

alphabet that has 32 letters. In Hurufism all letters point towards Elif, the first letter of the alphabet. What Elif has, all other letters also have. "One plus one... equals one," and the one mentioned here is Elif. It is the word of God. In the Alevi-Bektashi tradition there is the virtue of viewing all 72 nations in the same light. 72 nations, we are all one, there is no division, we are one single being. 72 equals one, and that is Elif. We come across a lot of references to Hurufism in everyday life as well; for instance there is the expression, "to agree on 66". According to the abjad method of calculation, every letter, Elif, be, lam, cim, has a numerical value. And according to the Arabic alphabet, when the word Allah is written as a double vav, its numerical value is 66. In other words, what this means in a bargain is to make a strong deal, strong like Allah. We should perhaps consider the intense attention shown to Hurufism in the context of the neo-Ottomanist thought that is in vogue today.

Do these numerical values correspond in any way to your life?

No. I have Hurufism in me as a philosophy, as a culture. I do not derive an artistic knack or attraction from it as an intellectual or an artist. I depict the human body. Each body in my paintings is a letter that expresses itself. If each body is a letter that expresses itself, then each letter utters Allah's name. We repeat this when we say, "The word is one, Allah is one." What is essential is that each letter recounts a body. In every human body, Allah sings of himself, reveals himself. This is what both Ibn Arabi and Fazlallah Astarabadi say: The body is a sign of the universe. Therefore, when following Hurufism, it is unnecessary to add a second sign to the body, or to write on it, because the body itself is a letter. The montage of certain symbols of Hurufism onto new works does not mean that those works succeed in establishing a relationship with the traditional structure. This is, at its best, merely an example of the postmodern cut-and-paste logic. The body itself is a letter; it is unnecessary to affix a sacred addition onto it. It is a spiritual matter.

You mentioned Ibn Arabi; is he an important thinker for you?

Ibn Arabi is a great school. The Bedreddinis, the Bektashi Order, the Mevlevi Order and all the other great sufi movements of Anatolia learned from him. Ibn Arabi is a path in and of himself. When we look back today, all the paths begin with Ibn Arabi; he represents such a strong tradition. "If you do not bite the apple with pleasure; then there is something missing in your prayers," Ibn Arabi said. You must feel the apple as a being. God is inside the apple. God's secret is inside the apple. "He who knows his self, shall know his God." Ibn Arabi very deeply influences the heterodoxy in Anatolia. But sufism is also a river that runs continuously within itself, developing until the present day. It has, during some periods, collaborated with the ruling power. For instance, the Mevlevi Order became quite close to the rulers. The palace took the order under its wing and opened madrasahs of the order, or expanded the existing ones.

You mentioned Blake when talking about painters you felt close to. Who would you mention from the field of poetry?

It seems to me that Blake transforms the irony that

exists in the folk songs, ballads and melodies of Anatolia into brief sentences. I see a great similarity between Blake's poems and Nasimi, Pir Sultan and our often Qizilbash-oriented folk motifs. That self-surrender, the journey to the other side and back, and the atmosphere he creates are like words uttered during sama. That is how I perceive poetry. I am not too bothered about what we call modern poetry. I have tried to read a lot of them, but again, it is the same story as canvas painting. Some of Nazım's poetry feels like canvas painting to me, too. I come across things that disquiet me, that disturb me, that I do not feel close to. But there are also things in his poetry that he brings from within the tradition, from centuries back. It is either Nasimi or Pir Sultan Abdal, or Yunus Emre who are behind those poets who are considered significant modern poets by all ethnic groups and people who live in Anatolia today.

The novel is a literary form that you do not find close to yourself; is it, in a sense, a "canvas" painting?

Definitely. Yes, there are some good novels, they are read widely, and they sell well. But the novel is an adventure story created by modernity, by a system, by a market. Whether a romance, or a crime novel, the great A Thousand and One Nights already contains all those discourses. Whether old or new, whether Tanzimat (the Ottoman Reformation period) novels or Western novels, this type of fictional literature contradicts the tradition in the east of the Mediterranean. When you try to combine that form with tradition, what you get is precisely a postmodern cut-and-paste installation of a novel. You go into the historical past, and you add a bit from the present; but it does not work like that. If the water is flowing, it will arrive somewhere. You are at a certain stage of that flow, if you are aware of that stage, the novel cannot enter there. The novel is the state of a different kind of flow.

Can a novel not open the gateway to mystery?

No, because there is no gateway to mystery in its tradition. The gateway to mystery is about going to the beyond; it is shamanistic, it is about rituals;

The White Stripes is a band that goes to the source of a tradition, and they are also a band in their own right. I hear something that flows from the '50s and the '60s in their music. It is not cut-and-paste in a postmodern sense. They are in the water. But there is also the source of the water, it flows, and they come and go in the water. And that is also how I think of myself.

there can be no rituals in the novel, because it is fiction itself. Whether a romance, or an adventure novel, the person who reads a novel and is affected by it, does not pass through to the other side. He or she says, "I read a good novel, and it affected me," that is all. What I am talking about is something different.

Thinking of Yusuf Atılgan's "person who has just come out of a movie", does cinema create this affect?

Cinema is very close to the plane of painting that I choose to call the curtain of dreams.

Cinema is the medium that most competently produces the illusion of the third dimension, isn't it?

There are stages of cinema. For instance, with the technology that existed until the 1930s, cinema was not adapted to the market as much as it is today... Although its attempts towards the illusion of the third dimension damage its quality as a

curtain of dreams, it still manages to create the initial affect.

Who are your favourite film directors?

Godard is a director I like a lot. I sometimes see him as an Anatolian director. In his work, I see similarities with Yılmaz Güney's early films. By adding text between sequences, and including sketches, he forms a film like a picture book. One could also think of it as a graphic-novel, but it reminds me of the method used in our text-image tradition. It is as if he is using a technique from the

Anatolian, or Persian text-image tradition. That plainness in the flow of the script, yet its immense depth, the way he manages to capture the irony within that simplicity... We find this in Far Eastern cinema. I find, for instance, Wong Kar-wai very close at times. "2046" (2004) is a shamanistic story. In "In the Mood for Love" (2000) we do not know whether there is a love story or not, but we feel it. Apart from some European cinema and a few special cases, I feel very distant to American cinema.

What are those special cases?

Cassavetes's cinema, especially "Faces" (1968). The comings and goings, the way he edits consecutive images without knotting up the plot's loose ends, the improvised dialogues...

What about local cinema...

Metin Erksan; but, not in view of the point he eventually arrived at. "Gecelerin Ötesi/Beyond the Nights" (1960), "Sevmek Zamani/Time to Love" (1966) and "Kuyu/The Well" (1968) are very important. A much more competent filming of "Kuyu" would be possible today, but the editing, the structure that film has is incredibly Asiatic; it belongs here, to Anatolia. His mastery in transmitting the subject matter to cinema, his framing, the locations he chooses, every single one of them take you beyond the story, to somewhere else. He quotes the Quran, and the film progresses with quotes. In "Sevmek Zamani", the idea of falling in love not with the real person but with the depiction is again an image from the path that runs through

