



Brechtian Influence in Two Novels by Emine Sevgi Özdamar

Citation

Galloway, Eric Michael. 2010. Brechtian Influence in Two Novels by Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Master's thesis, Harvard University, Extension School.

Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37367554>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Brechtian Influence in Two Novels by Emine Sevgi Özdamar

Eric M. Galloway

A Thesis in the Field of Foreign Literature, Language, and Culture
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

November 2010

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Bertolt Brecht's ideas of *Verfremdungseffekt*, political theater, and epic theater on the novelist, Emine Sevgi Özdamar. In her two novels, *Life Is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went out the Other* and *The Bridge of Golden Horn*, where can possible Brechtian influences be located? Based on what is known about Özdamar's biography, can one determine that direct influence exists? This investigation separates these two loosely autobiographical novels into four thematic categories: family and Turkish heritage, politics, sexuality, and artistic impressions including an emphatic focus on theater. Using these divisions, the study analyzes key excerpts from the novels to locate potential applications of a few Brechtian concepts: *Verfremdungseffekt*, political theater, and epic theater. To assist in this influence study, I employ a model in which the novels may be perceived as science experiments that seek to facilitate unbiased biography. Brecht's essay, "The Street Scene," which describes a process of recreating a real-life event in a theatrical setting for the purpose of performing an intellectual examination of the event, provides inspiration for the scientific experiment method of literary analysis. This study finds that Özdamar, indeed, utilizes Brechtian methods to create her poetic autobiography, and that she is likely inspired by her experiences participating in productions of *Man Equals Man* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and by working closely with the theater director, Benno Besson. Brechtian influence in the novels runs parallel to signs that other forces simultaneously inform her writing (such as films by Jean-Luc

Godard, the literature of Franz Kafka, Heinrich Heine, William Shakespeare, and Federico García Lorca, as well as oral Turkish fables told to her as a child by her elders). Furthermore, this study notes that the novels are actually literary versions of epic theater productions, where the author's use of imitation to re-experience and re-remember her past enables her to direct and perform in a re-invention of specific periods in her life.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
I. Family and Turkish Heritage	11
II. Politics	21
III. Sexuality	29
IV. Artistic Impressions and the Theater	35
Summary and Conclusions	48
Bibliography	53

Introduction

Emine Sevgi Özdamar's novel *Life Is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went out the Other*¹ describes the life of a girl—from birth to age eighteen—growing up with her family in various cities within Turkey. Upon the acclaim of this work (it was awarded the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 1991), the author then wrote *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*,² which continues the chronological story of the same primary character, now growing into her young adulthood. The two novels possess different tones, themes, and first-person narrative styles. Writing while in her 40s, the author deftly develops distinctive voices for her respective child and young adult narrators. When considering the similarities between these characters' experiences and the known details of Özdamar's biography, the novels may be understood as the author's experimental attempts to find her own narrative voice while re-inventing, re-experiencing, and potentially re-remembering various stages of her life. In this model, the narrator from each work may also be understood as the same character, albeit at different ages.

In *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, the processes of developing this narrative voice involve observing the effects of various facets of Özdamar's identity. These formative elements include her family history, her Turkish

¹Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Life Is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went out the Other*, trans. Luise Von Flotow (London: Middlesex University Press, 2000). Hereafter referred to as *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*

²Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Serpent's Tale, 2007).

heritage, her exposure to mid-twentieth century world politics, her sexuality, and artistic impressions including her experiences as a stage actress. To consider these influences while re-remembering her life, the author constructs the novels like science experiments, where the main character is the subject and the narratives are controlled environments filled with variables, or memories, that may potentially inform the subject's narrative voice. The reader does not need preconceptions about these novels' historical settings to appreciate Özdamar's operation of re-invention. It would also be futile for the reader to attempt to discern how many or which of the stories' details accurately describe the past. (The possibility that these novels are saturated with fiction exists.) The author determines which elements of Turkish and German life in the 1950s and '60s are pertinent to her experiment, and these are the only details the reader need consider as a spectator to the main character's development of a narrative voice.

To make the experiment as unbiased as possible, Özdamar refrains from utilizing emotional cues in her novels. Events are explained matter-of-factly, dialogue is written as if dictated, supplementary information is often presented in list form, and certain phrases are tirelessly repeated. The language never suggests that any moment is sad, funny, frightening, inspirational, etc.; rather it reads like ongoing lab notes explaining a scientific experiment in progress. This style results in intellectually approached accounts for the reader to observe and for the author to re-experience. In approaching the tightly controlled story cerebrally, the reader and the author may bring to the proceedings their own opinions, emotions, and reactions—whether directly relevant or merely tangential.

Özdamar's techniques exhibit commonalities with Bertolt Brecht's concepts of epic theater and *Verfremdungseffekt*. (Epic theater refers to theater that invites calm and

detached contemplation and judgment, and objects to dramatic Aristotelian theater, which courts catharsis, illusion, and emotional identification with character and action.

Verfremdungseffekt is a conceptual device in theater that prevents the audience from identifying emotionally with the play by flagrantly disclosing manipulative qualities of character, action, and aesthetic design.) Throughout his career, Brecht continually wrote essays describing his theories pertaining to theater. Although his ideas evolved and transformed over time, several key tenets emerged. Brecht describes his own coinage of epic theater as such: “It must report. It must not believe that one can identify oneself with our world by empathy, nor must it want this.”³ Just as Özdamar’s novels do, Brecht’s idea for epic theater discourages a quest for communal feeling. However, Brecht realizes that even in epic theater, the audience, after processing the content of the play, may still feel emotion, even if precisely how they are supposed to feel has not been clearly defined.

The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator’s reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things. At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre. It would be much the same thing as trying to deny emotion to modern science.⁴

His pragmatic approach to intellectualizing theater draws an analogy to science. In

seeking to engage reason over emotion, *Verfremdungseffekt* anticipates only an

³Bertolt Brecht, “Letzte Etappe: Oedipus,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (February 1929), rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 25.

⁴Bertolt Brecht, “Schwierigkeiten des epischen Theaters,” *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Literaturblatt) (November 1927), rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 23.

unpredictable response from its audience, lacking bias, just as a proper scientific experiment should (and just as Özdamar's novels do).

Explaining his attempts to write epic theater in more impatient and humorous terms, Brecht claims: "I give the incidents baldly so that the audience can think for itself. That's why I need a quick-witted audience that knows how to observe, and gets its enjoyment from setting its reason to work."⁵ Analogously, Özdamar's works, even while they amply accommodate purely visceral reactions, primarily cause cerebration. Her most stimulated readers will have analyzed their natural reactions to her writing in accordance to currencies circulating through the novels' varied subjects and set pieces.

An authoritative biographer and scholar of Brecht, Martin Esslin, elaborates on the playwright's belief in the power of *Verfremdungseffekt*: "By abandoning the pretence that the audience is eavesdropping on actual events, by openly admitting that the theatre is a theatre and not the world itself, the Brechtian stage approximates to the lecture hall to which audiences come in the expectation that they will be informed. . . ."⁶ Although Özdamar's novels are obviously a different medium of artwork than Brecht's dramas and theatrical productions, their texts come packaged like a comprehensive account of one girl's experiences during specific time frames. As mentioned before, they read like chronological lab notes, interjected with descriptions of potentially noteworthy particulars, and with key words and ideas repeated matter-of-factly as if to allow the reader, and the writer in her process of re-remembering, to chart the instances and

⁵Bertolt Brecht, *Die Literarische Welt* (July 1926), rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 14.

⁶Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) 116.

possible patterns where important motifs appear. In other words, the author exhaustively (and creatively) prepares the information like one might organize an informative briefing. It is full of the basic information that the author deems important, but objectively allows the recipient of this knowledge to use, or not use, the material as he or she sees fit.

The previous quote also relates to Brecht's ideas for a "smokers' theater." Brecht scholar John Willett explains:

. . . Brecht was insisting on the need for what he called a "smokers' theatre," where the audience would puff away at its cigars as if watching a boxing match, and would develop a more detached and critical outlook than was possible in the ordinary German theatre, where smoking was not allowed.⁷

This setup for a theater seems to want to relax the audience as much as possible, while also disengaging expectations for proper theatrical etiquette. It also would seem to facilitate a rowdier audience response where visceral reactions might not only be digested internally but also shared and debated with fellow spectators. In comparison, Özdamar's literary experiments serve as catalysts for her own attempts to re-remember the past, but also encourage her readers to simultaneously entertain their own discourses on her biography. To boot, she also spotlights the act of smoking, throughout *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, as a signifier of intellectual discourse for dialectic student activist characters. The main character repeatedly notes how her young contemporaries chain-smoke when philosophizing about their generation's challenges in improving society. When one of the narrator's friends puts out his cigarette in a cup of coffee, it appears that political freedom extinguishes with the smoke: ". . . at the points where he talked about

⁷John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 8.

the police or about politicians, he didn't stub out his cigarette in the ashtray, but in his coffee cup. Then I heard a quiet hiss, and an unpleasant smell spread, of wet cigarette ends gone soggy in coffee, and this smell stayed in my mind as the smell of the German police and politicians." [116] The bureaucracy of late 1960s society constricts these young people's desired way of life, and the authority of German and Turkish police threatens their political freedom.

Verfremdungseffekt allows action-oriented episodic events to be dictated with the expectation that the accumulation of ideas and themes will inspire the audience to contemplate the collected items' relation to each other or lack thereof. Özdamar manages to create this outcome in her novels by excluding climactic plotting and prearranged tempo in her continually moving action (which abruptly halts on the final pages of each novel). *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . does not even utilize chapters to divide its 270 pages of non-stop prose. As a result, no episodes stand out as key advisories; rather, the various small moments must be contemplated as a web of thematic possibilities. According to Esslin, Brecht advocated a comparable technique in epic theater:

The construction of the plays of the "epic" theatre, which rejects the logically built, well-made play, is free from the need of creating suspense, loosely knit, and episodic; instead of mounting to a dynamic climax, the story unfolds in a number of separate situations, each rounded and complete in itself. The total effect of the play will be built up throughout the juxtaposition and "montage" of contrasting episodes.⁸

The previous passage reads as if it is actually describing *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. An entire article that could be describing these novels, but is actually referring to Brecht's drama, *Trommeln in der*

⁸Esslin 118-9.

Nacht, is Astrid Oesmann's "The Theatrical Destruction of Subjectivity and History: Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht*." Oesmann argues: ". . . rejecting the play as a portrayal of specific historical events, and seeing it, instead, as a *theatrical* event that produces its own history—a history informed by a distinct notion of revolution—opens a variety of previously ignored aesthetic, cultural, and historical perspectives."⁹ Both *Life Is a Caravanerai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* re-create their own histories. They are essentially comprehensive accounts of the Germany and Turkey in the 1950s and '60s—albeit ones that focus on history as observed by one individual in specific places in space and time. If a reader has never met Emine Sevgi Özdamar or heard her speak before, than reading her books serves as an introduction to an entirely fresh perspective on these time periods in Europe. Her two novels, in this frame, are literary events that produce their own history.

Additionally, Oesmann writes: "In *Trommeln in der Nacht*, language does not express characters' subjective emotional condition as it does in expressionist theater; instead, it takes the form of quotations whose exchanges produce pleasure, conflict, and even linguistic violence."¹⁰ This statement could also apply to *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. German is Özdamar's second language and she experiments with the foreignization of her new vocabulary. These efforts provoke, in the reader, an intellectual consideration about how words may be learned and perceived. She does not care if her readers laugh, cry, swoon, or get bored; she plays with the ways in

⁹Astrid Oesmann, "The Theatrical Destruction of Subjectivity and History: Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht*," *The German Quarterly* 70.2 (Spring, 1997): 137.

¹⁰Oesmann 139.

which her stories can be told and interpreted, and in the process, creates an evolving narrative voice with which she is able to re-invent and re-remember the past.

Among Brecht's essays, "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for Epic Theatre"¹¹ is particularly useful when discussing implications of his theories on *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. To illustrate the basic concepts of epic theater, "The Street Scene" proposes the model of a traffic accident being explained by an eyewitness. This explanation—an imitation of the facts as understood by the demonstrator—is what the audience must judge when contemplating the accident, and its purpose is to make this process easier for the viewers. Özdamar's novels, a replication of events experienced and information absorbed by the author in years past, similarly provide an eyewitness account designed to be judged, albeit by the author herself, as well as the reader. Within these epic theater-like novels, Özdamar playfully positions characters while recreating situations from her memories. In doing this, she experiments with conventional devices of literature, using her stories as a laboratory for loose documentation and provocation of memories.

The essay also stresses the importance of the retelling having socially practical significance. Brecht regularly insists that epic theater also be political theater, addressing cultural events and encouraging political consciousness and social change. While Özdamar's novels do not necessarily seek to make waves among modern societies (the stories are set in the 1950s and '60s without clear references to modern issues), they are still politically thematic in nature. She maintains a regular focus on student activism and contentious realities of the respective time periods, and she avoids presenting these

¹¹Bertolt Brecht, "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for Epic Theater," ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964) 121-9.

elements with leading or opinionated language. Thus, the reader, as well as the author in her re-remembrance, is free to critique history. “The Street Scene” notes that the demonstrator’s imitation of the action only need be as accurate and lifelike as to clarify the practical significance. Özdamar limits the variables introduced in her stories to only those she deems necessary for an evaluation of the narrator’s life.

According to “The Street Scene,” characters in epic theater are derived entirely from their actions. This breaks with orthodox theater’s habit of basing the actions on the characters. Özdamar does not explicitly contemplate the psychology or motivations of her characters. As Monika Shafi, a scholar of Turkish-German literature, explains:

Özdamar foregrounds the immediacy of experience, which results in a vivid, scene-by-scene account that often resembles a theatrical performance. Özdamar’s protagonist neither delivers an exemplary self-analysis nor does she attempt to recreate her former self and its emotions, emphasizing instead action over reflection.¹²

While this statement is misleading—Özdamar does not recreate her former emotions, but she does create a new version of her old self—it nonetheless accurately identifies how, by describing action instead of characters’ internal feelings, the job of determining characters’ personalities is left to the reader, as well as to the author, in her reflective process.

Finally, “The Street Scene” insists: epic theater is still artistic! Despite its focus on intellectual qualities, an epic theater play may still be entertaining, imaginative, and humorous. After all, its style of drama is creative and unique, and it has influenced Özdamar. Her novels possess all of these qualities while being linguistically

¹²Monika Shafi, “Talkin’ Bout My Generation: Memories of 1968 in Recent German Novels,” *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (April 2006): 214.

adventurous, entirely original, and—yes—unabashedly intellectual. Her colorful, clever, and altogether riveting storytelling challenges the reader to keep up as the author re-experiences Turkey, Germany, and a few other places in the mid-twentieth century. The actions and decisions the narrator makes provide fodder for an ongoing analysis of who this character is and what she thinks. Just as in epic theater, there is not meant to be an answer to this query. Rather, there is an invitation to debate the implications of the art presented by the storytelling vessel—in this case, two narrative novels by Emine Sevgi Özdamar.

Chapter I

Family and Turkish Heritage

Throughout the course of the two novels, Özdamar gradually reveals details about her family history and her Turkish heritage. With each variable added to the experiment, the author and the reader question: how do these factors enable the revelation of a narrative voice, and how does this history and this heritage affect the narrator's identity, perceptions, and choices? It is not obviously clear why Özdamar chooses certain elements of cultural and familial background, but each variable included has the potential to function as a catalyst in forming the narrator's personality.

In *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*, Özdamar charts the narrator's life up to age eighteen, starting when she is incubating in her mother's womb. Introducing variables to the main character, at this tender age, not only serves the author's efforts to re-experience this early part of her life without the bias of aged wisdom, but also portrays a speechless baby forced to make sense of the information to which she is exposed. The majority of the narrator's chronicles in *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* involve interactions with her family members, so it is primarily through their actions and words that she learns about Turkish culture, as well as the specific dynamics, conflicts, and histories of her relations. The author may discern between aspects of her upbringing that are typical in Turkish culture and particular ones included for further potential elaboration on the narrator's personality. Since her family members often preside as her primary source of knowledge and opinion of the world, the narrator spends a considerable amount of time listening to

and reciting their speech. Only gradually does she learn to distill genuine facts from the adulterated interpretations of her elders, and find her personal narrative voice.

“People sleep through their lives, once they’ve died, they wake up. The earth says bitter words to the dead person. When the earth is silent, an angel comes, tells the dead person, ‘Write your life.’” [9] This passage arrives early in *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . and prepares the reader for what he or she can expect from the rest of the two novels at hand. The main character encounters the speaker, Musa, the “graveyard fool” [9], while visiting the graveyard as a young child with her grandmother, Ayşe. Musa’s quote is excerpted from a proverb he shares with the two visitors. The tale is unsentimental, infused with spiritual and poetic touches, and harks to Turkish and Kurdish customs of oral storytelling. Grandmother Ayşe—a woman of an Arabic-speaking generation for whom listening and reciting stories is more common than reading and writing them—receives the proverb attentively, and by imitation, so does her granddaughter. The angel in Musa’s proverb heralds the start of the re-remembering process. The narrator has much to learn, and Özdamar has much to re-learn (will she “wake up” in the process?); with “write your life,” the slate is clean, the laboratory is disinfected, and the science experiment is free to begin. The tale is also significant, however, for providing the narrator with a style template for storytelling. Until she identifies her personal voice (and even after she does), traditional tropes exemplified by this passage strongly influence her narrative language. Indeed, her words are direct, her phrasing is as simple as possible, and when she does not entirely understand something

she wishes to convey, she articulates by creatively piecing together concepts to make analogies . . . and this results in poetic and sometimes supernatural imagery.

The impressionable young narrator absorbs her elders' spoken tales and anecdotes without much thought. It is not long before she begins responding with confusion to proverbial folklore presented to her as fact. One night, Grandmother Ayşa shares the story of how Hasan and Hüseyin, the Prophet Mohammed's grandchildren, die from dehydration:

They die in the Sahara sun with the words “water, water” on their lips. Then my grandmother sent me to get a glass of water because her throat was dry. I went down the rotted wooden staircase. When I saw the water I wondered how this flowing colourless stuff could kill Hasan and Hüseyin when it wasn't there. The stairs shook under my feet, the water in the glass began to tremble as though it were very sad about what it had done to Hasan and Hüseyin. [22-3]

Without comprehending scientific concepts about the necessity and properties of water, the main character uses the variables introduced to her at this point—a cryptic story, a glass of water, and sympathy—to create an analytic narration of her experience. This scene marks one of the first times in *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . where the narrator evaluates an element of her heritage, as opposed to simply rehashing what others have said. Her narrative voice has evolved here, and it has become a bit more personalized.

Apparently recognizing the artistic process of proverbial storytelling, the narrator practices, at age seven, developing her own creative linguistic rhythm:

In this city [Anatolia] I never saw the light. The two months I spent there were like one very long day, and it began with the dawn. The house was a like an Arabic house, with a flat roof, that's where the grain dried and gave off a wonderfully pungent dust. In the garden I saw the veil of dawn, and the snakes out strolling under the pomegranate trees. The bees making honey below the sky created another sky above the grapes. The watermelons bobbed in the cold water of the little stream, my uncle's hunchbacked wife milked the donkey and gave me to drink. “Drink, it'll

make you clever.” “Why?” “Because the donkey’s clever and doesn’t have any sins.” “Why?” “Because she’s always working.”

It was true, the donkey looked like a machine, there was milk running out of her bosom, she was eating with her mouth, she sent away a turtle with her hooves, her tail switched constantly across her own body where flies were incessantly taking off and landing again, and her eyes were staring into mine. The donkey’s eyes reminded me of my mother’s beautiful eyes, I cried and dried my eyes on a dirty cloth. My uncle’s hunchbacked wife went from room to room with me, from tree to tree, and showed me all the house and garden spiders. “You must never kill them!” “Why?” “They are all the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters that have died, and a spider once saved our prophet Mohammed from his enemies. Mohammed was hiding in a cave, two men with sabers were after him, wanting to kill him, a spider came along and wove a house in front of the cave that looked a hundred years old. And so the men with the sharp sabers did not enter the cave.” [32-3]

In the first paragraph, the narrator uses awkward descriptive language to paint a physical image of Anatolia. At first glance, it seems Özdamar is simply waxing poetry. The abstract reports of the landscape, however, read like a recital of confused illustrations. There is an absence of light, but a never-ending day, a “pungent dust,” snakes that stroll, a swarm of bees described as having “created another sky;” her colorfully worded imagery makes sense, but it is indicative of her premature narrative voice. She strains to emulate her grandmother’s storytelling prowess, but she jumbles her rhythm and vocabulary. Still, she recognizes the usefulness of clear and direct dialogue (informed, not yet by Brecht, but by the blunt cadence of traditional Turkish and Kurdish fables), and the lack of transitions between ideas demonstrates her thoroughness in listing each important detail. This also speaks to the scientist-author’s need to expose her test subject to all potentially relevant variables.

From the meticulous questioning of her uncle’s hunchbacked wife, the narrator construes the donkey to be like a machine. Suddenly, she has made a well articulated, if bizarre, metaphor. Although her interpretation of the aunt’s idea is childishly literal, it

nonetheless is carefully diagrammed. With this passage, she has emboldened her narrative voice.

She has also made series of connections between disparate observations in these sentences, such as the lines drawn between the donkey's eyes and her mother's eyes as well as the aunt moving from room to room to tree to tree with the spider weaving a web. Once again, a traditional fable is invoked, and the spider web theme of this particular story serves as a metaphor of connections that may exist in the narrator's various observances.

In the two novels, the narrator's exposure to Islam comes almost entirely from the mouths of her family members, particularly her grandmother's. Early in *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . , Ayşa teaches her granddaughter a word that will become an important mark of cultural identification as she grows older:

When you stepped into a house, you had to put down your right foot first and at the same time say bismillâhirahmanirrahim. When you washed, you had to say bismillâhirahmanirrahim with the first cup of water you poured over your hair, when you put the first piece of bread in your mouth in the morning you also had to say bismillâhirahanirrahim, you took your clothes off and put them on with bismillâhirahmanirrahim. . . . [37-8]

Just as this word does not have a precise definition, Özdamar does not always spell it the same way, perhaps alluding to its significance as an old oral tradition, as well as an inability to write down an oral tradition without destroying it. For the narrator, it becomes akin to a secret handshake—a way of identifying herself as someone with an acute Arabic tie to others who would understand this. As she takes advantage of opportunities (in both novels) to use this word, it transforms into a distinct aspect of her burgeoning narrative voice. The word is also repeated without irony many times.

Özdamar wants to list every possible use of this word relevant to the narrator at this point in her life, in an effort to be thorough in the scientific process.

When the main character's family moves to Bursa, she observes the curious customs of formal greetings and polite conversation. In her narration, she recounts chats between women with seemingly exact dictation, letting any possible humor or satire manifest itself, without any proactive push from the writer:

“How is your husband?” “Thanks to Allah, he is well.”

“How is your son?” “Thanks to Allah, he is well.”

“How is your husband?” “Thanks to Allah, he is well.”

“How is your bride?” “Thanks to Allah, she is well. . . .”

The question how is your husband was not asked, but I read the answer in the faces of the listening women, they nodded with their weeping mouths pointed toward the floor, the wooden floor gave the answer, creak, creak.

[122-3]

At this point, the main character recites predictable and veiled dialogue, but also gives voices to the wordless faces of the women as well as the creaking floor. Her narration now combines a record of words actually spoken with a more imaginative interpretation of events.

The strains of underlying meanings in diplomatic conversations become apparent to the narrator not only in settings of polite acquaintances, but also in her household. In a delicately disguised scene of tension, the narrator's father, Mustafa, and paternal grandmother, Ayşa, spar over the family's debt woes:

My grandmother said, “Mustafa, big men also hand out big slaps in the face.”

Mustafa said, “They have money like sand at the seaside.”

Ayşa said, “You cannot cook in a stranger's pot. . . .”

Mustafa said, “The rich can't take all their money with them into the other world. I'm going to borrow money, pray for me my daughter, pray for the rain to stop.”

Mustafa went to borrow money. [55-6]

Özdamar includes several variables in this scene: proverbial Turkish anecdotes, Mustafa's problems with money, and the idea that Ayşe and her son speak in code—perhaps to hide their conversation from the children. The way in which the scene plays invites the author to re-experience a moment where varying issues conflict simultaneously. The dialogue manages to reflect all of these ideas at once, demonstrating the maturing sophistication of the narrative voice.

Mustafa's difficulty in finding regular work is the primary reason the family repeatedly relocates to new cities. It also leads to the following conversation:

So, for my mother my father was a müteahhit, for my grandmother he was the assistant of an unemployed master, for me Mustafa was the one who bought my fasting days for 25 kuruş. . . .
 “Mustafa is naïve.”
 “Mustafa is honest.”
 “Mustafa is Casanova.”
 “Mustafa is a holy man.”
 “Mustafa's nose looks like a pregnant aubergine.”
 “Mustafa once had a Chevrolet. . . .” [44]

The narrator assembles these various opinions of the patriarch in this unsentimental and random list, and in doing so, continues to play with language while forming her narrative voice. At the same time, the differing interpretations of Mustafa's role in the family are indicative of the idea that there are various ways to view any number of influences in the narrator's life. In this example, the author introduces variables in the form of contrasting vantage points towards one character. Characterizations are formed through action, and here, the action is speech.

Another patriarchal figure in the novel is the narrator's grandfather, Ahmet. He first appears in the opening pages of *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . spinning tall tales of Turkish and Ottoman history, as well as grandiose versions of family legends. As a

young child, the narrator attentively absorbs her grandfather's rapturous yarns. However when he returns to the family, once they have moved to Ankara, she is entering her teenage years—and by now, her narrative voice has noticeably evolved. In his return to the storyline, he no longer appears as the larger-than-life figure he seemed to be during the narrator's childhood; he now comes across as a more realistic person, undoubtedly due to the tonal and stylistic adjustments that have gradually been made in the narration.

Ahmet killed one of his wives—the narrator's maternal grandmother—in a fit of jealous rage, and the reader may judge his past actions, understand his apparent guilt, and hold contempt for the things he says ("Grandfather Ahmet told my brothers what they should do if one day their wives didn't obey them. . . ." [241]) His instructions for punishing disobedient wives are not met with any expounded reaction from the narrator; like all other variables Özdamar introduces to the text, this passage is written without any obvious prejudice. In fact, it is sandwiched in between two other wholly delightful episodes involving Grandfather Ahmet. His iron-fisted attitude towards wives is one significant part of his personality—and one dark facet of the narrator's family history.

One additional variable that has a potentially significant impact on the main character's personality comes around her fifth or sixth year of school, after the family has moved to Bursa. She comes to doubt her religious beliefs, which have been instilled in her since the first pages of *Life Is a Caravanserai* Her crisis of faith begins as a confusion regarding spiritual logistics; she cannot understand how Allah could be watching her and her mother at the same time while she is at school. This musing quickly transforms into a full-blown existential crisis:

I looked for dark corners like the kitchen, with cold flagstones under my feet, I stared at the walls in the semi-darkness, I asked who I am. How can

I think about what the world is, who I am? How can a brain think about that? How can I think about that? Where do words come from? The mouth that asks “why?”, how can the mouth ask that? Who am I? Where was I when I wasn’t here yet? [164]

This episode mirrors a set of questions Özdamar seems to ask generally through her writing style. In re-inventing the past, she plays with her test subject—the narrator—to explore topics such as language formation, metaphysics, mortality, and self-consciousness. When the main character explicitly asks these questions, a bridge between narrator and author is constructed, and the discovery that Özdamar has been struggling with these concepts for years is made.

These sorts of questions appear again in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, but not as crises reactions. Rather, they exist as part of the narrator’s descriptions of Brecht’s epic theater models and *Verfremdungseffekt* (and these formative elements will be further explored in the later chapter on artistic impressions). Since such questions abruptly arrive in *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . , prior to evidence of the main character’s training in Brechtian acting methods (in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*), it could be suggested that her eventual attraction to Brecht owes to the fact that his methods seek to explore these very questions, both as discourses on real life and as explorations of the limits and possibilities of representing life in theater. Alternately, Özdamar could have learned to ask such questions during her acting training, and simply applied it in her writing. Either way, she has identified this mode of thinking as an appropriate analogy for how the teenage narrator of *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . deals with a burgeoning sense and questioning of her place in the world. Even if Özdamar has not yet revealed to her test subject main character the relation of such questions to Brecht, it is apparent that the

author allows a Brechtian trope to influence her artistic creation—the reconstruction of her self in the form of two experimental novels' main character.

Chapter II

Politics

Özdamar devotes a significant amount of words in her novels to illustrating the political climates of her settings. In *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*, the narrator listens to other characters discuss politics without ever offering her own take on such matters. The author presents differing ideas of social and governmental conflicts as variables in her controlled experiment and allows these factors to influence the formation of her main character's narrative voice. Throughout *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*, the main character receptively absorbs others' political ideas, although she eventually exhibits an understanding that what she is hearing are opinions.

In *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, the narrator—now a young adult—actively makes decisions that help define her political identity, if not a political voice (Özdamar continues to exclude her own defined opinions, and her main character listens to ideas much more than she proposes them). The people presenting political ideas to her are now less frequently her elders, and are more often people her own age. As a young foreigner in Germany, she seeks friendship, stimulation, and inspiration. She finds these things in the company of politicized students and young workers hoping to affect change circa the turbulent year, 1968. She absorbs and deflects politics that are presented to her, while influenced by various factors: her social acceptance amongst these young adults, an apparently genuine concern for the working class (she is, herself, among the working class in Germany), her sexual attraction to literate and passionately politicized men, and

her strong urges to become an actress in a theater environment that is widely seeking to comment on politics.

Consistently throughout both novels, Özdamar throws political ideas, conflicts, and figures at her narrator. To this effect, the author seeks to construct interactive tests and obstacles for her main character in an effort to reconstruct the formative thought processes and events that helped shape the author's political life. No confirmation is ever provided that Özdamar subscribed to any particular political opinions, which absolves the author of any responsibility of proselytizing to her readers, who, in turn, are as free as the main character to allow or not allow the political elements of these novels to affect their own political opinions. Additionally, this lack of confirmed political opinion provides the narrator the opportunity to function in an untainted world. In other words, she creates a controlled environment which, although mostly dominated by leftist student protesters, lacks clues for how history will play out, how the character will turn out, and how and if the story is autobiographical for the author. The experiment enables the reader to experience Özdamar's past while she re-experiences it.

Özdamar's attempts to write politicized novels without letting them develop political agendas resembles Brecht's approaches to playwriting. His stories and characters often deal with conflicts involving class, poverty, institutionalized corruption, and criminal behavior—problematic issues for most societies. The action of his dramas plays out in politically neutralized settings (sometimes it occurs in metaphorical, abstract, or fabled situations). The notion that Özdamar eventually becomes embroiled in Brecht-inspired theater hints that the ideologically sterilized frames of her novels are (not coincidentally) inspired by ideals of epic theater. In the way Brecht challenges his

audiences to mull over the controlled information given to them on the epic theater stage, Özdamar's creative experiments not only encourage her readers to mull over the ideas contained in her novels, but function as a ingenious vehicle for she herself to re-remember a re-invented autobiography.

The narrator's introduction to longstanding conflicts in Turkish-Kurdish relations, and her personal proximity to this conflict arises early in the novel, *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*, during her childhood in 1950s Istanbul: "I said, 'I was born in Anatolia, in Malatya.' The teacher said, 'Then you're a Kurd, you have a tail growing on your ass.' She laughed, all the others laughed too, and called me 'Kurd with a tail.'" [23] Her first conception of Americans is explained to her in similarly oversimplified terms: "'What's an American, Mother?' my brother Ali asked. My mother said, 'An American is someone who doesn't have to eat, they just take pills, Americans take one pill, that's their lunch, in the evening they take another little pill, that's their supper.'" [11] By having the narrator recite others' generalized and debatable ideas in these early pages of the novel, the main character's learning processes are on display for the reader and the author to analyze. The notion that Özdamar introduces variables to a controlled arena factors into the story as a revelation that the narrator learns by osmosis, repetition, and by gradually connecting seemingly disparate concepts. A perfect example of these processes comes in this exchange: "'Mother, what does deux pièce mean?' 'Deux pièce means deux pièce,' my mother said" [19]. The narrator neither precedes nor follows her brief dialogue with indication of any greater understanding. Her exposure to political ideas regularly comes in such unelaborated terms.

A bit later in her childhood, the narrator's family (including her paternal grandmother, Ayşa) moves to a "religious street" [47] in Yenişehir, where she notices how her mother feels pressured to wear a headscarf. The narrator is introduced to a new Turkish word: "As soon as father finishes building our villa she won't have to wear a headscarf because only memurs (bureaucrats) will be living around there." [47] These *memurs* take interest in her family . . . perhaps seeking her parents' votes. However, the narrator's mother hides her mother-in-law in another room when the bureaucrats pay visits: "Now that the memurs were calling on us, my mother considered my grandmother a peasant. But when the bureaucrats were gone, she was very nice to my grandmother again." [48] In these pages, the reader sees that the narrator has learned two new words from her mother: *memur* and peasant. She also has begun to understand implications of perceptions of these words in the way they relate to how her mother treats Grandmother Ayşa. Here, her learning process is affected by seeing examples of new vocabulary play out in interactions between her elders.

Grandmother Ayşa comes from a rural background, is illiterate, speaks and understands Arabic as well as Turkish, and is religious, but is also an outspoken and fairly independent woman. These are all common attributes for a Turkish woman of the grandmother's generation, but Özdamar only gradually reveals these truths in the text of *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . , thus presenting Grandmother Ayşa as a character first, and as a typical representative of a culture second. By recognizing tension between her mother and her paternal grandmother in the previous citation, the narrator learns a bit about the generational and political schism that exists in her home. At this point, the author and the

reader might take the opportunity to consider the schism's macro-equivalent in twentieth-century Turkish society at large.

The main character also learns about another type of politics that will later play a major role in her life when her mother expresses suspicions about the one of the *memurs*:

“There’s a communist among them too, a teacher.” When they came, I’d watch this man. I wanted to know what a Communist is. He wore glasses and had thin lips. I wanted to see more, but I saw nothing except that the man who was a communist smiled a little differently than the others. [48]

The narrator’s conception of communism, at this point, is not an intellectual one. When her mother introduces this new type of person, the main character attempts to define the word, communist, by observing physical attributes of the individual identified as one.

The curious narrator uses information at her disposal in her evaluation—even if her search takes her in misleading directions—but she does not yet possess enough relevant knowledge to make sense of her mother’s claim.

Gradually, the narrator demonstrates an expanding ability to identify and make sense of her elders’ political ideas, while also realizing that she can develop her own opinions (even if Özdamar constantly resists disclosing such opinions). When her Aunt Sıdika takes her to stay with friends in a village on the outskirts of Bursa, one of these friends, Mehmet Ali Bey, quizzes the narrator with history trivia, possibly in an effort to make her think critically about politics. He then poses the question: “What is freedom?” [148] She does not know how to answer. Her mind wanders and gets distracted with other thoughts, but this open-ended question nags her. After this experience, she begins reacting to her elders’ political commentary a bit differently. Instead of simply absorbing it, she begins observing and contemplating it—recognizing that political conflicts lack simple resolutions.

This turning point marks a significant moment in the formation of her narrative voice. In this scene, the main character becomes aware of her political identity. Up to this point, she has merely repeated the discourse of her elders—in the same way she has carried out her grandmother’s tradition of oral storytelling. She will continue to recite and absorb others’ ideas, but with a more sophisticated comprehension of how these ideas may be understood and communicated.

In this passage, the narrator demonstrates how people express political sentiments in short conversational quotes that don’t always correspond to each other or follow logical trains of thought:

Whenever Aunt Sıdıka talked, Mother said, “May the eyes of the Democratic Party go blind, *inşallah*.” Or she’d say, “Don’t the people from the Democratic Party have mothers? If only their mothers would give them a long enough beating.” “Allah save us from this Democratic Party, *inşallah*,” they said and went to bathe again. [202]

The narrator presents these statements as spontaneous expressions of passionate feelings. Özdamar repeatedly introduces political opinions in this style of extemporaneous and direct dialogue throughout the two novels. She also indicates the passages of time and the evolving political climates of the world with sudden, clear, and succinct descriptions, such as: “The military is coming. There’s a revolution.” [214] This statement is followed by descriptions of strange silences, curious looks on people’s faces, and planes in the sky that are a result of this revolution. The style of dropping-in inevitable political realities also serves to affect the narrator’s journey with conflicts and new information—variables for the test subject to confront.

When she reaches her teenage years, the narrator demonstrates an aptitude for political consciousness that did not exist during her younger years. After a scare

regarding an attraction between the narrator and a boy, her mother sends her to stay with an acquaintance in slums on the outskirts of Ankara (where the family, at this point, lives) so she would “see people raised by poverty and realize how many hard edges the world has.” [262] The narrator ends up being stimulated by the experience, befriending and empathizing with people poorer than herself. When leaving the slums, she remarks:

I got off at the edge of the capital city, from there I could still see the slum houses. I saw that my feet were going back toward the slum houses. I wanted the laundry woman to be my mother. My feet would have gone back to her, but then I saw my shoelaces which had come untied and were hanging down. Because the shoelaces were running on ahead of me, I followed them toward my mother. [264]

This internal struggle she describes marks a major development in her personality that will greatly inform her future efforts to appeal to poor Turkish people. While remaining true to her family, and often sympathizing with her mother, the narrator continually struggles to balance her passionate political motivations with her familial devotions and responsibilities. Özdamar portrays a glaring divide between the main character’s convictions regarding the world’s problems as compared to those of her more complacent parents. Generally speaking, the influence of her family receives more attention in *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .*, whereas issues of politics take up a greater portion of text in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. However, it never becomes apparent that either of these themes has greater significance than the other in Özdamar’s re-invented life.

It is not superfluous to note that the narrator’s emotional connection with impoverished people, and that the resulting focus the novels have on the lives of poor people also resemble key tenets of Brecht’s works. As mentioned earlier, Brecht’s plays deal with troubling societal realities—sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly—with the aim of setting the stage for political theater. Özdamar’s penchant for peppering so

much real-world seriousness throughout her novels may not seek to lead her readers to political consciousness (in other words, she may not intend to write the novelistic equivalent of political theater), but she finds usefulness in presenting complicated political scenarios as an effort to test her main character and re-remember the mindset of her youth. The political element of her identity must be considered in her experiment of re-invention not only because it was affected by the events she seeks to re-experience, but also because writing about it in objective terms enables Özdamar to re-remember her social consciousness.

Chapter III

Sexuality

Sexuality permeates Özdamar's novels to such a large extent that it potentially affects the narrator's voice, as well as the formation of her character, at every point of revelation, conflict, and decision. The narrator blossoms into an actively sexual being when her adult life begins in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, but sexual discovery begins during her young childhood in *Life Is a Caravanserai* Her early exposure to sex often happens in ways that can easily be perceived as negative and unfortunate. In consistent form with her writing style, however, Özdamar presents all sexual scenes in her novels—including ones featuring sexual abuse or manipulation—from an emotionally detached point of view. That she resists romanticizing even romance—especially when it plays such a powerful role in the narrator's journey in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*—is an exemplary testament to Özdamar's rigorously controlled and unbiased experiment. While experiencing or re-experiencing the sexual moments in the two novels, the reader and the author are free to react to each of these by swooning, recoiling, or intellectualizing; the important thing to notice is how Özdamar allows sex to inform the development of both the narrative voice and the main character's identity.

The narrator feels a wave of sexual heat at a young age when she attends a street parade for local military servicemen. She notices how the fathers, mothers, and younger siblings of young women at the event keep watchful eyes on their daughters and sisters as these girls watch the soldiers. Her observance that girls need supervision, and that they

may be vulnerable to some invisible tension is tested when she suddenly realizes that she herself is not immune from the effects of the pungent testosterone:

. . . at that moment a man bent down toward me, his breath came into my ear, he said, “My soul, I’m licking you.” Then he kept on walking arm in arm with his group. When I got back to our wooden house, my grandmother said, “Did a dog come after you? Have a glass of water.” I had a glass of water. [134]

Whatever this mysterious presence may be, her grandmother may have noticed it as well. Ayşa’s veiled question indicates the inappropriateness of discussing sexuality in literal terms, but also demonstrates how she is the adult figure in the narrator’s life most unafraid to baldly discuss sex. As the main character matures (and westernizes in Germany in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*), the way she describes sex recalls her grandmother’s approach—unembarrassed and frank, but always cleverly worded.

Although the main character has long been familiar with male sexual aggression (men have been lustily making inappropriate advances towards her since she was a small child), the familial defense of daughters and sisters in this previous scene is fairly fresh to her. A game-changing moment in her relationship with her own brother, Ali, comes a bit later. For most of their childhood, Ali and the narrator have been close-knit playmates and protective of each other in a childish way. As they reach their teenage years, she observes the register of Ali’s voice deepening. Simultaneously, he appears to become uncomfortably conscious of his sister’s sexuality, and how her sex could affect his social life. She describes this realization with a slightly existential touch—as if their childhood bond has been abruptly severed:

Ali had got a different voice, he didn’t want to walk down the street with me anymore. He told mother, “Mother, tell your daughter not to walk beside me anymore.” Mother said, “Don’t walk beside the boy anymore.” Ali said, “I’m afraid she’s going to fall on my head because no man’s

going to take her.” Mother said, “He’s afraid no man’s going to take you and you’ll fall on his head.”
 Ali said, “She walks like a camel.”
 Mother said, “You walk like a camel.”
 I said, “I can understand what he says.”
 But Ali kept on talking to my mother. My mother sat on a chair between Ali’s chair and my chair and translated Ali’s sentences. [251]

By turning her mother into a mediator between she and her brother, the narrator creates a vehicle for demonstrating the sudden lack of understanding between these teenagers. Furthermore, by feeling like she threatens Ali’s social standing, he, by extension, is now an obstacle hindering her quest to find her personal feminine identity. She says she understands his sentences, but suggests he doesn’t hear hers properly. This invites the possibility that she feels offended and disappointed by her brother—a male figure in whom she has lost trust, due to sex.

When the narrator reaches Berlin, at age eighteen, she has left behind such insensitive messages from her brother. By being so far away from home, she now seems more comfortable experimenting with sexual relationships. Upon her arrival in Germany, she wastes no time in going out with other girls from her hostel to meet men:

. . . the second boy, Salim, was also very good looking. . . . Salim smiled at Gül and me, and so all three of us didn’t dance. We just stood there, and the third boy went home. The two remaining boys then brought us three girls to the hossil. Because it was raining so heavily, we sat in their car for a long time outside the women’s hossil. . . . we three girls went up the stairs as if we were each quite alone. [60]

Özdamar emphasizes body movements (instead of dialogue) in this passage. It seems likely the characters would have spoken to each other at some point this night, but their words are not important; the chemistry and the tension manifest in their physicality. (This is, perhaps, the chemistry portion of the science experiment!) In positing these

nonverbal cues as variables that would affect her narrative voice, she has found that sex, unlike politics, is less about words, and more about an invisible and unspoken language.

The most emphasized romantic encounter, and the most developed and elaborate example of sexual narrative in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, is one the narrator shares with a Catalan named Jordi while visiting Paris. Again, the author deemphasizes verbal conversation, which, in this case, also speaks to the language barriers between the two characters. The scenes with Jordi, however, also minimize the importance of bodies. While walking with Jordi, the narrator pays attention to their shadows, rather than their bodies:

I walked between the shadows of the trees, as if I didn't want to disturb these shadows. The earth showed me the shadows of my legs, they were very thin, very long, then another leg shadow was walking beside mine, I only looked at the ground. Then the other leg shadow walked through my legs. [95]

In spotlighting her shadow, she signals the presence of an alter ego, or at least, a new side of her personality. On the other hand, perhaps she is playing with a head-in-the-clouds (attached to a limply dangling body) sense of infatuation. At any rate, she designs an elaborately worded passage wherein her narration suggests an out-of-body moment of spiritual—and sexual—enlightenment.

Jordi stirs her senses by discussing the Socialist Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet, and Yves Montand's song of a Hikmet poem. As she becomes increasingly attracted to this man, and their relationship becomes more physical, her narration evolves from proper first-person to a treatment of herself as a separate character, as this being falls in love. In this euphoria, the narrator has, in a sense, lost her mind . . . and, in a sense, Özdamar has lost control over her main character's mind:

. . . I went upstairs and took a look at the bed. The boy and the girl had disappeared under the blanket. The blanket was moving, and I didn't know where the girl was, on top, below, beside the boy, on the right or the left. They remained under the blanket for so long that I laid my head on the bed and waited. Suddenly the boy's hand was in my hair, he divided my hair on the pillow and said: "You are a child." When he said "child," he made a slight movement of his head towards my legs. "Yes, yes," I said, "I am a child." Both had thick lips from all the kissing . . . [97-8]

Özdamar only includes a few words spoken by Jordi in this scene, continuing the theme that the significance of physical gestures overpowers dialogue in an attraction of this intensity. However, when those key words are spoken by Jordi, the out-of-body language briefly returns to first-person narration, before the main character once again perceives her self as an additional being in the room. His suggestion that she is virginal and inexperienced takes her back to her childhood—a time marked by her Turkish and familial identity. When she gets lost in the thick steam of romance, and her narration describes her actions as if she is watching them be performed on stage, the author experiments with a new facet of her main character's identity—one that is associated with such newfound interests as sex, theater, and Western European flavors. In re-experiencing this love affair, Özdamar plays with *Verfremdungseffekt* in the sense that the narrator takes part in her own role-play (which reads as a theatrical event, no less!) This elaborate experiment enables the author and the reader to observe this unprecedented moment in the narrator's sexual development as a variable that provokes not only her increasingly inventive narrative voice, but also her dynamic personality.

Throughout *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, Özdamar sprinkles sex-positive philosophies and opportunities throughout the main character's journey, serving as catalysts for her characterization. The narrator becomes convinced that she needs to have sex for reasons greater than her own physical and emotional pleasure. She takes to heart

advice given to her by the communist hostel warden (and future theater director) under whose watch she lives upon first arriving in Berlin: “Let me tell you something, Titania: if you want to be a good actress, sleep with men, it doesn’t matter with whom, sleeping is important. It’s good for art.” [74] His friend Ataman concurs: “He’s right, you must sleep with men, free yourself of your diamond, if you want to be a good actress. Only art is important, not the diamond.” [75] She trusts and admires these guys and always remains focused on her convictions towards performing in theater. If these are not enough reasons to capitalize on her hormonal urges, Kerim, a young activist to whom she also looks up as a sort of mentor, gives her further sexual advice:

Kerim said: “The Chinese girls who have achieved greater consciousness with the Mao revolution have also become more conscious in love. Good sex depends on revolutionary consciousness.” When Kerim rubbed a ripe peach against my naked right breast and then ate it, I thought about a little Chinese girl and her consciousness. I didn’t talk much to Kerim, because I didn’t know how conscious my sentences were. [195]

In spite of the narrator’s self-doubting approach to political discourse, this strange pronouncement by Kerim further complicates the narrator’s approach to sex. Not only is sex essential for an actress, it also apparently intertwines with activism. The narrator humors the possibility that activism is essential for acting—since being an activist makes one a better lover, and being a better lover makes one a better actress. At any rate, Brecht agrees that political consciousness is essential for theater (or, at least, for his version of political theater). Özdamar comes to the same conclusion, but finds that sex is the link between the two arenas.

Chapter IV

Artistic Impressions and the Theater

Özdamar's novels display a strong sensitivity to the influence of artistic creations that apparently appeal to the author's philosophical sensibilities. Particularly in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, the narrator alludes to a tremendous amount of potential artistic influences, often mentioning them directly by name. The examples of influences are often quite bluntly thrown in to the story, even in list form, to simply announce their potential influence on the narrator in the time and space of a particular moment. For instance, a reference to Georg Büchner is neither preceded nor followed with any explanation: "[Bodo's grandfather] twirled his moustache and said: 'Am but a poor shoemaker, my lamp it burns so low.' Bodo laughed and said: 'That's not by him. It's by a German writer Büchner.'" [113]

In other instances, explanations of significant influences are explained to the narrator, usually in an eloquent and well-versed manner, even while the author leaves the possibility that the sources of such knowledge may be characters who are oblivious to their own hypocrisy or who lack proper insight. The narrator always refrains from providing her own commentary on these examples of stimulating art (or rather, Özdamar slyly creates shifts in action before the narrator can expound upon her opinions). This discipline enables the reader and the author to, using only their own knowledge about any given artistic entity introduced to the story, consider how it may affect the narrator and any other characters it has touched.

Film, literature, and theatre are the most common artistic mediums that make an impression upon the narrator. Although she absorbs media from varying time periods, cultural origins, and styles, she appears particularly receptive to pieces that challenge her intellectually. She appreciates creative endeavors that engage their audience and call for participation or active reflection, and she is stimulated when artists blur lines between art and reality. The author smears distinctions of perception and representation, for instance in this passage from the early pages of *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*: “They walked along the streets as if at that moment they were being filmed for TV. To me the streets and people were like a film, but I didn’t have a part in this film. I saw the people, but they didn’t see us. We were like the birds, who flew somewhere and from time to time came down to earth, before flying away again.” [25] Here, the narrator relates the experience of viewing a film with living as a *Gastarbeiter*. Like a television program, Berlin entralls her, even if she views it from a distance. Her minority status creates that distance as Germans ignore her and assume she and the other guest workers will only stay in Berlin temporarily. She makes this analogy via *Verfremdungseffekt* coordinated by the scientific investigator, Özdamar. The author allows the main character to enable a distanced viewpoint of the action with her foreignness, and then to form a commentary on the role of *Gastarbeiter* in German society by, apparently, thinking critically in this moment of detachment. Özdamar has built into her story a scene of Brechtian epic theater—experienced by her main character, and re-experienced by the author herself.

Soon after this, however, Özdamar introduces a variable that allows for a different outlook on the perception of *Gastarbeiter*. One of the narrator’s associates in Berlin

credits Nâzım Hikmet with a philosophy that speaks to Turkish-Germans' sense of

Heimat:

Rain, who was the only student in the Turkish Workers Association, said to one of them: "You are a worker, a worker has no homeland. Where there is work, there is his homeland, the great Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet said that. He was in prison for thirteen years." The worker to whom Rain had said these sentences repeated Rain's sentences and said: "What you say is right, brother, we are workers. Workers have no homeland." [31]

Here the author provides a mention of Hikmet (including the seemingly irrelevant anecdote that "He was in prison for thirteen years") to establish this poet's potential effect on the narrator's experiences. No guest worker from Turkey feels at home in Berlin in comparison to how the German citizens may feel. Where is an immigrant's home, though, if not the current place of employment and community?

When the narrator later returns to Turkey, she again views the world as a film, but not to draw an analogy as a foreigner. Influenced by her experiences and new friends in western Europe, she has become a bit of a political activist in Istanbul. Her immersive encounters with Russian films blur with her current living situation: "The stories of the Revolution in the films took place on the Russian streets, and we, the audience then stood in the street outside the cinema for a long time, as if the Istanbul streets were the extension of the streets of the Revolution from the Russian films." [164] When in Istanbul, the narrator again feels not-quite-at-home, but for different reasons than when in Berlin. There, she had found people with whom she formed a sort of family—even if only a temporary one. Now back in Turkey, she lacks the Berlin-specific political and artistic community in which she grew emotionally. The cinema provides a respite from her present reality. Not only do like-minded patrons go to see the sorts of films in which the narrator finds stimulation, but the movies themselves provide a comfortable,

rebellious, and escapist companionship to this disillusioned *İstanbulu*. She seems to be seeking, by getting lost in these foreign films, an alienation effect—not Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* precisely, but simply the instigation of feeling like an alien again, even while in her native country.

The filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard is presented as a variable by Özdamar several times in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. The narrator relates:

In the evening I went to the cinema and saw Godard's film *La Chinoise*. At one point a young man and a young woman sat at a table, on the wall behind them was a poster of Mao. . . . Someone said: "Don't you think, too, that the film deals with the changes in people who want to change something?" – "No, they're bourgeois, this girl and the boy, and the way they express themselves is ridiculous. She's sitting in her parents' big apartment and is playing at Marxism-Leninism for two months. But it's her parents' apartment." – "I mean, her attitude is anti-bourgeois." – "I think her behaviour is bourgeois. Godard is bourgeois too." [116-7]

The inclusion of this reference highlights the narrator's alternative lifestyle. The question is begged: does the narrator, at the influence of artists like Godard, consciously avoid what she fears might be a bourgeois existence? Channeling Brecht's bourgeois tragedy tropes, the action of *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* resists following any clear narrative structure other than a freewheeling and often anti-climactic stream-of-conscious style. It is probably not a coincidence that the narrator's companions strain to lead untraditional lives, and that the book ends without the narrator seeking marriage, a stable job, or ever aligning with one particular political ideology. Her taste in film, too, errs toward Godard's Brechtian-style of essayistic filmmaking, rather than pop movies. Always interested in an intellectual challenge, the narrator describes another experience at the cinema:

But the characters in the Godard film were not easy to copy, they spoke a new language, which one had to learn first. About Liz Taylor we said:

beautiful or fat, that was enough. Beautiful or fat one could imagine. But with the Godard characters one said bourgeois or anti-bourgeois. It was difficult to imagine what bourgeois or anti-bourgeois is. [117]

Özdamar's delicate satire in this moment asks: does the narrator find it "difficult to imagine what bourgeois or anti-bourgeois is" because she is not familiar with the concepts?, or does she say this because she considers "bourgeois" and "anti-bourgeois" to be subjective and unreliable terms? By not clarifying the narrator's thoughts, Özdamar allows both possibilities to co-exist.

At any rate, the narrative language of *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* deepens and becomes more elaborate once Godard's films enter the action. To the reader, the narrator's descriptions of *La Chinoise* mirror the philosophical content of Özdamar's novel. Because the novel and the film are both works of art, the reader may interpret both as fiction. This model makes it easy to see where Özdamar might view Godard's work as an authentic artistic interpretation of life, or, at least, an effective means of discourse on life's problems via an artistic medium, and thus, an inspiration for her own artistic depiction of the world.

Throughout the course of the two novels, the narrator develops an evident fascination with reproducing life onstage. Her first opportunity to participate in a theatrical production occurs in *Life Is a Caravanserai* When in Bursa, she wins an audition to be in a production of Molière's *The Self-Made Gentleman*. Although her father collects the money she earns in this role, the experience appears to be a meaningful one for her. She pronounces her commitment to this artistic craft: ". . . and as I walked home that night over the holy bridge, I made an oath that I would become an actress later in my life." [212] Around the same time, she notes that she also sees her first play: *Anne*

Frank's Diary—a story that, like *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . , functions with a young, inspired, and female voice.

Indeed, the narrator sticks to her teenage promise in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. In Germany, she responds to a question clearly: “‘What do you want to do in Berlin?’ – ‘I have to earn money, then I’d like to go to drama school.’” [113] It takes no time at all, after she arrives in the FRG, for the narrator to find theater-types. Her communist hostel warden and his friends teach her about Bertolt Brecht, Helene Weigel, and take the narrator to see plays at the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin. She muses frequently on how these new friends of hers constantly talk about Brecht’s greatness, and she gradually adopts a similar obsession with Brecht.

In turn, her interest in the world of Brecht feeds her desires to be an actress. Her apparent passion for theater is marked by the sheer amount of *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* that is dedicated to discussing her relationship with theater, rather than explicit references that say how much she loves theater. Just as a Berliner Ensemble production of epic theater would do, Özdamar and the narrator refrain from injecting explicit indicators of emotion in the novel. One passage that seems to contradict this rule is, in fact, a tongue-in-cheek description of the main character fulfilling her drama class assignment: “We did exercises – Who can look longest into someone else’s eyes? Who arouses the strongest emotions in the other? What do two emotions do with one another? Who fills the whole room with emotions? I was so happy I did cartwheels in the streets.” [127] The narrator may indeed feel this happy about being an actress in Berlin, but she may also just be acting—wanting to embody the most spectacular emotions of anyone in the class. Likewise, the line may be Özdamar pretending that the narrator actually did

cartwheels, in an effort to make fun of the drama class assignment. The action does not quite fit the personality of the narrator, so perhaps this line is merely a sarcastic one, where in vicious Brechtian mode, a more emotional and excessive style of acting is mocked.

Indeed, the narrator is educated in varying styles of theater. In *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, she learns about Stanislavky's ideals for acting from a mysterious and eccentric coach in Anatolian Istanbul. [171-2] This form of drama focuses on getting the actor into the mind of the character, as well as method acting. It also serves as the direct counter for Brecht's epic theater. As another one of her teachers in Turkey describes the argument against Stanislavsky:

You musn't act with the emotions but must act with your head, you must draw on science and analyse the relations between people sociologically. You can't get everything from your bodies. You should listen to what's inside you, but look at, observe your surroundings. With screaming and roaring you don't display the world, but only yourselves. [156]

The narrator continues to describe how this Brechtian method of researching and portraying a character allows the audience members to make their own judgments on the scenarios, while potentially learning something about the world and about themselves. Although *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* are novels, and not dramas, these ideas mirror techniques which Özdamar uses in her writing. By approaching her memoirs as a sociological science experiment, with unreliably emotional nostalgia extracted, she avoids merely reciting history based on her inevitably biased viewpoints. In doing this, the audience—the reader, and the author who is re-experiencing her life as the narrator—may contribute external views of the world to

potentially affect the way they interpret the story as well as their own lives and the real world.

The element of this drama instructor's teachings that "you can't get everything from your bodies" suggests these Brechtian processes could be manifested as a scene of one leaving his or her body, in an effort to shed the intellectually constricting prejudices of one's personal emotions. It could also be approached in reverse, however. The narrator notes: "We students called our two teachers Body Man and Head Man. With one we left our bodies at the classroom door and went into the lesson only with our heads, with the other we left our heads at the classroom door and went into the class as bodies." [156] Using her intellectual mind, she is developing a consciousness of two distinctive ways she can proceed in life. If the mind can enable reasoning, the body can experience pain and joy. The reader of Özdamar's novels may decide where and when the narrator's feelings and emotions of the flesh occur; all the author makes evident is the point of view of "Head Man," so to speak.

In *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . , Özdamar experiments with a concept similar to this when the narrator enters her brief suicidal phase as a teenager—having an out-of-body experience after swallowing a dangerously large amount of aspirin. [225-6] The scene causes a rupture in the novel's linguistic flow, where the narrator is suddenly conscious of her body not hearing verbal questions coming from her family. The narrator's strange state could be explained by a chemical induction, but it also speaks of an existential crisis in the girl's adventurous and vulnerable young mind, and the paralyzing confusion to which her body reacts. Perhaps Özdamar uses this technique here as a way of

maneuvering around direct emotional cues, but she also experiments with separating the narrator's body and mind.

A moment in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* that comes only a few pages before the drama instructor's lesson seems to flash back to this paranormal experience of the narrator's youth. It occurs here, however, not because of depression, but because of a sudden visceral awareness of the actress within her that is, with enough inspiration, unconfined by her body:

I wanted to die onstage like Molière, in the middle of the set. I saw myself onstage, other actors carried me in their arms, I bled from my mouth, died and left behind no children who had to weep after my death. The ship was just in the middle between Asian and European Istanbul. The actress came out of my body, she pushed a man and a child in front of her and threw them from the ship into the Sea of Marmara. The she came back and entered me again. When the ship reached the Asian side, I knew that I never ever wanted to get married. I could hardly wait to get home. Before I got on the bus, I called my mother. "I don't want to marry, I want to go to drama school." [147]

Her mother cannot control her wild inner actress, nor can the pressure she feels to marry upon her return to Istanbul. The fact that the actress leaves the narrator's body while on the Bosphorus points to a level of expressive freedom the narrator gains by traveling between continents. That it jumps out of her while she is headed towards the Asian side of Istanbul—the part of the city that is known for being more steeped in old Turkish traditions and less influenced by modernity, as well as being where her family resides—suggests that this existential crisis arrives during a crossroad in the narrator's life, when she is trying to decide which way to proceed. Her mind and body were both powerfully stimulated while in the west, and in this out-of-body moment, she actually acts her way through a decision making process.

The most glaring out-of-body experience in either of the two novels, however, comes in the *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*'s love scene involving Jordi from Barcelona. Discussed earlier for its emphatic focus on physicality over language, this significant sexual encounter can also be read as a statement by the author that it is useful to separate intellect and feeling when reflecting on memorably affecting moments in life. Making the decision to be an actress, attempting suicide, and having one's first intense love affair would each likely be major life events for anyone. With any major life event that comes packaged with intense feeling, it is quite easy to analyze and overanalyze the memory. By isolating reason and emotion so dramatically in these three scenes in her novels, Özdamar's ultra-rational and unsentimental experiment studies the unstable effects sentiment has on the mind and the body. The author clearly values reason and intellect and their ability to stir complex reactions in her writing, but in these three scenes—and most emphatically in the love scene with Jordi—she finds that intense human emotion appears alien to the rational mind.

The same drama instructor that introduced Body Man and Head Man preached calm, patient, and rational contemplation. For the student activists of the turbulent late 1960s however, this bit of Brechtian theory needed an update:

We shouted like the popular press: “Cry of a worker's child,” “The unheard cry of a poor man,” “A starving people cries out.” Our teacher who loved Brecht, said: “You musn't shout, but research the story. . . . Shouting is your mask. Take off the mask and read history books about the Ottoman Empire.” But we went on shouting and screaming, the shouting went right into our bedrooms, even there we didn't take off this mask. [159-60]

The narrator and her fellow students of theater are drawn to the politically stimulating aspects of Brechtian theory. The student activists' methods of affecting political change,

however, do not utilize such unbiased methods. They shout, scream, connive, refuse, insist, and preach, and although the narrator may have sex to be a better activist, she has sex like a passionate student political activist, not like an intellectual Brechtian. The socialist origins of Brecht's theater naturally appeal to her circle of leftists, however, and unsentimental art is certainly a bit reactionary. Brecht's plays and Godard's films are to dramatic Stanislavsky-style drama as nonviolent protesters are to the status quo of adult life. Her Brecht teacher comments on the delicate art of stirring political passion by engaging intellect: "It's with such precision that you can catch the emotions of the audience and at the same time force it to think about the social circumstances of the unemployed." [162] He is commenting on Brecht's film *Kuhle Wampe* in this quote, and is challenging his students to participate in theater for the sake of improving humanity.

Özdamar challenges the narrator's intentions as an actress, however, by allowing the narrator to question and doubt the effectiveness of their Brecht-inspired theatrical efforts. After a fake stage blood mishap leaves her troupe laughing with grim giddiness, she states:

But then we asked ourselves: People are really dying, and we're laughing, what are we doing here? We thought, we're parasites and are living on the blood of others, who really bled or sweated. Those students who were left-wing asked: Theatre for art's sake or theatre for the people? [159]

This passage inspires discourse on representation of ideas and people the actors wish to defend. If the actors do not understand their subjects first hand, then how are they to defend them?

The narrator makes strong efforts in her theatrical endeavors, however, to research and empathize with the subjects she plays. While portraying a whore in a play directed by her former Communist hostel warden, she befriends prostitutes in Istanbul

brothels. [232] Her efforts to represent functioning members of society with dignity seems especially successful when she surprises herself playing a mother and a child in an acting class: “. . . I once played a woman who was going for a walk with her child. I also played the child. . . . In the part of the mother I imitated my mother and then noticed how tender my mother was to me. So it was at the theatre that I discovered my mother.” [172] Here, the narrator notes that she gained insight into her mother’s perspective by play-acting. It is interesting that Özdamar gives her main character this revelatory power in this scene since discovering by imitation is precisely what the author does throughout both of her novels in order to re-invent her stories.

Once again, the relationship between playwriting and novel writing comes into question as the issue of imitation comes to the foreground, but with this topic, Özdamar’s bridge from the influence on one medium to the other becomes clearer than ever. The author’s experiments, in the form of novels, construct controlled environments wherein the main character can be provoked. However the queer relationship between author and subject in these unconventionally autobiographical tales can be better understood if the scientific laboratory is equated to a theatrical stage. Upon this stage, the main character is an imitation of Özdamar’s life, which has been re-invented for the author to play-act. Özdamar evidently learned how to research, learn, and recreate as an actress of a Brechtian persuasion (affected by many other cultural influences as well). To re-invent, re-experience, and re-remember events from the 1950s and ‘60s, she applies the processes she learned from acting—researching, learning, and recreating—to her writing. While her primary role in her novels is her narrator, every character, setting, and idea in *Life Is a Caravanserai* . . . and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* is an open-ended imitation

of her memories, and each imitation is performed by the author. Özdamar is the scientist performing the experiment, but she is also the test subject. Likewise, she is the actress to her own direction. In this sense, the pertinent artistic influences, including those from her experiences performing onstage, not only serve as catalysts for re-remembering the past, they also lead her to create theatrical novels in which she can continue her career as an actress through imitation and re-invention.

Summary and Conclusions

In her article, “Brechtian Specters in Contemporary Fiction: Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Rohinton Mistry,” Patricia Anne Simpson makes the most definitive argument to date of Bertolt Brecht’s influence on Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Published in The International Brecht Society’s “The Brecht Yearbook 32,” Simpson quotes Leslie Adelson (“Özdamar’s fascination with Brecht is well known, and many of her texts explicitly conjure the legendary German and Marxist playwright as a kind of Turkish Muse”¹³), and notes how “Özdamar reaffirmed her commitment to Brecht’s legacy” at a 2005 reading in Berlin.¹⁴

Aside from this text, the academic literature written about Brechtian methods and influences on Özdamar’s writing mostly assumes the influence to exist because of the explicit references to Brecht in her novels. However, it is known that, during her years as an actress, she participated in productions of at least two plays by Brecht—*Man Equals Man* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.¹⁵ She also performed at the Volksbühne theater

¹³Patricia Anne Simpson, “Brechtian Specters in Contemporary Fiction: Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Rohinton Mistry,” *Brecht and Death / Brecht und der Tod*, eds. Stephen Brockmann et al., *The Brecht Yearbook 32 / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch 32* (Pittsburgh: The International Brecht Society, 2007) 391.

¹⁴Simpson 389.

¹⁵Emine Sevgi Özdamar, “Living and Writing in Germany: Emine Sevgi Özdamar in Conversation with David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky,” *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*, eds. David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996) 45; *The International Artist Database*, 5 June 2009 <<http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?629>>.

in East Berlin under the director Benno Besson from 1976-9.¹⁶ Besson was a pupil of Bertolt Brecht's at the Berliner Ensemble beginning in 1949¹⁷ and would later direct "innumerable productions" of Brecht's plays.¹⁸ The performers at the Volksbühne learned Stanislavsky as well as Brechtian methods of acting.¹⁹ Walfriede Schmitt, an actress who also worked under Besson at the Volksbühne (from 1973 until 1978, when he and Özdamar took a production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to Paris and Avignon²⁰) explained that the Volksbühne carried on Brecht's tradition of utilizing *Verfremdungseffekt* to produce political theater: "We worked a lot externally, premised on the idea of creating distance from the character. If I think about what made ours different from Western theater schools, it would be that we learned a social presence. We learned to incorporate the political situation into our portrayal of a character. Not just a tumult of feelings."²¹ Again, although *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* do not appear to propagate political motives, Özdamar allows her main character to develop a political consciousness—introducing her to a spectrum of political

¹⁶*The International Artist Database.*

¹⁷"Obituary: Benno Besson," *Buzzle.com* 3 April 2006, 28 April 2008 <<http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/4-3-2006-92619.asp>>; "Benno Besson, 83, Director of Plays and Brecht Disciple, Is Dead," *nytimes.com* 25 February 2006, 5 June 2009 <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9403E4DB1F3EF936A15751C0A9609C8B63>>.

¹⁸"Benno Besson, 83."

¹⁹N. Ann Rider, "'Not Peasant Stew! Real Theater for the People!' – Walfriede Schmitt Talks about East German Theater," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 4.2 (1995): 61; *The International Artist Database.*

²⁰Rider 64.

²¹Rider 61.

philosophies, problems affecting lower classes, and challenges facing foreigners. In doing this, the author applies Brechtian ideals of political theater to her novels.

Monika Shafi analyzes the narrator's descriptions of political demonstrations in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*: "They are part of her new life in Germany, something that has to be deciphered and interpreted in order to make sense. German realities appear to be a complex system of unknown signs that require a semiotic approach, resulting in a highly ironic 'Verfremdungseffekt.'"²² Özdamar presents politics in her books from the vantage points of characters that do not fully comprehend matters of state, even while the author herself seems to possess a solid understanding of 1960s German and Turkish historical events. In doing so, she answers two of Brecht's calls by writing political works and by engaging her readers in critical thinking. She manages all of this without explicitly revealing her true political opinions. Azade Seyhan supports this discourse: "Although Özdamar maintains an ironic distance to her tales and resists identification with a community, nation, or institution, like [fellow Turkish-German author Aras] Ören, she does not hesitate to record, with undisguised outrage, the persecution and victimization of innocent citizens by the state and its police."²³ While I do not quite agree that she writes "with undisguised outrage" (if her outrage is apparent in her writing, it is not clearly defined), this analysis accurately notes that the political opinions expressed in these two novels represent widely varying camps, and is often presented in winking and satirical terms. Even as the narrator in *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* finds

²²Shafi 214.

²³Azade Seyhan, "From Istanbul to Berlin: Stations on the Road to a Transcultural/Translational Literature," *German Politics and Society* 74.23 No. 1 (Spring 2005): 166.

herself caught up in romantic notions of revolution brought about by student demonstrations, Özdamar uses her narrator's unrefined aptitude for activism to question all of the characters' political opinions. Seyhan adds:

[Özdamar] reflects on the paralysis of the naïve idealism of student movements that could never be translated into effective social intervention and action, as they were so woefully trapped in hermetic cycles of endless analysis. . . . Political commentary, which only appeared in her writing in allegorical and cryptic forms, becomes a confrontational Brechtian staging in her second novel.²⁴

Özdamar's writing is Brechtian in the sense that it reflects one vantage point of the action. Political opinions are not thoroughly or reliably explained; they are simply observed by the narrator. The confrontation occurs when the reader and Özdamar evaluate these observations.

This "staging" recalls "The Street Scene," where Brecht suggested that a singular explanation of an event could feature inaccurate reporting, but that the audience was free to draw their own judgments in their investigative participation. As Özdamar performs her own examinations of the facts present in her creative experiment, she gradually constructs her main character's narrative voice. As a scientist, the author creates a controlled laboratory and performs tests in an effort to re-remember her past. As an artist, she identifies with the subject of the experiment, re-experiences her past, and develops the narrative voice.

In utilizing Brechtian methods of *Verfremdungseffekt* and political theater, Özdamar re-invents the past using imitation. In this process, she combines her talents as creative scientist and as ingenious writer, but also draws on her theater experience. She

²⁴Seyhan 164-6.

directs her vaguely autobiographical novels as productions of epic theater prose—ones in which she stars, playing every role. *Life Is a Caravanserai . . .* and *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* enable the author to re-invent, re-experience, and re-remember various stages of her life by doing what she loves: performing. Her imitations of people, ideas, and situations from her past—developed especially for her sensibilities, using Brechtian methods that she admires—result in the creation of a unique narrative voice.

Bibliography

“Benno Besson, 83, Director of Plays and Brecht Disciple, Is Dead.” *nytimes.com* 25 February 2006. 5 June 2009
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9403E4DB1F3EF936A15751C0A9609C8B63>>.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Die Literarische Welt* (July 1926). Rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. New York: Hill & Wang, 1964.

---. “Letzte Etappe: Oedipus.” *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (February 1929). Rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. New York: Hill & Wang, 1964.

---. “Schwierigkeiten des epischen Theaters.” *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Literaturblatt). (November 1927). Rpt. in *Brecht on Theatre*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. New York: Hill & Wang, 1964.

---. “The Street Scene: A Basic Model for Epic Theater.” *Brecht on Theatre; The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1964.

Esslin, Martin. *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*. 4th ed. London and New York: Methuen, 1984.

The International Artist Database. 5 June 2009
<<http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?629>>.

“Obituary: Benno Besson.” *Buzzle.com* 3 April 2006. 28 April 2008
<<http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/4-3-2006-92619.asp>>.

Oesmann, Astrid. “The Theatrical Destruction of Subjectivity and History: Brecht’s *Trommeln in der Nacht*.” *The German Quarterly* 70.2 (Spring 1997): 136-50.

Özdamar, Emine Sevgi. *Life Is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went out the Other*. Trans. Luise Von Flotow. London: Middlesex University Press, 2000.

---. *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*. Trans. Martin Chalmers. London: Serpent’s Tale, 2007.

- . "Living and Writing in Germany: Emine Sevgi Özdamar in Conversation with David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky." *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*. Eds. David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996.
- Rider, N. Ann. "'Not Peasant Stew! Real Theater for the People!' – Walfriede Schmitt Talks about East German Theater." Trans. N. Ann Rider. *Contemporary Theatre Review* 4.2 (1995): 59-69.
- Seyhan, Azade. "From Istanbul to Berlin: Stations on the Road to a Transcultural/Translational Literature." *German Politics and Society* 74.23 No. 1 (Spring 2005): 152-69.
- Shafi, Monika. "'Talkin' Bout My Generation: Memories of 1968 in Recent German Novels.'" *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (April 2006): 201-16.
- Simpson, Patricia Anne. "Brechtian Specters in Contemporary Fiction: Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Rohinton Mistry." *Brecht and Death / Brecht und der Tod*. Eds. Stephen Brockmann et al. *The Brecht Yearbook 32 / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch 32*. Pittsburgh: The International Brecht Society, 2007.
- Willett, John, ed. and trans. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1964.