

Subverting Literary Allusions in Eliot and Özdamar

Walter Rankin  
*George Mason University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rankin, Walter. "Subverting Literary Allusions in Eliot and Özdamar." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1318>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1318)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**CLCWeb Volume 8 Issue 3 (September 2006) Article 6**  
**Walter Rankin, "Subverting Literary Allusions in Eliot and Özdamar"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/6>>

---

**Contents of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 8.3 (2006)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/>>

---

**Abstract:** In his paper, "Subverting Literary Allusions in Eliot and Özdamar," Walter Rankin explores the opposing ways allusion can be used in the works of major and minority authors. While Eliot is a canonized author whose *The Waste Land* is characterized by allusions to Eastern and Western works supplemented with his own comprehensive endnotes, Özdamar is a Turkish-German author whose *A Cleaning Woman's Career* subjects Western literary and historical figures -- including *Medea*, *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, *Nathan the Wise*, *Julius Ceasar*, an Hitler and Eva Braun - - to the interpretive powers of a Turkish cleaning woman working as a guest worker (*Fremdarbeiterin*) in Germany. In contrast to Eliot's literary and anthropological amalgam, Özdamar's text centers exclusively on characters so well-established and recognizable that their emergence is awarded no further explanation even as they are brought together through the ramblings of her beleaguered narrator. By employing this literary device, Özdamar and other minority authors can assume a position of discursive power on their own and in relation to canonical texts, bringing their works a heightened level of legitimacy and authority.

## Walter RANKIN

### Subverting Literary Allusions in Eliot and Özdamar

In a 1996 interview with David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky, Turkish-born German author Emine Sevgi Özdamar commented on her aesthetic and deliberate desire to write in the German language while living and working in Germany: "I was also attracted to German as a new language. You see, at that time, I often traveled back to Turkey by train, finding myself together with ... all migrant workers. Their common language was German ... They made mistakes, of course, but the German they spoke was devoid of clichés and came out almost like poetry as they struggled to express the images of their mother tongue in this new language. And this, as I now realized, was the language of some five million Gastarbeiter [guest workers]" (47). Özdamar arrived in Germany in 1965 at the age of nineteen, and she was among the early groups of Gastarbeiter following Germany's Labor Importation Contract with Turkey in 1961. Following World War II, Germany found itself in great need of workers to help during the rebuilding process, and it turned to migrant workers as a primary resource of inexpensive, mostly manual labor. By 1973, migrant workers made up nearly twelve percent of the work force, the majority arriving from Turkey (Panayi 217). These workers were mostly young, and mostly male, and they almost invariably encountered the worst working conditions for the least amount of pay. In fact, wages for male migrant workers averaged more than seventy-five percent below those of native Germans performing similar services (Panayi 223). Typically, these workers lived in poor communal accommodations, and they maintained a limited command of the standard (High) German language owing to their physical and social divisions apart from German society (Panayi 224). However, this forced commingling of migrant languages led to the spontaneous and necessary creation of a utilitarian language and, ultimately, to the poetic hybrid tongue described by Özdamar. In *The Rustle of Language* Roland Barthes examines our linguistic power struggle: "In contemporary societies, the simplest division of languages bears on their relation to Power. There are languages which are articulated, which develop, and which are marked in the light (or the shadow) of Power, of its many state, institutional, ideological machineries ... And facing them, there are languages which are elaborated, which feel their way, and which are themselves outside of Power and/or against Power" (107).

The language of these (im)migrant workers certainly began outside of Power, and, in truth, it has remained there for the most part due not just to its relative newness, but also to the nature of German society in relation to that which is foreign. According to Azade Seyhan, the writing of Turkish-German authors like Özdamar "is by no means unified; nor is it easily classifiable along gender, ethnic, and class lines. Herein lies one of the challenges of cultural translation, for the cultural production of the 'Other' has to be understood in its own historical context and in its relation to and dialogue with German literary traditions and cultural institutions" (418). Özdamar is able to take this language and use it to create boundary-crossing and boundary-shifting works that subsume and subvert the Power around her. In her discussion of Özdamar's 1990 collection of short stories called *Mutterzunge* (Mothertongue), Bettina Brandt notes that the author and her narrator are "shaped by three different languages: Turkish, Arabic, and German ... [As] language pairs, neither Turkish and German, nor Turkish and Arabic, nor Arabic and German have, from the perspective of historical linguistics, much in common" (31). This linguistic disparity strengthens Özdamar's unique voice, however, and Annette Wiersche maintains, "Özdamar plays with the German language, interspersing it with foreign metaphors, foreign-sounding words, and exotic linguistic constructions and violating grammatical rules ... In doing this, a foreignness within the language is established that has its own charm and carries a poetic sound and rhythm" ("Özdamar spielt mit der deutschen Sprache, durchsetzt sie mit fremden Metaphern, fremdklingenden Wörtern und exotischen sprachlichen Konstruktionen und verstößt gegen grammatikalische Regeln ... Dadurch wird in der Sprache eine Fremdheit hergestellt, die für deutsche LeserInnen einen ganz eigenen Reiz hat und einen poetischen Klang und Rhythmus trägt") (173; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine; on Özdamar, see also, e.g., Milz <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/4/>>).

The compound term "guest worker" carries ironic and conflicting messages within German society (so also in Austria), and it delineates clearly the power structure on social and economic levels. As David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky explain, "In German everyday culture, the host is obliged to be polite, fair, and courteous to a guest, while the guest is expected to follow the rules of conduct that prevail in the host's home. That guests should never outstay their welcome has been one of the key rules of German hospitality" (xviii). Thus, the guest workers were welcome for a limited stay, and although they could renew their contracts, they were not encouraged to live indefinitely. Being labeled "guests" ensured that these workers should not regard Germany as more than a temporary dwelling away from their permanent home, just as the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (which included the Reich Citizenship Law) defined the right of citizenship to the nationality of the blood (*ius sanguini*). For the children of guest workers raised in Germany, the dichotomy of their identity became ever more severe. Even though they often spoke German with native fluency and may have never visited their parents' home of origin, they were considered residents of Germany -- not legal citizens. According to Panikos Panayi, their education was often conducted apartheid-style in rooms separate from the native German children with German parents. Fewer of these students were geared towards the *Gymnasium* (high school), the preparatory school preceding entry into the university, further defining their space outside of those professions requiring higher education. As late as 1996 in Germany, Arlene Teraoka explained, "Naturalization, though possible in theory, is rare in practice: only 1% of foreigners (and 0.75% of Turks) are naturalized citizens, although the majority (60%) have resided in Germany for over a decade" (136). Germany's revised Nationality Law of 1999, which went into effect on 1 January 2000, resulted in some dramatic changes in how foreign-born residents and their children could become citizens (see German Embassy <[http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/06/other\\_\\_legal\\_\\_matters/Reform\\_\\_Germany\\_s\\_\\_citizenship\\_\\_seite.html](http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/06/other__legal__matters/Reform__Germany_s__citizenship__seite.html)>). The waiting period to become a naturalized citizen was decreased, for example, from fifteen to eight years, and children of foreign-born parents living in Germany could now be considered citizens from birth providing their parents met specific residence criteria. In the context of Özdamar's early texts, however, such radical changes would have seemed quite improbable. Unfortunately, the implementation of a number of integration reforms have stalled within Chancellor Angela Merkel's increasingly fractious government, and "the question of integrating foreigners in Germany has led to disagreements within the Great Coalition" ("Die Frage der Integration von Ausländern in Deutschland hat zu Unstimmigkeiten innerhalb der Großen Koalition geführt"; see "Koalitionsstreit" <[http://zeus.zeit.de/text/online/2006/15/integration\\_0804](http://zeus.zeit.de/text/online/2006/15/integration_0804)>). A national conference on integration -- to include representatives from the federal and local governments along with members of the political parties, businesses, scholars, public intellectuals, and religious organizations -- remains in the planning stages.

In relation to the political and societal issues concerning guest workers and their children, Özdamar is remarkable in several regards. As a female guest worker from Turkey, she was one of the few women initially to come to Germany on her own, working in a factory, and not as a dependent joining a working spouse or parent. Indeed, even by 1981 there were only 658 Turkish women for every 1,000 Turkish men living in Germany. When Özdamar arrived in 1965, she would have been among the initial group of guest workers who were not allowed to bring their families with them and who "would find themselves living in communal accommodation ... consisting of mass overcrowded quarters with minimum furnishing and poor cooking and sanitary provision, administered by house managers in an authoritarian manner" (see Panayi 219-20). Additionally, she did learn the language, and she learned to manipulate it and play with it, becoming the first non-native speaker of German to be awarded the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize Competition in 1991 for a live reading from her at the-time unpublished novel with the lengthy, stream-of-consciousness title *Life Is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors through One I Came in and through the Other I Went Out* (*Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai hat zwei Türen aus einer kam ich rein aus der anderen ging ich raus*). In her discussion of fiction and autobiography, Patricia Fox asserts that a number of authors view their displacement as "a cathartic return to a world never glimpsed, vaguely remembered from childish imaginings" or with "a truncated longing or a half-hearted res-

ignation" (Fox <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/2/>>). This view resounds with Özdamar: in her largely autobiographical writings, Özdamar came to view her own "displacement" in Germany as a realm for self-discovery and reflection, a place where she did not outstay her welcome, but rather where she could continue her search for identity where writing "was more like a search for identity, but in a foreign country it is different from the process you undergo in your homeland. When you are in a strange land it is almost like an archeological dig. You delve and you delve, right back to your origins in your mother's belly" (Harrocks and Kolinsky 50).

Analyzing the work of a so-called "minority" author is likewise similar to an archeological dig -- what lies beneath a fresh surface may be the remains of canonized texts and Western cultures. Inherent in this type of analysis is the anthropological and semantic problem of categorizing texts using the terms "minority" and "majority." In addition to implying that unavoidable power struggle among languages and cultures as described by Barthes, using this terminology further cements their divisions and ignores their arbitrary nature. It therefore appears that the minority text operates primarily when defined against the major works rather than among them. The result is a singularly defined discourse averse to both change and inclusion. Karen Jankowsky notes, "The process of developing a multicultural understanding of literature in German is, however, fraught with difficulties in articulating equality without either erasing or overly accentuating differences between groups" (262). The genre of migrant literature (*Migrantenliteratur*) in Germany is barely forty years old and can be considered a unique subcategory within minority literature; rather than focusing on a particular minority race, gender, or religion, however, it encompasses the works of migrant authors writing in German, typically as their second language. As a relatively new literary category, it also "perpetuates the notion that this body of literature is at best an expendable 'enrichment' to 'native' German literature" (Adelson 305). Indeed, minority authors like Özdamar must fight to gain recognition within -- and, in some cases, preferably without -- the established literary canon. As a relatively new literary genre in Germany, (im)migrant literature can be viewed as the adolescent seeking an independent status from the elder canon while striving to form its own identity.

Literatures are often placed within such genres as poetry, drama, or fiction based on their common style, form, and content. In his seminal work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov notes that "we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of them," when we determine to label texts within the confines of a particular genre (4). Minority literature does not appear to be a genre-by-choice, but rather a genre-by-default, in which the "principle operative" is tied to the author as a minority writer rather than to her writing as a literary work. Indeed, Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define a minority literature as "that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). When discussing grouping by genre, the truism that power is granted through sheer number should certainly not be ignored. Indeed, with this power comes the establishment of a more solid, recognized identity. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that texts (major as well as minor) must sacrifice a portion of their individual identities when they become qualified and quantified within a specified genre. Paraphrasing and interpreting Mikhail Bakhtin in "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity," Jola Skulj argues that "the cultural Identity of a national literature is continuously undergoing the impacts of new qualities and peculiarities. Linked to features of another cultural identity, one cultural identity re-accentuates its own inexhaustible characteristics" (Skulj <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/5/>>). In establishing their identity, minority texts do not always define themselves against the canon. Nor do they necessarily ally themselves to the "collective identity" of minority literature as emphasized by Deleuze and Guattari. Rather, as evidenced in Özdamar's short work, "A Cleaning Woman's Career: Memories of Germany" ("Karriere einer Putzfrau. Erinnerungen an Deutschland") the final tale within the 1990 prose collection *Mutterzunge*, a minority text can, through allusions, incorporate canonized texts and form its identity in relation to them. As Jankowsky emphasizes: "Thinking multiculturally means acknowledging that more than one culture sets values and meanings. In general, multicultural thinking implies that acquiring knowledge about the different cultural structures that coexist within a country, as

well as globally, will allow for a greater understanding of the mental map out of which people from various backgrounds participate in society" (263).

Özdamar's "Karriere einer Putzfrau" represents, then, not just the collected memories of an unnamed Turkish cleaning woman, but, rather, part of a greater amalgam which includes such canonical and historical figures as *Hamlet*, *Woyzeck*, *Medea*, *Nathan the Wise*, *Julius Ceasar*, Georg Heym, Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun, and the fabled prince featured in the classic Grimm fairy tales. These separate identities conflate to establish the "whole" of her story. In this article, then, I focus on how minority texts, with particular regard to "Karriere einer Putzfrau," can achieve their own voice and identity while, ironically, alluding to canonized, major texts. Özdamar focuses on the positive creative experience afforded her by living and writing between worlds: "Whether you want to or not, you find yourself in two places at once. ... the whole thing runs like a simultaneous film in which images and yearnings merge without any gaps. When the two come together in this way, it makes for a beautiful encounter" (Horrocks and Kolinsky 53-54). In his discussion of comparative literatures, Jeffrey Peck notes in his *Hermes Disguised*, "Once a text is brought down from its place of veneration, from a fixed and immovable place in the museum of masterpieces, from the bastion of the best, so to speak, the understanding and meaning of a text can change when seen in a different context and through a new interpretive eye" (281). In employing the literary device of allusion, minority texts and authors deterritorialize so-called major texts from their comfortable "immovable place." Majority texts must then function within the minority framework. Minority texts can thus actually gain power in relation to the major texts, and with that power comes a certain authority and legitimacy. Allusion has long been employed effectively in major texts. How then does the use of allusion in a minority text, such as Özdamar's "Karriere einer Putzfrau," differ from that of a major text, like T.S. Eliot's acclaimed 1922 ode to inference, *The Waste Land*? Further, if great differences do indeed exist, are they primarily do to the minor/major dichotomy? Özdamar's and Eliot's texts do share some significant similarities and they have much in common structurally. Both texts are slight, no more than twenty pages and extremely complex and dense with references. The authors shift between scenes and images with little transition. In fact, the reader is carried through a transitory realm where the fictional melds with the historical, and physical and temporal laws do not exist. Ultimately, each functions as a mythical Atlas wielding an allusive orb. And both confront seemingly barren worlds of fruitless repetition as they allude to pained figures whose personal horrors can be felt by those reading today. Eliot, a firm believer in inter- and intra-textual discourse, would likely claim that Özdamar's text has, like all texts, merely engaged itself in an extended, inclusive canonical conversation.

In his *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, Eliot, the critic, determines: "No poet, no artist of any art, has complete significance alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead. ... The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the new (the really new) work of art among them" (49-50). According to Eliot, the author -- major or minor -- could be viewed primarily as a channeler of literary spirit from that "ideal" order of existing monuments, conducting a séance among dearly departed texts. Considered as such, the narrating cleaning lady of "Karriere einer Putzfrau" is herself an author communing with the dramatically deceased. The resulting text is a drama starring Shakespeare's betrayed Caesar and ruminating Hamlet, Euripides's enraged Medea, Büchner's disturbed Woyzeck, and Lessing's enlightened Nathan. Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun are blended into the tale for historical measure and the cleaning lady casts herself as the crazed, drowned Ophelia: "Bedsheet in hand, I thought of all the other dead who play their roles on the stage! The villains win in life, but the dead may play out their madness on the stage. ... I have already told you all, I have as much madness as all the dead. So I have run along, madness in hand, bedsheets in mind, oh pardon, the other way around, to the next theater" ("Das Bettlaken in der Hand, dachte ich an alle anderen Toten, die auf der Bühne ihre Rollen spielen! Die Bösen gewinnen im Leben, aber die Toten dürfen auf der Bühne ihren Blödsinn machen. ... Ich habe es euch doch gesagt, ich habe soviel Blödsinn wie all Toten. So bin ich gelaufen, Blödsinn in der Hand, Bettlaken im Kopf, oh Pardon, umgekehrt, bis zum nächsten Theater" (111-12). It should be

noted that Özdamar does not merely draw from other texts referentially. Rather, she permits her speaker to participate actively with the appropriated characters. Ultimately, her displaced cleaning lady does not simply converse with these figures; she physically and dramatically interacts with them. And, as these figures are displaced themselves -- either from their literary or historical settings -- she is on equal footing with them. Her *Blödsinn*, madness, has as much merit as theirs.

Roland Barthes asserts, "We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture" (52). Although Eliot claims that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," he comes across as a rather determined "Author-God" who does not allow himself to fall victim to his resulting text (52-53). Although he is at first submerged seemingly within the deluge of voices and cultures that resonate throughout *The Waste Land*, he maintains his authorial and authoritative presence by inserting his own explanatory notes to the dystopian text. He tells his readers which works specifically influenced his choice of symbols, including Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, which he recommends "to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble" (70), and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Eliot's choice of allusions becomes "one of Eliot's poetic procedures for distancing himself from his emotions. ... by which personal experience can be seen from the perspective of other poets, other times" (Reeves 7). His reader is carried along not merely by the poetic narrative, as in Özdamar's work, but by clearing stated authorial guidance and endnotes as well. There are no helpful notes supplied by Özdamar to guide her reader. Her many allusions stand in their relation to her cleaning lady alone; together, they shape the text into its narrative. The result is a minority text which converses freely with the major works without the obvious intrusion of the writer as mediator. Where Eliot's allusions steer the reader through a theatrical text, serving an explanatory function similar to the classic Greek chorus, Özdamar allows her allusions to stage their own coup de theatre. Eliot's poem has also been viewed as a dramatic text "attested to by Eliot's own recorded performance and by the frequency with which it turns up as a text for readers' theater on college campuses -- persuasive testimony to the poem's dramatic character and possibilities with its five parts functioning as five separate shows, replete with characters from all classes" (Selby 154). Both Eliot and Özdamar subvert dramatic conventions and elements, creating theatrical texts with further nuances that emerge from being performed or read aloud.

What, then, is the overall purpose and effect of allusion within literature and these texts specifically? The *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* is a renowned manual for literature. It is also extremely conservative. It states very directly that the technique of allusion subsumes the following: "(1) prior achievements or events as a sources of value; (2) readers sharing knowledge with the poet; (3) incorporation of sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements; and (4) fusion of the incorporated and incorporating elements" (Preminger and Brogan 39). These points can be applied readily to major texts, but how valid are they when analyzing the use of allusion within the confines of a minority text? The following sections concern the applicability of these assumptions to Özdamar's "Karriere einer Putzfrau," as a minority text, and Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as a major one. The first and second characteristics are assumed by both authors who allude to specific canonized -- and primarily Western -- texts. It should be noted, therefore, that Eliot, a major author writing in his native, and a major, language, alludes to English, German, and French texts. It is important to note that he also includes quotations and statements in such "foreign" languages. When Eliot quotes a work like Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in German, however, there is no great shock, because he is a major author simply writing in another major language. There is little surprise that he should be able to do this as a Western poet. However, Eliot also draws upon Eastern tradition as when he refers to Hindu fables. He concludes his work: "Shantih shantih shantih," which he explains in his own note as "a formal ending to an *Upanishad*. 'The Peace which passeth understanding' is our equivalent to this word" (76). By incorporating Eastern philosophy and then explaining its meaning and inclusion, Eliot seemingly violates all of the characteristics ascribed to allusion. This Hindu phrasing would likely not be among the familiar literary traditions his Western audience could expect to share with the poet. Ultimately, a paradox of legitimacy aris-

es through Eliot's deterritorialization of a minority (for Western society) language: When a major author alludes to a minority text, does he/she give it a legitimacy which it did not previously possess on its own? Or is that legitimacy simply recognized through the major author's authority? In either case, even when a minority text is brought into the discourse of a major work on its own terms, it appears subject to the power of that alluding author. It remains the other, minority work encased within the controlling, major text.

Özdamar, a minority author writing in her second language, alludes to many of the same types of images and texts as Eliot, particularly Shakespeare and his *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*. The key difference is that Özdamar, as an active embodiment of displaced otherness, communicates in a major language that is not her own. Both she and her Turkish cleaning woman-come-actress actually appear to be living the interwoven lives described by Eliot as he recalls the cruelest month of April "mixing / Memory and desire" (53) and the blind, prophetic Tiresias "throbbing between two lives" (61). Similarly, Özdamar's title character has blended memories and desires that drive her creation of this bizarre, theatrical tableau. Although Özdamar's cleaning woman shares some qualities with the popular Nasreddin Hodja of Turkish folklore (on this, see Ashliman <<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/hodja.html>>), a humorous and seemingly simple-minded trickster who ultimately reveals thoughtful insights to those who have come across his path, Özdamar does not directly allude to any popular Turkish figures or images in this particular tale. Perhaps she wants to prevent them from becoming powerless "guest workers" in German literary territory; rather, she alludes only to established Western characters, who are then subject to her power. She does not, however, determine the legitimacy of these texts; that has been established through a canonical tradition outside of her. Nevertheless, Özdamar has the authority to alter these Western figures and to place her cleaning lady on a level alongside them. It is this fact which is crucial to the second assumption of allusion concerning audience. Özdamar's intended reader is both German and, like her, Turkish-German, and she is the minority Other speaking the German language and employing Western texts: "This is the burning hot truth of the sun at two o'clock in the afternoon. A slow, sexual nightmare that becomes clearer little by little, without nightmare and without effect. The dog of Eva Braun bites the children of Medea and the extras, Nathan the Wise enters and says, he is the peace minister with the Nobel Prize, one should leave Medea's children and the extras playing mensroom occupants in peace" ("Dies ist die brennendheiße Wahrheit der Sonne um zwei Uhr nachmittags. Ein träger Zeugungsalptraum, der sich nach und nach aufklärt, ohne Alptraum und ohne Wirkung. Der Hund von Eva Braun beißt die Kinder von Medea und die Statisten, Nathan der Weise tritt auf und sagt, er sei der Friedenspfaffer mit Nobelpreis, man solle Medeas Kinder und Männerpisssoirbesetzerstatisten in Ruhe lassen") (115). In this excerpt, Özdamar erases the boundaries between German history and literature while incorporating figures of Greek tragedy. She allows Hamlet and Ophelia to talk with Caesar, Medea, Woyzeck's mother, and most intriguingly with Nathan the Wise. Nathan the Wise is widely regarded as Germany's greatest symbol of enlightened thinking, a Jewish figure who is able to unite peacefully with Christians and Muslims. Including him among these murdered, murderous, and mad characters shows the impotence of reason in the cleaning woman's world. He also assumes their attributes through association, revealing her belief that the unity brought about in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* was little more than an eccentric aberration rather than a realistic, achievable goal.

Deleuze and Guattari argue, "Even when it is unique, a language remains a mixture, a schizophrenic *mélange*, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out" (26). This schizophrenia is readily apparent in "Karriere einer Putzfrau," because Özdamar, herself, is forced to communicate in the language and mind-set of a majority. She too is consequently split between the minor and major cultures. The effect of such deterritorialization is, as noted by Arlene Teraoka in "Talking 'Turk'," almost heuristic for the majority: "They [the minority] speak, while we learn to listen. We are no longer sovereign or manipulative toward their reality but unsure and ignorant. And it is only when the self can suspend the imposition of its beliefs that it can hope to listen carefully to what the other is saying" (161). Eliot, in contrast to Özdamar and other minority authors, is a major author dealing primarily with other major authors and texts; they are essentially appendages of the same Self, a majority.



Özdamar operates as a surgeon, making her minor incisions of the major textual body. It is possible to consider the texts of Özdamar and Eliot as both "comparative" and "combative" unto themselves, especially if interpreted within the context of Todorov's *Genres in Discourse*: "A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination ... It is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking the question of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of the genres themselves" (15). Each text does indeed transcend the literary boundaries of genre through its allusive maneuvers, working on multiple dramatic, poetic, and referential levels. The remaining characteristics of allusion concern this echoing of familiar, known elements within the walls of a new context. The voices of other texts resonate within the new text (the other text), often amplifying, but just as frequently muffling, its voice. For Eliot in *The Wasteland*, "Allusion is a key to this poem, combining the metaphoric and metonymic function and inspiring the constant metamorphosis of style, structure, syntax, character" (Davidson 115). Eliot's poem can be viewed as a labyrinth with the allusions acting as a thematic compass for the reader's voyage and the blind, prophetic Tiresias as the captain. In one of his explanatory notes to the text, Eliot notes: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. ... What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (72). By providing this note, Eliot intrudes again in his work while demonstrating his insistence upon the kind of unity that Özdamar does not believe can be provided to her disparate, desperate characters.

In contrast to Eliot, it is the lone figure of Özdamar's cleaning lady as Ophelia who acts as the reader's guide through her tale, and it is she who ultimately directs the narrative through its allusive elements. Shakespeare's Ophelia descends into madness after being rejected by her beloved Hamlet. She is a tertiary participant who acts as a spectator but is unable to discern the truth. In this regard, she is as blind as Tiresias, but she lacks his prophetic insights. By choosing this as her defining role, the cleaning woman adopts Ophelia's madness, pain, and rejection. Describing her life, she proclaims, "In my country, I was Ophelia. ... Once one is killed in his own country, one can sleep anywhere, regardless where" ("In meinem Land war ich Ophelia. ... Wenn man in seinem eigenen Land einmal getötet ist, kann man überall schlafen, egal wo") (110-11). She may have been killed in her own country, but she has resurrected herself on-stage in Germany where she can "sleep" even if she cannot truly live. Skulj asserts, "Through its complexity of influences, cultural identity defies predictability. Its own creativity, when being enacted in a dialogue with other cultures, changes itself only to a new sense of its existence. Comparatively speaking, the creativity of individual cultures exists through permanent re-interpretations of their own image of identity" (<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/5/>>). Accordingly, a crucial difference between Eliot and Özdamar is that she never fully relinquishes the narrative flow of her texts to the guidance of other major texts. Rather, she simply places the texts alluded to in the hands of a displaced woman who discovers that her fairy tale "prince" is but a dog that she must follow with her white plastic bag. A brief catalog of the figures she gives voice to in her collective drama reveals her own despair and anxieties concerning the powerful Western tradition: Ophelia goes insane and drowns herself; Hamlet is the unsure prince haunted by his father's ghost who warns him of his mother's infidelity with his uncle; Caesar is the self-absorbed leader murdered by his most trusted friend; Medea murders her husband, his lover, and her own children out of jealousy; and Woyzeck kills his beloved Marie in a fit of rage. The poetic cleaning lady even details her own fairy tale which concludes contrarily to the typical Brothers Grimm story in which the couple lives happily until their death. In the versions she has lived through, she laments that "in the end, the evil ones always win" ("am Ende gewinnen immer die Bösen") (105). Her text envisions no glorious castle far away, and if it did, she would surely have to mop its dirty floors and change out its bed linens. The once-powerful figures who populate her drama have – like her – all been betrayed within their very homes and lands and by those they trusted most. She sees that safety cannot be found at home, regardless of the minor or major status of those involved. No happy ending is available. Özdamar's cleaning lady focuses on each of these figures after their fall. In her homeland, she already considered herself the betrayed figure of Ophelia, ordered unsympathetically by her Hamlet, "To a nunnery, go, and quickly, live well" ("In ein Kloster geh, und schnell, lebwohl") (102). As a cleaning

lady in Germany, she allows herself to become the drowned corpse (*Wasserleiche*) of Ophelia: "So I drowned in the dark brook of my bed linens" ("So bin ich ertrunken in dem schwarzen Bach meiner Bettwäsche") (103). Özdamar allows this to be the cleaning lady's story, and it is her tragedy which unfolds. The characters she chooses to star in her drama have been displaced from their own dramas, and she is their playwright scripting their new identities even as she searches for her own.

Özdamar concludes her story with a linguistic problem for her leading-lady who mixes up some common-sounding words in German: "Here is the floor polisher, the stage is polished daily, they said, no here is the floor polisher they said, the stage is staged daily, the bean is polished daily, no, no, the stage is polished daily" ("Hier ist die Bohnermaschine, die Bühne wird täglich gebohnt, haben sie gesagt, nein hier ist die Bohnermaschine haben sie gesagt, die Bühne wird täglich gebühnt, die Bohne wird täglich gebohnt, nein, nein, die Bühne wird täglich gebohnt") (118). There is no way to do justice to Özdamar's delightful play on words with a literal translation, however. In German, the words "bohnen" (to polish), "Bühne" (stage) and "Bohne" (bean) are very similar in sound and show the inherent difficulties one encounters when working within another language. My looser and more figurative translation reads, "The stage steps are swept daily, they said, no the stage pets are swiped daily, they said, no the stage pets are swept daily, no, no, the stage steps are swept daily." The old cleaning woman understands each of the characters' motivations even if she cannot always get the lines right on the first try. Ultimately, Özdamar has created a text in which perhaps the most extreme of minorities – her cleaning lady is a minority figure based upon her race, gender, and class -- is allowed to reign over the majorities. She reveals herself to be an actress as much as an author, and as such, all identities are within her range in this *Theater des Blödsinns*, her own theater of the absurd. And now, having flubbed the closing line of her final act, the cleaning woman's Ophelia allows the canonical curtain to fall as she awaits applause from her audience and ponders the possibility of an encore performance.

#### Works Cited

- Adelson, Leslie. "Opposing Oppositions." *German Studies Review* 17.2 (1994): 305-30.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.
- Ashliman, D.L. "Nasreddin Hodja: Tales of the Turkish Trickster." *Folklore and Mythology* (2006): <<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/hodja.html>>.
- Brandt, Bettina. "Collecting Childhood Memories of the Future: Arabic as Mediator between Turkish and German in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Mutterzunge*." *The Germanic Review* 79.4 (2004): 295-316.
- Davidson, Harriet. *T.S. Eliot and Hermeneutics*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guarrari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- Eliot, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Fox, Patricia. "Fiction, Biography, Autobiography, and Postmodern Nostalgia in (Con)Texts of Return." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.4 (1999): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/2/>>.
- German Embassy (London). *Reform of Germany's Citizenship and Nationality Law* (2006): <[http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/06/other\\_legal\\_matters/Reform\\_Germanys\\_citizenship\\_seite.html](http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/06/other_legal_matters/Reform_Germanys_citizenship_seite.html)>.
- Horrocks, David, and Eva Kolinsky. *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996.
- Jankowsky, Karen. "'German' Literature Contested: The 1991 Ingeborg-Bachmann-Prize Debate, 'Cultural Diversity,' and Emine Sevgi Özdamar." *The German Quarterly* 70.3 (1997): 261-76.
- "Koalitionsstreit wird schärfer." *Die Zeit* (4 August 2006): <[http://zeus.zeit.de/text/online/2006/15/integration\\_0804](http://zeus.zeit.de/text/online/2006/15/integration_0804)>.
- Milz, Sabine. "Comparative Cultural Studies and Ethnic Minority Writing Today: The Hybridities of Marlene Nourbese Philip and Emine Sevgi Özdamar." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/4/>>.
- Özdamar, Emine Sevgi. "Karriere einer Putzfrau. Erinnerungen an Deutschland." *Mutterzunge*. By Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Berlin: Rotbuch, 1990. 102-18.
- Panayi, Panikos. *Ethnic Minorities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000.
- Peck, Jeffrey. *Hermes Disguised: Literary Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Literature*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1983.
- Preminger, Alex, and Terry Brogan, eds. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.

- Reeves, Gareth. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Herfordshire: Simon & Schuster International, 1994.
- Skulj, Jola. "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.4 (2000): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/5/>>.
- Selby, Nick. *T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Teraoka, Arlene. *East, West, and Others: The Third World in Postwar German Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1996.
- Seyhan, Azade. "Lost in Translation: Re-Membering the Mother Tongue in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawansera*." *German Quarterly* 69.4 (1996): 414-26.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Cleveland: Case Western UP, 1973.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Genres in Discourse*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.
- Wierschke, Annette. *Schreiben als Selbstbehauptung: Kulturkonflikt und Identität in den Werken von Aysel Özakin, Alev Tekinay und Emine Sevgi Özdamar*. Frankfurt: IKO, 1996.

Author's profile: Walter Rankin teaches language and literature courses at George Mason University including a course for the Department of Modern and Classical Languages called *Outside of Hitler's Shadow* which focuses on images of Nazi Germany and Hitler within US-American pop culture. Rankin's recent publications include "Patriotism, Politics, and Propaganda: The Naturalization of Friday's Man, Robinson, in Robinson Crusoe on Mars" in *Bright Lights Film Journal* (2003) and "Autobiographical Fiction vs. Fictional Autobiography in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*" in *Comparative Literature Studies* (1999). He is currently working on a book entitled *Interpreting Film through the Fairy Tale Lens of the Brothers Grimm*, in which he examines themes and images that appear in both the original Grimm tales and modern cinema. Email: <[wrankin1@gmu.edu](mailto:wrankin1@gmu.edu)>.