



„SCHWER VERLÄSST, WAS NAHE DEM
URSPRUNG WOHNET, DEN ORT“
(FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN)
FUAD RIFKA

Born in Syria in 1930, migrated to Lebanon at an early age, studied Philosophy at the American University of Beirut, continued his study of philosophy in Germany by means of a DAAD Scholarship and graduated in Philosophy at the University of Tübingen in 1965, held an academic position at the Lebanese American University, retired as a Professor emeritus in 2004. Publications: 12 poetry collections in Arabic, a number of which have been translated into several foreign languages, especially German. Four works of prose in Arabic of a literary-philosophical nature. Articles, interviews, and essays appeared in various mass-media channels. Translated selected poems from Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke, Trakl, Novalis and Olly Komenda-Soentgerath into Arabic, a number of which appeared in a bilingual form, each as a separate work. Participation in the translation of the Old Testament into Arabic. Translation into Arabic of 365 stories from the Bible for children. Others: A member of the German Academy for Language and Poetry, a member at the Bavarian Academy of the Fine Arts, a member of the Otto Friedrich Bollnow Society, a member of the Hölderlin-Gesellschaft. A number of prizes and medals, the last of which is the Deutsche Bundesverdienstkreuz. – Address: Lebanese American University, PO Box 13-5053, Beirut, Lebanon.

How difficult it is to describe fully my rich experience during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg for a whole academic year! Yet, despite this difficulty, I shall try to touch briefly a number of its aspects.

My project at the Wissenschaftskolleg moves towards the translation into Arabic of a selection of contemporary poems in German. When I started with this project last October,

I doubted whether I would be able to complete it before the end of July, the date of my departure back home. But now I am happy to realize that my previous doubt was only a white summer cloud, since the project, as defined, has been completed, and I am hoping that it will be published next spring.

However, the completion of this project should not be traced back only to my own effort, but primarily to the warm and smiling help I got at the Wissenschaftskolleg, from the top of the pyramid in the administration down to its basis in the form of typing letters (I don't know how to type or how to use the computer and the Internet), in the form of searching for the addresses of a number of German poets and publishing houses, in the form of researching the biographies of several German poets, and finally in the form of doing everything possible to make my work easier.

Another aspect of my rich experience at the Wissenschaftskolleg is manifested on two levels: internal and external. Internally, I had the opportunity, as much as time permitted, to exchange ideas with other Fellows, whether on the occasion of the Tuesday Colloquium, or during the daily meals, or during the afternoon walks in the neighbourhood, or during a break at a certain coffeehouse. This exchange of ideas has proved to be very enriching, despite the fact that the majority of my colleagues are specialized in areas far removed from my own.

Externally, I had the chance to establish ties with several writers, poets, painters, publishers, cultural centres and the press, in addition to the poetry readings and the interviews I did in Berlin, inside and outside Germany.

As a result of the relaxing, creative climate, I could devote enough time to my personal work, namely to poetry writing, ending up with three poetry collections to be published after I return home. In this relation, may I mention that during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg my poetry collection *Die Reihe der Tage* appeared in Berlin, Schiler-Verlag, bilingual: Arabic-German.

Certainly, I don't claim to have already acquired a satisfactory impression of Berlin's extremely rich world, indeed Berlin is a great work of art, whose inner world can hardly be fully experienced. In Berlin, one is always on the way to Berlin, like the horizon towards which the sailor moves, but without ever reaching it.

Is this all? Certainly not. Indeed, the important thing has not yet been said: What language can express the way the fall in Berlin quietly, silently, without even a whisper, creeps into the trees, the branches, the leaves, thus transforming them all into Greek tragedies, reminding us of Rilke's Eighth Elegy:

So leben wir
und nehmen immer Abschied,

What language can describe the scene of Berlin's lakes transformed in winter into a lonely, icy mirror, without boats, without wild birds, without lovers embracing the endless distance at sunset? What language can touch the song of the blackbird (Amsel), reluctantly calling for love early in spring, late in the evening! And in summer, where is the song, so loud, to reach the stars.

Berlin, oh Berlin, you sun of the world, that sets in order to rise again, look!
The bird of the storm hovers over your peaks and announces the new dawn.
Auf Wiedersehen.

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In den Trümmerfeldern von Beirut
In den Trümmerfeldern von Rom und Berlin bis Hiroshima,
auf dem Trümmerfeld Erde
immer noch ein Jasminstrauch,
der das Auge überrascht,
ein Abendstern.