

10 March 2019

Dear PEN members,

After the solidarity campaign you have started by kneading as if it were bread dough, I have been receiving postcards; letters and books from all over the US, Australia and Europe, which all make me extremely proud. As you might appreciate, I cannot respond individually to all of you because of my circumstances not allowing such an endeavor. Please do not consider this a form of Oblomovism. I want you to know that your letters, which have rendered iron curtains meaningless and ineffective, have filled my two-steps'-long cell with resistance, resolve and hope. At this time when I am still able to have access to this pencil and paper, I am amateurishly sharing my feelings of gratitude and humbleness, and I would be most delighted if you accept it.

We have yet once again witnessed an attempt to "stop" those who try to put a stain on the literary and poetic attraction of aesthetics, of life. Thanks to you, we have been able to etch on every page of every calendar that shadows have the lifespan of a tiny spark; that those who want to muddy the clear waters of literature have a lifespan that can be ended with the flick of a finger. Knowing that you are right there, akin to keeping company to caged birds, is beyond any dream inside this cell which at times feels stifling. But it is real, it is sincere, and from the heart..

Prisons, tragically, have always been unavoidable for the laborers of words and letters in our country. It is as if a wound has remained fresh for a century, and has not been allowed to form a scab and heal. Regardless of [those in government] coming to power through military coups or slightly democratic channels, it is impossible to find [rulers] that grant the chance and opportunity to breathe for bearers of imagination and thoughts. It is such that, one of our poets once described these prisons as "facilities of compulsory accommodation". Another master poet of ours who was stifled in the claws of oppression and impositions all his life is Ahmet Arif of Diyarbakır. The legendary poet, whose body the police threw into a garbage container thinking he was "dead" after severe torture, has left his seal on the world of literature with his single yet unequalled book of poems.

With a few words by our master poet who is now resting in light, I would like to share my affection and respect with all of you, and wish all of you the best.

"Wherever you may be,
Indoors, outside, in class or in a line
Confront them.
Spit on the face of the executioner,
The opportunist, the evil doer, the malicious

Endure with books.
Endure with work.
With your nails, your teeth.
With hope, with love, with dreams
Endure, don't bring shame upon me."

Ahmet Arif

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