtv* anthologies.

<sup>2</sup> Kemal Kurt, interview with the author, 2 May 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Chiellino's first group are dialect-speaking ethnic authors; the second group are those who purposely write in German for specific reasons; the third group are those who were socialized and schooled in Germany but spoke another language in the home; the fourth are those who are not classic *Gastarbeiter* but have a background in common with *Gastarbeiter*; and the fifth group are those who have returned to their country of origin. Chiellino presents these five categories as the only useful manner of presenting the discontinuities and continuities of the genre.

<sup>4</sup> Zehra Çirak, interview with the author, 27 Jan. 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Gino Chiellino, interview with the author, 3 Feb. 1988.

<sup>6</sup> An informal email survey on 24 March 1999 of 574 "Women in German" listserv members produced a small but significant pool of respondents who reported emphasizing the literary aspects to an equal if not greater degree when minority writers' works were featured in a course on German literature.

<sup>7</sup> Zehra Çirak, interview with the author, 27 Jan. 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Zehra Çirak, interview with the author, 27 Jan. 1987.

<sup>9</sup> From Zehra Çirak's award certificate presentation on 7 June 1993, photocopied to author.

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Walter, manuscript of unpublished speech provided to the author by Jürgen Walter and Zehra Çirak.

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