

he smiles and looks into the camera – in this smile he carries a light.

still a child, he doesn't know that every picture carries him away – to unfamiliar streets, away from his light. and he doesn't understand that every street flows into a language at some point. provided he goes barefoot and surrenders to the language.

only a few years later he is standing in a corner of frankfurt airport. he understands nothing and holds on to his suitcase tightly. in the inside pocket of his shirt a thousand mark note, the pocket is sewn up: "germany is full of thieves". over his shirt he wears a sweater, over it a jacket and a coat: "germany is very cold".

November 19, 1965, is a warm day. the light is bright and hectic, as are the people at that airport. this wet, dull, dark, racing europe, thinks the 17-year-old who has never left his country before. now he stands alone here with a valid passport and searches – for support and for the gate for his flight to munich. he does not speak a word of german, only a few scraps of english.

confused, he discovers that the airport is almost as big as the neighborhood where he grew up. he looks at the people who are racing about. can i cope with this place? in the midst of these people who all speak a different language? he gets scared. then a glimmer of hope. maybe when i learn this language. after an hour he finally finds the gate. he stays there; he doesn't want to miss the flight to munich.

in munich, he faces german grammar. he sits in a run-down building in front of a wall and declines words like a pious jew facing the wailing wall. from his first german teacher he learns the decisive points of the language. "the full stop is the most important part of the sentence." through him he also gets to know german authors, first wolfgang borchert. with his disarming language he describes what many see and cannot express. later heinrich böll with his melancholy that's close to people. just as he feels that Germany is not so cold after all, he is taken by surprise – by the student revolt.

one day he stands alone on the karlsplatz, carrying a stack of flyers. the headline: shah murderer. strangely, he's not afraid now. neither of people nor of the police. he remembers teheran. whenever the shah drove to the airport, there was a secret service agent in every apartment looking at the main street, his back to the window. and now he stands here alone and screams out his anger. he knows the whole german student movement is supporting him. he will never forget the moment when a german fellow student distributed the iranians among the german ones – so that they could escape preventive detention. because during the shah visit the police wanted the iranian opponents to be outside the city, in an inn at Lake Tegernsee or in prison.

he feels hope inside of him, the country is actually getting closer to him. in the following years German authors come to him again. they do not lecture, they do not quote paragraphs, they do not threaten -- they speak of their own weakness. for instance friedrich hölderlin: "we are painless and have almost lost the language abroad."

they give him a language. this opens up a new world and moves him to write. if the german language brings him closer to his homeland? still he hopes for a reunion, for a return without humiliation. and he is active in the opposition. he mainly cares for the political prisoners in his country, who are facing military courts without legal assistance.

and he writes poems, first about justice, later about her twin sister, love. soon he stops drawing comparisons between persian and german. with a trembling body he understands that every language has its own beauty and loves to give it away, when the stranger opens himself. the refugee is driven by the fear that he will lose everything again. so he seeks refuge in the german language – the language takes in the refugee. a liaison between two unequal partners begins. it lasts until the shah regime falls – the refugee returns home.

Tehran, the ugly capital of the world, is waiting, rebellious and desirable.

"how gracious/passers-by are/they speak Persian."

then these little everyday familiarities.

"what a joy to have my name written here without me having to spell it."

but that capital city has many lovers, new and more brutal ones. and it tells the refugee that he is not wanted here, he is a stranger here.

"time and again I attract people's attention/as a stranger/why is that? /because of my gaze? //
because I greet the newsdealer first? /because I want to shake hands with women, too? /
have we/the returnees/become a breed of our own?"

The refugee takes his passport and goes back.

"conversation with a flower/what are you saying, dog rose,/you will not come along to the foreign earth? /so you stay here/with the supple skin."

he returns to his beloved, the german language. It receives him again, like a lady who bears the childish strokes of the pubescent lover on her ripened body with grandeur. the transient liaison becomes a love story. nonetheless, he knows this love can be terminated unilaterally at any time. the woman of the world does not need the refugee.

he keeps searching and he still peers sideways at that ugly capital of the world.

then hell comes.

an unprecedented terror rages in his country – in the name of god. as though one could love god and massacre his creatures. again he sits in his safe exile to learn daily about the death of old friends. executed, shot on the run, tortured to death. he has recorded some of these fates in his books. how lonely he would be without this craft in the german language.

but he is only a guest in this language. does the guest have the right to wish to be received as a son and not as a vagabond? he is guest and prisoner of this language. the guest writes poems, he wants to touch the prisoner. germany offers him space, the german language a new skin.

germany: his way of being a stranger. german, the language of his freedom.

From now on, he will be careful to have no contact with the state that rules his country.

this land that wounds him, humiliates him. he also takes care not to lose sight of the longing that leads him home every night. into the afternoons of the alleys of teheran, full of loneliness and dignity.

are these afternoons, then, what is commonly called home?

the only place he can call home is his childhood. but by now he knows that childhood will not return.

he no longer knows where he belongs, only one thing is certain. through the years of exile he became a nobody, a citizen of the world without a window of his own. here he is only an uninvited guest; the hostess is the german language. the german language, which does not fear poverty, which does not defend prosperity, which does not set houses on fire at night and does not knock down refugees on the streets.

he knows that he no longer has a homeland. home is the time he has lost. he is content with a place to live offered to him by the german language. as though the language were a support and the german literature a bridge between yesterday and today, between teheran and the rest of the world. the child wants to believe this and waits. he must wait a long time, until rainer maria rilke approaches and whispers into the refugee's ear: "because staying is nowhere."

the child thinks that whether he stays or goes is not important. important is only that he notes and perceives being a stranger. he has finally become an indispensable stranger, with that childhood light that it never shed. and this language, which has caught up his loneliness without wanting to displace that light. and the child claims that this light is essential for one who dreams – with eyes wide open and a third ear. he thinks he needs that light, but also this language, for this balancing act.

the many airports and the racing flights could not scare away that light. the familiar light refuses to become a word, but also refuses to die. like a love that has lost its place, that uses different voices and bodies. a ghost light, homeless and transient.

he says that this language has offered him a place to stay. and he can't imagine that

it ever leaves him. it is both wings and handicap at the same time. this language is more truthful than the stuffiness of the fatherlands and the talmi of assimilation.

since then the child persists in an intermediate country – between two rivers. here the persian, there the german; each quenches a different thirst. in one river he swims with the current, in the other the child struggles for every word in order not to drown. the rivers transform him into a chameleon. the animal dreams in persian and awakes in german; although this order as well has long since slipped from him. the chameleon believes that it cannot leave either river – without dying of thirst.

the child decides to move. doesn't every movement end in flight or in a touch? from now on the child draws its food from dialogue. but on what dream does this dialogue feed?

the child remembers his first contact with europe. he was a teenager who set out with immature rage at the dictatorship to seek freedom. "freedom, the colour of men," as louis aragon called this precious good that we could only seek in europe. after all, we still had in our ears the fanfares of the french revolution: "liberty, equality, fraternity!"

at the beginning of the sixties it was dangerous to search for freedom in teheran. we searched for its traces: for books. the works of the iranian authors who wrote of freedom were forbidden – they themselves sat in prison if still alive at all. we searched for books by european writers. but even the europeans had not been spared the censorship of his majesty. we risked being observed or even arrested by the secret service because of the books we hunted – without even knowing where to look. but the flying booksellers outside the university of teheran understood their craft and recognized the thirsty – they risked a lot, too, far more than we did. we owe our treasures to them:

"the just assassins" by albert camus, "the wall" by jean-paul sartre, "the red and the black" by stendhal, "the living" by jean laffitte, "mother" by maxim gorki.

the adolescent ran home, albert camus hidden under his shirt, supposing the whole secret service to be on his heels. arriving home, he feverishly waited for evening, so he could go to

bed in the sultry nights of teheran. with a clenched fist he read his europeans - and he loved this europe.

soon he left his homeland. finally! no more censorship! no prohibition! into the arms of europe! into the lap of freedom! but precisely freedom and his german friends showed him a different face of europe. he learns that the secret service of his country has best connections to the "intelligence service", to the French "deuxième bureau", and to the German

"Verfassungsschutz", who support the colleagues in teheran with spy work and information. he learns that the instruments of torture also come from europe. the instruments with which the dictator's henchmen torture women, to then call them "dirty european whores".

what a europe! while it sends our tortured ones – if they escape – to special clinics and develops new methods to heal their wounds, it sells the torturers the tools of the trade: handcuffs, rubber truncheons, electroshock devices! first poison gas, then the masks against it; afterwards the gas detector tank and finally the medication.

the aged refugee still loves and seeks his europe. and he hopes that this europe will be more than a financial mirage and that it remains a gift to all who seek freedom.

and the child, now fleeing for 50 years, still claims that he is not needed here. sometimes the defiant child overlooks what he's so richly received from this smallest continent. here he can express his thoughts freely and work. and this europe even allows him to be unhappy as he sees fit – a blessing for a wounded child.

here you have aged, on the run, here you are beautiful – because you seek. but isn't what you seek the sum of all those beautiful things that you have learned from your europe? that equality does not exclude fraternity. that fraternity calls for freedom. that freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently.

and is this not enough for you, my friend, what you have learned with your heart, and a language that means the way and the truth to you?

the child still writes poems. in his poems he is also elsewhere. he wants to receive so much of the beauty of the world without losing the connection with that ugly capital of the world. must the refugee romanticize everything in order to survive?

he exposes himself, hoping not to escape the traps of love. but what does he seek, if not return? return? into mediocrity? the old trauma of the exiled?

or does the child seek really certainties? he has not answer, he seeks – the lover does not ask. and what happens to the exposed child on the way, during this long intermezzo – except for a language? is a language sufficient for the child, a fool on the run who asks for reliable owls, with an antiquated light in his hand and a stubborn memory? does the child with a handful of poems want to take exile by surprise and its semantics, which replace the flight with a dash?

he writes poems to find out where it wants him to go. he knows only one thing: he is the most useless refugee of all - because he seeks beauty.

he writes poems against being a stranger and thus becomes even more estranged.

the poem, the narrow bridge to childhood, a place to forget, where the flight ends?

does he really want to return to his childhood naked and undazzled? he does not want to know if someone is waiting at his destination. he has decided to move, to touch.

he remains provisional, unsettling. so that the third ear, which he has grown in the foreign land, is not lost. he wants to hear the wafting, the uninterrupted message that forms itself out of silence, as rainer maria rilke put it.

a provisional dinosaur full of melancholy and rebellion, haunted by his memory, inspired by his language. so the exiled remains a child; he becomes mellow, but not ripe.

thanks to his language of freedom, the child finally understands that there can only be one certainty – that of the seeker.

and already he hears the voice of the privy councillor of weimar:

"i love the one who does the impossible", faust II

the child wants in any case to believe in a certainty: one day this language will build a bridge to that light in teheran.

the child writes, seeks, hopes and thanks his language.