Prof. Süheyla Artemel and Traugott Fuchs

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And every single moment with the old teacher will be precious – protected by the force of memory and precision of every one of us...
(Traugott Fuchs about Erich Auerbach in an unpublished letter)

The German literary scholars Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer, who were forced to leave their homeland after Hitler's rise to power due to their Jewish background and came to Istanbul in 1934, have received increasing attention in recent years as seminal figures in the field of world literature. One of their students, who also left Germany out of loyalty to them, was a research assistant named Traugott Fuchs (1906-1997), who remained in Istanbul long after his teachers had left for the United States. Fuchs was a gifted musician, poet, painter, essayist, scholar and teacher. Between 1934 and 1983, he taught French, German and German literature at Istanbul University, Robert College and Bosphorus University. Between 1968 and 1983, he was a colleague of Prof. Süheyla Artemel, and during the 1980s, they lived in the same street in Rumeli Hisar. When Traugott Fuchs passed away, Prof. Artemel took all his paintings and documents into her personal care and thus rescued what might be called in German a *Schatzkammer*, or "treasure chamber," filled with historical and cultural documents and artifacts (including letters, diaries, and lecture notes to poems, essays, and sketches, as well as various beautiful objects and his extensive library), from destruction and oblivion.

In cooperation with Bosphorus University and Yeditepe University, and with the support of Dr. Hermann Fuchs, Traugott Fuchs's nephew, and some of her colleagues and students, Prof. Artemel established the Center for Comparative Studies in European Culture and Art, which became the home of the Fuchs Archive. Thus she not only rescued and preserved the academic and artistic legacy of her colleague, teacher and friend, but sought to kindle intellectual interest in his work. During my first semester at Bosphorus University in the PhD program of the Department of Western Languages and Literatures, I met Prof. Artemel and I quickly realized that the Fuchs Archive was very close to her heart. When I first visited the Center for Comparative Studies, whose name was emblematic of Prof. Artemel's far-reaching, interdisciplinary intellectual vision, I found myself standing in front of a turn-of-the-century

mansion house in a lush garden. I was struck by the atmosphere pervading the place and immediately wished it was swarming with scholars, rather than being peaceful and quiet, but at the same time sadly deserted. At first, my interest in Prof. Artemel's Fuchs Project was limited, but that changed when she asked me to translate a letter by Fuchs from German into English. I soon became intrigued by the style of the letter, which had been written with great care, affection, tenderness and consideration for its recipient and subject matter. The writer of the letter appeared to me unusually perceptive, imaginative, sensitive and subtle. This made me realize that Fuchs was an extraordinary person, whose intellectual and artistic legacy deserves attention and recognition.

Fuchs was at home in different languages and cultures. The intellectual climate of pre-WWII Germany had been highly propitious for the development and exchange of new ideas in the humanities, but this period of flourishing academic debate was stifled when the Nazis began to remove all Jewish intellectuals from German universities in 1933. Fuchs detested the nationalistic fever and anti-Semitism which was becoming rampant in the 1930s and organized a protest against this measure with the aim of protecting his revered teachers Auerbach and Spitzer, but to no avail. In retrospect, Fuchs expressed his admiration for Spitzer as follows:

> No Aryan – I asked myself: what is Aryan supposed to mean anyway? - professor close to me has ever been so brilliant, witty, gifted in education, understanding and as a teacher so encouraging and as a person so generous, charming, tactful, cheerful and *human* in the true sense of the word as him. (Hermann Fuchs 31)

Spitzer and Auerbach were integral members of the Humanist tradition. Auerbach wrote *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought* in Istanbul between 1942 and 1945. Similarly, Spitzer wrote *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony* during the Second World War. Both books were informed by their authors' humanistic, pacifistic and anti-nationalistic worldview, and both revisit the past to uncover and restore what Auerbach and Spitzer believed was the unity of Western culture. Both writers emphasized the common ground shared by the peoples of the Western hemisphere in a time in which millions of human beings were killed in the name of different nationalisms. Erich Auerbach expressed his desire for a transnational future after the Second World War as follows:

> In any case, our philological homeland is the earth: it can no longer be the nation. Certainly the most precious and indispensable thing that the philologist inherits is the

> language and education of his nation; but only in the separation, in the overcoming it becomes effective. We must, under changed circumstances, return to what the pre-national medieval education already had: to the realization that the spirit is not national. (18)

Auerbach's remark is as pertinent today as it was almost eight decades ago. Instead of emphasizing artificial divisions and boundaries like nationality, we should emphasize the fact that we are all united in our humanity, a view that was fully shared by his student Fuchs.

The values by which Fuchs was guided and which he conveyed to his students were rooted in the Humanist tradition. Prof. Özer Kabaş referred to Fuchs as "the last Renaissance man" (Artemel 15). Like the Renaissance Humanists, Fuchs believed in the human potential for beauty, dignity and integrity. He spoke multiple foreign languages (French, Italian, Greek and Turkish) and was an avid reader and prolific writer. He translated texts by Turkish writers and thinkers into German, for example, texts by Orhan Veli, Nazım Hikmet, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and Sait Faik (Babaoğlu 275). When Prof. Artemel was preparing for a qualification in a second foreign language, Fuchs, who was a Romance philologist, became her tutor, and together they read and discussed Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* in the Italian original. In retrospect, Prof. Artemel remarked that the experience was "like embarking on a special journey and sharing a unique learning process with a soul mate" (Hermann Fuchs 9).

The impression of Traugott Fuchs I gained from Prof. Artemel was affirmed by the reminiscences of his other contemporaries. Prof. Dr. Nedret Kuran Burçoğlu made the following remark about him as a teacher: "At different stages of my life I have met beautiful people who have awakened in me a love and enthusiasm for literature. Mr Fuchs is also one of these people" (Artemel 8). Prof. Dr. Şara Sayın expressed her admiration and respect for her teacher as follows: "He had escaped from a totalitarian regime, and resisted all forms of coercion throughout his life. He carried great responsibility in his job regardless of academic titles, and always maintained his integrity and dignity" (Artemel 17). Although Fuchs had completed a doctoral dissertation, it was burned in an accident before he could defend it and he never tried to rewrite it, which meant that he could not become a professor. But Fuchs did not care much about academic titles and material gain. What he cared about was spiritual wealth. Like Keats, he was a lover of all loveliness, and he devoted himself to everything beautiful and spirited: nature, art, friendship and love. Fuchs experienced modern industrialized mass society as hostile to life. He

was critical of industrialization because it caused alienation and pollution, and his attitude toward it was influenced by Romantic literature and philosophy.

In an unpublished essay entitled “Lebenswichtige Etymologien: Der Mensch” (“Vital Etymologies: The human being”), which Fuchs probably wrote during the 1970s, he sought to answer this question: What does it mean to be a human being? The first half of the essay consists of an etymological exploration of the word “Mensch” (“human being”). The word *etymology* derives from the Greek word *etumología*, coming from *Etumon,* which means “true sense or sense of a truth,” while the adjective “vital” means both “essential” and “lively, spirited”. Thus, to unearth the root meaning of the word “human being” is a matter of urgency for humankind in the second half of the 20th century. In his essay, Fuchs uses the image of a tree to convey his belief that his etymological exploration of the word “human being” is a life-enhancing enterprise:

> So it is only more than right and proper today, when […] the term 'human being' has once again started to falter, that we are going back to the root of the original program and remember the source of nourishment of the human tree, which has been bent in so many ways in the wind of history.
>
> (Traugott Fuchs 3)

Like the branches of a tree, the different root meanings of the word “human being” are related to each other. According to Fuchs, to be a human being means:

1. To breathe
2. To think and to feel spiritually excited
3. To aspire to a higher love than *libido*
4. To create works of art
5. To exercise judgment, courage, solidarity and cooperation
6. To remember

In pointing out that the first meaning of the word “human being” is “to breathe”, Fuchs gives a sense of his excitement and delight in this discovery: “With the possibly original meaning ‘to breathe’, the meaning of the word human becomes all the more beautiful […] Breathing is life. Breath is soul” (Fuchs 4). Myths of the creation of the first human being come to mind: According to *Genesis*, God blew the breath of life, the *ruah* (Hebrew) or *pneuma* (Greek), i. e. his Spirit, into his human creation. According to ancient Greek mythology,

Prometheus created human beings out of clay, and Athena, the goddess of wisdom, breathed life into them. Fuchs pointed out that the words "human being" and the word "god" share the same etymological root: "to think or feel spiritually excited". Thus, etymologically, human beings partake of the divine. This is also manifest in the meanings "to create works of art" and "to aspire to a higher love than *libido*." Fuchs points to Plato's definition of love in the *Symposium* and the medieval concept of *minne* as examples of this kind of love – a divinely inspired, spiritual love. By creating works of art, human beings can transcend their physical limitations.

Fuchs highly valued the human potential for spirituality, love and artistic creativity, as the following remark by Prof. Artemel shows:

> One of the traits that characterize the school of style criticism practiced by Spitzer and Fuchs is the combination of scientific analysis with an emotional and intuitive approach to a work. Like Spitzer and Hesse, with whom he was equally deeply connected, Fuchs sees feeling and thought as integral parts of an organic whole. The same then applies - not only to literature and art - to life itself. These three thinkers all believe that the complexities of life and the fundamental problems of humanity can be solved by a harmonious integration of thought and feeling, of reason and *pietas*. This oneness can be realized through love and artistic creativity. (11)

Similarly, love in the sense of "a higher love than *libido*" gives human beings the possibility to transcend the purely physical and to dwell in a spiritual realm freed from the fetters of space and time.

When I had the opportunity to look at Fuchs's books in his archive, I noticed that one volume, *Selected Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke,* looked almost tattered. Many words and lines were underlined in pencil. There were numerous notes on the margins. In fact, as I realised, Fuchs owned more books by Rilke than by any other author. In "Vital Etymologies: The Human Being", Rilke is not mentioned explicitly. But the sentence "Du musst dein Leben ändern" ("You must change your life"), which appears repeatedly in the essay, is a quotation from Rilke's poem "Archaischer Torso Apollo" ("Archaic Torso Apollo"). Fuchs was fascinated by ancient Greek art and culture, which were transmitted to him through the filter of German classicism as represented by Winckelmann, Goethe and Schiller. Rilke's "Archaic Torso Apollo" draws attention to the fact that modern man is no longer whole, but only a fragment of a potentially wholly developed human being. Modern life is characterized by fragmentation and alienation.

Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* is a memorable testament to the *malaise* of modern man. Malte, an aspiring poet, feels alienated and ill at ease in Paris, where he feels vulnerable and exposed: homeless. Similarly, Fuchs never felt fully at home in any of the places he lived in after he left his childhood hometown of Metz. For Fuchs, feeling homeless was not a matter of Orient or Occident, Turkey or Germany. It was not a matter of place but of time. He yearned for a time which had long since passed. This kind of yearning is tangible in his artistic work. He was particularly drawn to the ancient Greek mythological figure of Arion, a semi-legendary Greek poet and musician. The painting "Frühling" ("Spring") depicts how Arion calls into being a pair of lovers by playing the lyre (Hermann Fuchs 12). Arion can be compared to Orpheus, the legendary musician and poet who was killed by a group of angry women who tore his dead body into pieces and scattered them to the four winds. Art is an attempt to put back together these pieces. It is an attempt to re-member what was torn asunder. All works of art are attempts to restore a lost unity and integrity.

This longing for wholeness or unity and integrity is also evident in Fuchs's emphasis on androgyny in "Vital Etymologies". In the essay, he argues that androgyny is the natural condition of humankind. For Fuchs, androgyny was an ideal - as yet unrealized, but anticipated and portrayed by artists in the figures of the Angel, the Madonna and Jesus Christ, figures which are asexual and related to the sphere of the spiritual, the religious and the divine. Fuchs (27) considered androgyny as "central concept of the image of God in man, thus of religion: the highest, most glorious possibility of man, the condition of his cosmic mission". The Angel, the Madonna and Jesus Christ are conspicuous figures in Rilke's work. Rilke's one-time lover and lifelong friend Lou Andreas-Salomé wrote in her book about the poet that "all creativity is interaction between the feminine and masculine in ourselves" (quoted in Cemiloğlu 84). In tune with their androgynous poetics, both Fuchs and Rilke valued the act of listening, which has traditionally been associated with woman. The first *Sonnet to Orpheus* is centered on the idea of listening:

> A tree ascended there. O pure transcendence!
> Oh Orpheus sings! Oh tall tree in the ear!
> And all things hushed. Yet even in that silence
> a new beginning, beckoning, change appears.
> (Rilke 227)

The last line of the sonnet refers to Orpheus as building a temple in the listeners' hearing by way of his song (*ibid*). As Martin Vialon pointed out, Fuchs cultivated "an attitude of listening", which involves not only "the faculties of observation and thinking, but also […] other human faculties which can attune us to the spiritual dimension that underlies the physical appearance of the objects: faculties such as feeling, imagination and intuition" (214).

The exclamation "You must change your life!" from Rilke's "Archaic Torso Apollo" is a *leitmotif* in "Vital Etymologies". It can be interpreted as referring to the possibility of individual transformation and to the possibility of world transformation. Like the writers who inspired him most, Fuchs cherished the beauty of nature and rejected the negative effects of industrialization and its concomitant capitalism, among which the most devastating of these negative effects are the exploitation of human beings and of the earth. The former caused economic and social injustice, spiritual impoverishment and alienation. The latter caused pollution and the near-destruction of our planet. Fuchs detested the arrogant, possessive and exploitative mentality of the imperialistic capitalist industrialized West, which was not only rampant in Europe and the USA, but had started to encroach on Istanbul as well at the time of the composition of "Vital Etymologies" in the 1970s. In the essay, Fuchs deplored the pollution and the disregard for the beauty of nature and the health of all living creatures, which he witnessed in the most beautiful city in the world he had chosen as his new home.

Fuchs's essay "Vital Etymologies: The Human Being" is only a small fragment of a rich body of documents and artifacts which Prof. Artemel saved from destruction and oblivion in 1997 and which she continued to protect and preserve for more than 20 years. Shortly after she passed away in 2018, the Center for Comparative Studies in European Culture and Art harbouring the Fuchs Archive was closed, but thanks to the efforts of her son, Prof. Mehmet Nafi Artemel, and of Fuchs's nephew, Dr. Hermann Fuchs, these irreplaceable documents found a new home in the Orient Institute in Istanbul. Now that the future of this archive has been secured, it is to be hoped that scholars will take note of the *Schatzkammer* it contains, and that they will peruse the works of Traugott Fuchs with the same care and consideration he himself devoted to their composition. In this way, what he valued and deemed worthy of his time and attention may guide us toward a future in which what it means to be human will not be forgotten.

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