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Interview

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Interview

Abstract

Taner Baybars a Sorular

GÜR GENÇ

Taner Baybars'a Sorular

GÜR GENÇ: *1955'de Kıbrıs'tan Britanya'ya gitme/göçme nedeniniz sadece eğitim miydi, yoksa ülkenin sürüklenmekte olduğu durumdan uzaklaşma isteğinin de payı var mıydı bunda?*

[Did you emigrate from Cyprus to Britain in 1955 for educational reasons or did your desire to get away from the situation the country was being dragged into also play a part in your decision?]

TANER BAYBAR: My first aim, at the age of 17, was to leave the RAF (where I was working in the Force's technical library) and do something better. This is perfectly normal for a young man at that age; he is not really concerned with the politics of the nation, let alone of the world; he is not able to assess the future developments in his own country. He is motivated, primarily, by his own ambitions. Well, probably all that has now changed. A sense of adventure and cultural curiosity have always been a part of my character. Cyprus, at that time, offered no possibilities for expansion in these domains. Our main literary exchange took place at Mapolar's bookshop. It must not be forgotten that many others who were of the same mind, and a lot older than me, had already taken the route either to Turkey or to England. Quite by chance I discovered, more or less at the same time, the municipal library on the moat at the bottom of Ledra Street, and the British Council Library on the other side of the moat. They were god-sent! I devoured all the books that appealed to me, and Maurice Cardiff at the British Council encouraged me strongly to write in English. His other protégé was Mehmet Münür, an artist who left for London long before me. Apart from that I was greatly influenced by Ayhan Hikmet and Ahmet Gürkan who were my mentors and guides, and in spite of the age difference, they treated me as an equal. They both urged me to go to England and study law and then return to the island where people would listen only to doctors and barristers, but those involved in the arts or literature would be mocked or ignored. Both Ayhan and Ahmet knew London very well. An equally important factor was that I already had cousins in Britain in various universities, Edinburgh, Nottingham. So there was nothing unusual or ominous about my decision to leave Cyprus.

GG: *18 yaşındayken yayınladığınız ilk şiir kitabı 'Mendilin Ucundakiler'deki şiirler Türkçe'ydi, arada 7 tane İngilizce kitap (çeviriler hariç) yazıp*

yayınladınız. Uzun yıllar sonra, 1997'de tekrar ana-dilinize döndünüz ve Türkçe şiirler yazmaya başladınız. Ne sebep oldu buna?

[Your first poetry book, Mendilin Ucundakiler, was in Turkish, and in between, you published seven books in English, translations not included. After many years, in 1997 you went back to your mother tongue to write poems in Turkish again. What was the reason for this?]

TB: This question keeps coming up every time I am interviewed or something is written about me. Frankly, I am very puzzled. First of all, my secondary school education at the Lycée was entirely in English except Turkish and Greek language lessons once a week. Eighteen months at the RAF introduced me to the real spoken English, the civil service jargon, the Cockney, the slang. Then arriving in England, everything became English! You must remember that I was only 18 years old plus a few months. What we call language is something like air you breathe in and exhale every day. How on earth can one live in an entirely English environment, especially at such a young age, and avoid being influenced by the language that one is breathing daily. You stop hearing the language you were born to. A Jewish friend of mine said that his father, an émigré from Russia, told him many years later, that when he realised that he was dreaming and counting in English, his mother tongue was pushed to the background. Once you dream and count in a different language, he added, your own language has gone, whether you like it or not. It is now twenty years since I have been in France but I still dream and count in English although I speak French quite well, simply because I arrived here much too old. These factors must be taken into account when discussing why someone from Cyprus starts writing in English; or a Pole; or a Pakistani — it is the age that matters, nothing else. In my case, there is also the question of the changing nature of Turkish. To me, certain modern texts make very little sense because the language is being invented all the time, and I cannot understand it. Yet when I talk to people, their Turkish is no different from what I speak, but if I write as I speak, they call it *Osmanlı Türkçesi!* Yes, a language evolves, but inventing new words is like creating an artificial language, a Turkish Esperanto, if you like, derived from Turkic roots which are as dead as Latin or Aramaic. To imagine that one could follow all these lingual changes, on the other side of Europe, and continue to write in one's original language is, very simply, not realistic. Just look at what is going on in Germany among the Turkish immigrants and the second generation...

Yes, I did write some Turkish poems a few years back; in fact when I first moved to Mediterranean France from the Charente. Some Cypriot Turks came to stay with me and we spoke Turkish all the time. There was also the satellite TRT International which filled my ears with Turkish

words I had forgotten. Those poems in Turkish resulted from these two experiences as, from time to time, I am impelled to write certain poems in French.

GG: *Dile duyulan ihtiyacı, ‘kaybetme’ ve ‘yokluk’ duygularıyla açıklar Lacan. Bu önermeye şiir açısından yaklaşacak olursak, ‘kaybetmek’ ve ‘yokluk’ un sizin şiirinizle ilintisi nedir?*

[Lacan explains the need for language with the emotions ‘loss’ and ‘absence’. If we are to approach this proposition from poetry’s point of view, what is the relation of your poetry with ‘loss’ and ‘absence’?]

TB: Lacan’s theories are based almost entirely on the use of the French language. With some drastic modifications they could be applied to other languages as well, I suppose. I don’t know. I am not really qualified to comment on Lacan and his psychoanalytic methods. My sources in this respect are Alfred Adler and Karen Horney. I don’t understand what you mean by ‘kaybetmek’ and ‘yokluk’. They have never played a part in my life except in the first four years on arriving in London where I knew none. At that time I was busily writing in Turkish, not poetry but what I called ‘Londra’nın Mikrokosmosundan İskeçler’. They were published in *Yeditepe* and my short stories about London life in *Hisar*. I have no idea what has become of them. Now, those might well explain the Lacanian concept of loss (yokluk) and the substitution of that loss with words. Apart from that period, my language evolved as I heard it, read it, and wrote it. Without the slightest sense of loss or regret!

GG: *Şiiriniz hem Batı hem Doğu kaynaklı imgelerin kesişme noktası. Hemen hemen her şiirinizde metafizik bir boyut var. Dinle olan ilişkinizden mi ileri geliyor bu, yoksa zaten şiir metafizik derinliği olması gereken bir sanat mıdır?*

[Your poetry is often the point of intersection of images from both West and East. Almost all your poems have a metaphysical dimension. Is this because of your relationship with religion, or does the art of poetry have to have a metaphysical dimension anyway?]

TB: I am not really aware that my poetry or anything else that I have been writing deserves this generous accolade! That reminds me of one of my teachers who was imported from Turkey for Ortaokul, to offset the importation of English teachers at the Lycée. I was still in Ortaokul at that time. I can’t remember his name. He was our Maths teacher. One day on the playground I asked him how he knew so much about everything. He told me that kültür dediğimiz şey, okuyup araştırmamız sonunda aklımızda kalan esansdır. [What we call culture is the essence of what we have read and researched]. So, when I write, I am not thinking about my origins

or my present circumstances. I write because I must and the result has nothing to do with my ethnic background or beliefs.

A great Jewish philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber, said that religion is the greatest obstacle between man and God. He said that it is enough to accept the uniqueness and greatness of a creator and recognise His will. In short: to be Godful. That is very different from being religious. But like most concepts —spiritual, political or whatever — religion assumes a different guise from one nation to another, from one individual to another. Look at the tragic interpretation of religion in Iraq, or of Christianity in recent Irish history. It is like a bottle of perfume which has a different scent on each person who rubs it on his or her skin. On the other hand, a mystical belief in God, the Being beyond our comprehension, the Omnipotent and the Omnipresent, does not change if we approach the belief free from an organised order of worship.

Doubts about a polytheistic universe began with the Greek philosophers, and Plato (Eflatun) and Socrates explored the possibility of a universe with one single Godhead. Similarly, in our own age we are becoming more and more convinced of the existence of parallel or contrary universes (multiverse, in Quantum Physics). Monotheism belongs to the three Semitic religions: Judaic, Christian and Islam. Although there is a charm in the Greek concept of a hierarchy of gods, to which I was deeply attracted in my early teens, in later years I found that the essential facet missing from the Greek mythological faith was a personal mystical element. On the other hand, the Greek myths reflect the primordial awe of nature, human fears, the force of emotions, and the reasons for the wonders of our lives, far more than any established religion...

In Islam I am very much drawn to the Sufis, to Rumi. I think that Yunus Emre is one of the greatest humanists ever and if my good friend Tâlât Halman hadn't translated his poems so magnificently, Yunus would have been one of my major translation projects. It may come to you as a surprise but the most eloquent, the most precise mystical expression I have found is in Dede Korkut: I believe it is in Deli Dumrul when the ozan geldi, söz söyledi, şöyle dedi, 'Ulu Tanrım, yücelerden yücesin, kimse bilmez nicesin; cebbar Tanrım, kimi cahiller seni gökte arar yerde ister, ama sen gönüller gönlündesin'. In Ođuz Turkish, this revelation is even more poignant. If everyone remembered that they are in fact carrying the essence of God within themselves, there would be no conflict, no bloodshed. Religion is responsible for all the troubles in the world not because of the belief a religion declares but because human beings are always trying to impress their own ideas, not their faith, on other people. They use religion as a tool to manufacture their misdeeds. If, on the other hand, religion is used in a positive, fruitful manner, then you have architectural masterpieces to the glory of God, art and great poetry.

Maimonides (Jewish), St Augustine (Christian) and Ibn' Sinâ [Avicenna in Latin texts] (Moslem) are the three most significant mystics, but there are many others, of course, who followed them. What I am trying to say is not new: if you delve into the *mutasavvıf* period of Ottoman literature, you'll find poetry that transcends the boundaries of religion.

GG: *Ayrıca erotik bir enerji ve gerilim var birçok şiirinizde, özellikle 'Nergis Susuz Göl İçinde' adlı kitabınızla başlayan dönemde ve sonrasında. Hatta, Fransızca yazdığınız 'Erotik-Aşk Haikusu' ve Türkçe yazdığınız 'Ömerge Sokağı 1952 Yaş 16' gibi şiirleriniz pornografik bile sayılabilir. Şiirinizdeki erotik ve pornografik öğeler hakkında ne söyleyebilirsiniz*

[Also, many of your poems have an erotic tension and energy, especially the period that began with 'Narcissus in Dry Pool' and after. Furthermore, 'Haiku Erotique' which you wrote in French and poems you wrote in Turkish such as 'Ömerge Sokağı 1952 Yaş 16' can even be considered pornographic. What can you say about this?]

TB: You are probably right. I wasn't conscious of that. I want to feel free to write about any subject that inspires me. In order to do that you have to employ the language the subject demands of you. If you are talking about love it wouldn't occur to you to choose another word for 'heart' because it is, essentially, a term used in describing an anatomical organ. [But there was a time in English literature when 'leg' was banned; you had to say 'limb'.] We remember it now with a tolerant smile; the haiku you mention was read to a mixed group of poetry lovers in the town of Confolens. In French. No one blushed, no one protested. If, instead of clitoris, I had said, 'female penis', that would have been just too awful, and insulting to a woman. The Ömerge poem would have been impossible to write without the words I have used there.

GG: *Özellikle 2000 yılında yayımlanan son İngilizce şiir kitabınız, 'Tilki ve Beşik Yapanlar'da hemen hemen her şiirde bir 'tilki' imgesi var. Şiirinizdeki bu tilki imgesi neyi simgeliyor?*

[Especially in your last English poetry book, Fox and the Cradle-makers, published in 2000, almost every poem has an image of a fox in it. What does the fox symbolise in your poetry?]

TB: My first seven years passed in Vassilia. There were many foxes on the mountain slopes but all the village folk talked about them with respect and admiration. Then, in the family, they began to call me 'tilkicik', because I had an answer to everything, and I managed to avoid getting into trouble. My mother had a fox fur that she used to put round her shoulders when we went out in Nicosia. I refused to come anywhere near her when she had that fur on. Eventually she gave it away. Those button (boncuk) eyes on

that fox's head! I'll never forget them. Apart from these early influences, there is something else about a fox that appeals to me: although he loves his home and his family, a fox is a lonely hunter. See, for example, how Fox is dying in *Çobanaldatan*.... Alone!

GG: *Bazı eleştirmenler Britanya edebiyatına dahil ederken, bazıları da Kıbrıs Edebiyatının bir parçası olarak görüyor sizi. Siz en fazla hangi dil ve coğrafyaya ait hissediyorsunuz kendinizi? Ya şiiriniz?*

[Some critics include you in British Literature; others see you as part of Cyprus Literature. What language and geography do you feel you belong to? And what about you poetry?]

TB: What I have said about language in your question above, partly answers this. I was born as a 'British Subject' and all my documents show me as British Citizen. If this description applies to my passport, my pension from the British government, why should it change when it comes to literature? Besides, it is the language that claims you and not your origin. It would be ludicrous to classify Joseph Conrad as a Polish writer; Nabokov as Russian; Tom Stoppard as Czech; Rushdie as Indian ... and many others. I think this concern about who belongs to where is found only in younger nations. Even such an Irish poet as Seamus Heaney is found under English literature. I believe that it would be perfectly in order to describe me as 'British poet of Cypriot (or, Cypriot-Turkish) origin', as you would Conrad as British of Polish or Nabokov of Russian origin, and so forth...

There is something else that you might find interesting. In libraries there is a classification called 'Dewey' and it is used internationally. My books all have the reference 821 which indicates English literature; the books have appeared in the English language. Moris Farhi is of Turkish origin but he lives in London and writes in English. If you look up his book *Young Turk* on the British Library Integrated Catalogue website, you'll see that it is first classified as British fiction, 823, then 914 which is Turkish history.

GG: *30 yıl kadar İngiltere'de yaşadıktan sonra Fransa'ya, atalarınız olarak kabul ettiğiniz Lüzinianlar'ın yaşadığı bölgeye taşındınız? Bu süreci anlatır mısınız?*

[After you lived in England for about thirty years you moved to France, the region where the Lusignans used to live, who you accept as you ancestors. Can you tell us about this process?]

TB: I really am glad to have the opportunity to correct this misconception. It all began with a visit from a Cypriot poet and his wife to my house in the Charente, near Angoulême. His wife was studying the myths of Cyprus and the subject included the Lusignan dynasty in Cyprus. The Lusignans ruled the island for three hundred years almost as long as the Turks; some three

hundred years of reign. I jokingly said that the Lusignans must have left a genetic imprint on the Cypriot population, and especially in the Paphos area where there were more blonde people than anywhere in Cyprus. My maternal grandparents were from the Paphos region, and in our family there are many sarışınlar. Again, as a joke, I said that I might well have been drawn to Angoulême, not Lusignan, which was a part of the Angoumois Kingdom. Where I used to live in Charente, is more than 150 km from the small town of Lusignan but only 33 km from Angoulême. The reason for choosing the house that I bought in the Charente near Angoulême, was purely financial: it was the only property I could afford at that time. The rest is coincidence. That such an innocent remark should be thrown out of context and blown into a historical fact, is a lesson not to make such jokes even in intimate company! Angoulemi used to exist on the map of Cyprus before the Turkish revision of topographical names. Angoulemi, quite obviously is from Angoulême, but apart from that, there are many other villages in Cyprus, particularly in the South-West of the island, which are corruptions of names that exist to this day in Poitou-Charente, the ancient Lusignan-Angoumois Kingdom. This fact was diligently observed by my old friend Georges der Parthogh and his wife Lana who came to visit me soon after I moved there.

Now I live on the Mediterranean coast, not far from Narbonne. Narbonne was the first Roman colony outside Italy. Is someone now going to suggest that I have moved here because of the Roman ruins of Salamis in Cyprus? And that I have descended from the Romans who ruled Cyprus?

GG: *Fransa'ya taşındıktan sonra, bir dönem bağcılık ve meyvecilik işleriyle uğraştınız. Bu dönemi anlatabilir misiniz?*
[After you settled in France, for a while you dealt with vinery and fruit growing. Can you tell us about this period?]

TB: While reading your question I couldn't help smiling! These are all romantic concepts in the mind of someone who wants to see you doing all these things because it will sound interesting to readers. I have a vague idea where the rumour comes from, but ... in popular journalism this is understandable, however deplorable it may be. In literary journalism, it is simply very sad. I have no idea how this story came about. Of course, like most convincing lies, it is based on fact. I did have a large garden in my first house and planted several fruit trees for my own consumption. Under the influence and the guidance of my winegrowing neighbours, and with a lot of physical help from them, I planted around eighty vines. The most popular drink of the Charente is called pinot a naturally sweetish wine that is drunk as an aperitif. My vine stock would produce around fifty litres of pinot. I was experiencing a new approach to life after thirty-five years of

books and library work in London. Anything different, I embraced with joy! If you talk about –cılık and –cilik, it sounds like a business, but what I was doing was entirely for my own pleasure... and a little present to visiting friends.

GG: *Genel olarak şiirlerinizde doğayla sıkı bir yakınlık, Urban değil de daha çok kırsala dönüklük görüüyor. Doğayla olan ilişkinizden ve bu ilişkinin şiirinizi nasıl etkilediğinden bahsedebilir misiniz?*

[Generally in your poetry, there is proximity to nature, a turning not to urban but to rural life. How would you describe your relationship with nature and how does it affect your poetry?]

TB: In my book about my childhood in Cyprus, *Plucked in a Far-Off Land* (*Uzak Ülke* in Turkish translation, YKY), I give a detailed account of my first ten years, first in Vassilia and then in Minareli Köy. By the way, in *Uzak Ülke*, for some mysterious printer's error, Vassilia is irritatingly spelled as Vavilia or something like that... No matter, but actually, it matters a lot! Of course, during those very formative years, the rural impressions on your mind last more than a lifetime! I have always been a lot happier in quiet and serene places than in bustling cities. Even when I was young, I never wanted to go to a discotheque although I was quite happy to dance to such music at private parties. In London I was happy because after the bustle of the city I was able to return to my house on Highgate Woods and relax in the rural surroundings, do gardening and mow the lawn. In the Charente it was even better. Down here in the noisy and unruly town of Saint-Chinian, not to be recommended to anyone, I am still not far from what they call the garrigue, the open meadows and hillsides, exciting vegetation and bird life. And I am only twenty minutes from the Mediterranean. Not more than forty minutes from the mountain range of the Espinouses. These influences inevitably come into my poems, particularly in the Miu Sequence, a part of which has been included in *Çobanaldatan*. I haven't turned against city life. I love visiting Paris, Toulouse, Montpellier, Avignon, Aix en Provence... These are cultural visits. They don't inspire me with images; whereas a walk in the vineyards, or on the rocky hills, does. There is always something to look out for, and discover, such as the French aliç. At the moment it is the season for the perfume of broom. I can also hear the nightingale, even in this noisy and filthy town of Saint-Chinian, as soon as the traffic noise dies down. Nature is always within walking distance.

GG: *Eskiden Türkçe öyküler de yazmıştınız. Bunları bir kitapta toplamayı düşünmediniz mi? Sonrasında başka öyküler yazmadınız mı?*

[In the past you wrote short-stories in Turkish. Have you ever thought about collecting and publishing them as a book? Have you written more short-stories since?]

TB: No, the idea never occurred to me because I haven't written many and what I have written wouldn't make a book. In any case, the short-stories that I wrote in Turkish were all published either in Turkey or in Cyprus. I have no record of them. I have written some short stories in English for an English journal published in Montolieu (the book town of the Languedoc region in France). They are chiefly in the category of the supernatural which I find an eminently suitable subject for short stories.

GG: *Henüz Türkçe'ye çevrilmeyen, 1965'te yayınlanmış A Trap For The Burglar adlı bir romanınız var, ama yeni basımı yapılmadığı için kitapçılarda bulunmuyor ve dolaşımda değil. Yeni basımını yapmayı düşünmüyor musunuz?*

[You have published a novel called, A Trap For The Burglar (1965) that has not been translated into Turkish yet. However, because it is out of print in the U.K it is difficult to find. Have you thought about reprinting it?]

TB: This book is still available from Australian booksellers because the illustrations were by one of the greatest Australian artists of the last century, Arthur Boyd. The Amazon prices are extremely high. No one has approached me for a reprint as Ruth Keshishian did for a reprint of *Plucked in a Far-off Land*. Maybe one day ... who knows...

GG: *Eskiden Taner Fikret Baybars olarak biliniyordunuz. Göbek adınızdan neden vazgeçtiniz?*

[You used to be known as Taner Fikret Baybars. Why have you dropped the middle name?]

TB: Now, another opportunity to put the record straight; thank you. My family name is, in fact, Evliyazâde. But my father was known only as Halil Fikret. When I was eight years old, I made friends with Vamık Volkan, whose name had been Vamık Celal. So, I decided to change my surname as well! Kemal Rüstem was beginning to publish his *Yeni Mecmua* and through my uncle Hasan he asked me and Vamık to contribute a short poem. I was only eight at that time and desperate to adopt my own surname. We were in Minareliköy and my father used to conduct a kind of educational evening class for adults. I used to go along with him. On one of those occasions he talked about the Baybars dynasty, the exploits of the sultans. I was fascinated. Much against his protests I assumed the name Baybars and my poem in *Yeni Mecmua* was published under Taner Fikret Baybars.

Many years later my young brother adopted the same name, to my great surprise, and to my greater surprise my own father and mother adopted the name Baybars! Am I unique in giving my chosen name to my own parents?

GG: *Uzun yıllardan beri günlük tutuyorsunuz. Bu günlüklerden söz eder misiniz?
[You have kept a diary for many years. Can you tell us about these diaries?]*

TB: Yes, that is true. I started keeping a pocket diary in 1947 when I was barely eleven years old, mainly because a cousin whom I loved very much, just like a young aunt, was getting married to an Arab hotel owner in Jaffa, and Palestine was about to bleed, a wound inflicted by armchair politicians of the West. The wound remains open to this day. In any case, my young cousin went there for her wedding and I kept hearing the news from my uncles. I felt a great impulse to keep a record of all the events of those months which became years, and they contain a boy's concern about war and its disasters. Unfortunately those diaries from 1947 to 1952, written in Turkish, I left in our house in Ortaköy. They disappeared among many other precious childhood possessions after the death of my parents and the mysteriously undocumented sale of the house. I have no idea what happened to them or to the furniture, and I never received a proper account from the so-called solicitor who was looking after my parents' will.

Luckily, though, I have all the others, from 1953 (written in English) to the present day. The main emphasis is on what is happening around me rather than to me; you might call it a running history of personal, social and political developments. Sometimes I do dwell a lot on health, on emotional distresses, but the main purpose of what I write almost daily is to record our times, to describe people in my life, their problems, their joys... The books will be of historical interest to social researchers, chronicling the developments in three disparate countries over sixty years or more. They will be deposited at Reading University where there is a Baybars Collection already. Apart from these journals I have a comprehensive collection of photographs to accompany the text.

GG: *Son dönemde şiir ve düzyazıdan çok, resimle uğraşıyorsunuz, sergiler açıyorsunuz. Resim olayı ne zaman, nasıl başladı? Kaç sergi açtınız?*

[Lately, more than poetry and prose you work on painting and holding exhibitions. When did you start painting, and why? How many exhibitions have you held?]

TB: For a very long time I have always wanted to use colours, to mix them, as I do words, to make them vibrate... Neither my job in London, nor the circumstances allowed that. When I began to live in the Charente, I met a delightful Dutch couple. The husband encouraged me to paint because of my comments on his paintings. He sensed that I had a good eye for colour. He gave me free lessons for three or more years, once a week which became a social occasion to eat, to discuss the arts, literature and music. So, that was the beginning, and the year was 1991! The Charente

is not a region for artistic activities like the Mediterranean coast. When I came down here, I was encouraged by the throbbing artistic energy. I got right into it and have changed styles and techniques over the years. I love it for a very good reason: you paint, you have a sufficient number of canvases or whatever, and then you have an exhibition. That takes no more than three to six months. What you have created is already out there for the public to love or to hate.

Writing is not like that. You spend a year to write a novel; you spend several years to write poems to form a book. Then you have to send the scripts out and wait, and wait, and wait... Then the answer is 'no', so you start all over again. This is an adventure for young writers and I am not young. Only my creative energies are young but I have no patience. Even if I have no bookings in galleries or anywhere else, I can display my art work at home, and people do come, from all over the region. Things will be even better when I establish my blog for word and art.

I continue to write, of course, especially my daily journal and my essays but I don't really see my essays published in my lifetime. The sequence of poems that I began to write some years ago, for my Chinese girlfriend Miu, continues. But there are no takers. Magazine publishers in England expect, nowadays, poetry broken into plain lines from a piece of prose. I hope this disease doesn't infect Turkish poetry which is still as poetry should be: 'an experience or emotion that cannot be expressed in any other way'.

GG: *1955'de ayrıldığımız Kıbrıs'a bir daha dönmediniz, nedenini sorabilir miyim?*
[You left Cyprus in 1955 but you have not returned since. Can I ask why?]

TB: This is not only with Cyprus. For instance, I have been in France for far longer than I ever lived in Cyprus! True! I have been back to England only five times because it is close, but five times in twenty years doesn't indicate frequent visits... I have seen the videos and DVDs of Cyprus, recorded by friends and relatives. There is nothing in them that I recognise or identify with. I received a photograph of the school house and the mosque in Vassilia, my first seven years passed there, and I looked at it unbelieving that the mountain was so close when to my child's eye it was distant, distant, distant... The great avenue (in my mind) of Victoria Street, is no more than a lane! These images of the past would collide very badly with the reality of now, and I am not certain that the result might not be a tremendous burden on mind and psyche. I should have returned much earlier but the political situation made that impossible, and when I was ready to return, it was too late.

Because, the tragedy of Cyprus left me benumbed. The present situation is entirely due to the ineffectual handling of the 1974 crises by the British government. It was a political miscalculation, not to say folly, of Wilson

and Callaghan. If they had intervened, Turkey would not have taken the action that she took in the end. Ecevit said so in their meeting in London, the Wilson administration remained inert. It is hardly surprising that in the Middle East, wherever you look, wherever you find a mess, there is a stamp of the Lion and the Unicorn. Anyone who needs to understand exactly what happened to Cyprus, from a totally objective point of view, to understand fully the catastrophe in Cyprus, should read, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954–59*, by Robert Holland who is the authority on the subject. The two Cypriot communities have been used, divided and set against each other by the British (and obliquely by the USA) for the sole purpose of maintaining airbases on the island. And who paid the price? And Iraq is now being demolished for very similar reasons.

So, I would prefer to relish the memories of that glorious past than a revisit that will certainly bulldoze them.