

# Between two nations

## “Beyond Words”: Poems by Nevfel Cumart

Nevfel Cumart is one of the best-known German-language poets of Turkish descent and a much travelled “wanderer between worlds”. His cultural roots in two countries and his polyglot background are infused in his poems, creating an unmistakably unique style. Nobody does it quite like Cumart.

“Um unsere einsamkeit zu vergessen / um unsere sehnsucht zu lindern / erfanden wir / die buchstaben”. Often as short and to the point as this, many of Cumart’s old and new poems have been assembled in this volume entitled “Beyond Words”. Other poems in the book stretch over two pages and tell short stories.

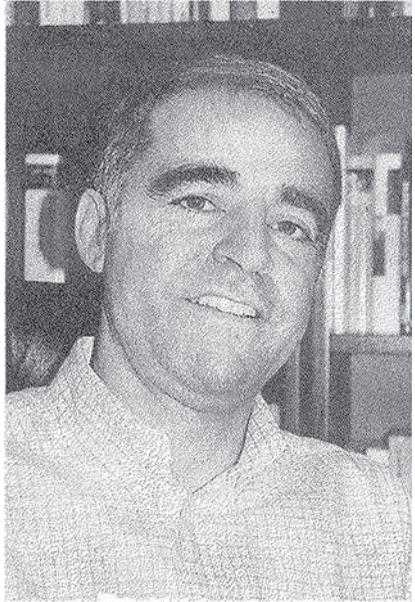
At home in the German village of Stegaurach, near Bamberg, Cumart has so far penned more than a dozen poetry books. Yet, together with “Waves of Time” published in 1998, this book is quite an unusual landmark on the lyrical landscape. Unusual in that English translations appear alongside the German originals. Together with Cumart, Eoin Bourke, an Irish Professor of German Studies, selected the poems for translation and quite clearly excelled at choosing the right words in English.

To appreciate the full extent of this accomplishment, it is should be remembered that Cumart’s poetry is distinctive because it has its very own melody, one that is difficult to replicate in English. And yet, Bourke has managed to switch language whilst preserving the poetry’s oriental whispers. The virtuosity of the English goes as far as the intentional use of laconic language which clearly reflects the German as shown in the poem cited above: “to forget our loneliness / to soothe our yearning / we invented / script.”

### Perceptions of “our own” and “otherness”

The enlightening postface offers a small insight into Cumart’s life and work and is likewise printed both in German and English. This also brings English-language readers one step closer to understanding Cumart’s desire to mediate between what we perceive as our own and otherness or foreignness and, in doing so, to use his own heritage to a positive end. Since English has become the world’s “lingua franca”, this book could also be used in German schools. Whilst acquiring language skills, pupils can gain an insight into foreign cultures

which, on closer inspection, are not all that “foreign” after all; insights that also help us to see what is “our own” with different eyes.



The poems Cumart has brought together in this book cover a broad horizon, both temporally and thematically. They reflect his own family’s past, the poverty in Turkey as well as the mercilessly tough life of a “guest worker” in Germany. And yet, they also touch upon his own more recent travels, to war-torn Vietnam, for example, and upon crises and disasters that affect people all over the world.

The message of humanity pervades all his poems, it is the compass with which Cumart remains firmly on course despite all the setbacks and digs we learn of in the poems. Human achievement is not measured by material or other successes but by the way in which we treat others. We are social beings and Cumart, the worldly poet, reminds us that we possess this special virtue. It can help us cope with challenging situations, it can bring us moments of joy, be it in the lanes of Adana, at the airport in Galway or at home with baby Amelia who has cut her first tooth.

By Stefan Neuhaus

Nevfel Cumart: Beyond Words – Jenseits der Worte. Poems – Gedichte. Translated by Eoin Bourke. Grupello-Verlag, Duesseldorf. 192 pages, EUR 19.80