

İSMAİL EMRE (1900-1970): A DERVISH WITHOUT AN ORDER

Ismaıl Emre did not belong to a dervish order. He was a solitary pilgrim on the road to God, that road which — as he used to say — can be walked only by one filled with love². Yet people found it difficult to accept that he lacked any official, or even unofficial, religious affiliation, and kept pinning labels on him according to their own prejudices and predilections. Thus Yusuf Ziya Yörükân, a professor of theology from Ankara University who visited İsmail in 1952, tried to persuade him that he belonged to the order of the Naqshibandi. İsmail dealt with his claim by reproducing one of the standard jokes of his own master, Hafız Halil Develioğlu. Develioğlu was an unconventional and wholly independent spiritual teacher who from time to time used to fast for forty days, eating once a day just a tomato salad covered in pepper. To those who asked him what dervish order he belonged to, he would answer: “*To the Biberciler*”, that is the Order of the Pepper Eaters³. Yet jokes are not enough to repel the need of the human mind for classification. People insisted on confining İsmail into mental prisons,

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¹ The following abbreviations have been used throughout this paper:

D I Ş. Kutkan (ed.), *Yeni Yunus Emre ve Doğuşları*, İstanbul 1950

D II İsmail Emre, *Doğuşlar*, II, Adana 1965

D III Typescript with the poems “born” between 1965 and 1969

K Konuşmalar: typewritten manuscript with the minutes of conversations between İsmail Emre and his circle from the early to the late 1950s

Συζητήσεις Minutes of conversations which took place in Athens in October 1961 according to the instant translation into Greek by Nicos Rossopoulos (Muzaffer).

² D II 1163 (25.11.63): Aşk ile gidilir, yol gibi değil; cf. D III 25 (7.9.67): Aşk ile gidilir, başka yol yoktur.

³ K 60.

and were angry when he attempted to escape from them. When, one evening towards the end of 1954, a visitor told him somewhat aggressively “*Everybody says you belong to a dervish order*”, he eventually lost patience and replied:

“I know nothing about orders. This business consists of one word. If you can understand it, do so. It is spirituality (*maneviyat*); if you can walk to it, do so! Each time that a great man leaves this world, those who are not able to understand his greatness found an order in his name, and always with their own interest at heart. It is in this way that the name of great men has been used for centuries by their successors as a means of profit. But those great men themselves regarded the monastic orders as a blasphemy”⁴.

About a decade earlier, this same sentiment had flowed out of İsmail in spontaneous verse:

My Friend! Many are those who seek you in the mosque
and those who expect to find you in Church.
The man who frequents those two places will not meet you.
This book has to be read by one who understands.

There are those who seek you in Mecca and Jerusalem
and those who, with cries of ‘Hay Hû’ seek you in some *tekke*.
You will only be found by the man who has abandoned all allegiance.
Should not this answer satisfy the seeker?

...

One man says: we need a mystic order!
There he hopes to find an escape from the dark
His sick mind is blind before the obvious.
All these things are vain — like the world.

God is not to be found through drums and tambourines.
These methods have grown old. Give them up!
Make your soul into God’s target,
Find Him, be joyful. Don’t let sorrow drag you down.

*Dostum! seni çoğu arar camiden
Bulmak ister kilisede cem eden
Seni bilmez ikisine çok giden
Bir bilenden okunmalı bu kitap*

*Kimi arar Kudüs ile Mekke’den
Kimi arar Hay Hû! ile tekkeden
Seni bilir her kayıdı terkeden
Yetişmez mi arayana bu cevap?*

...

⁴ K. 156.

*Kimisi der: lâzım bize tarikat
Bulmak ister o karanlıktan necat
Meydandadır bunların aklı sakat
Dünya gibi bunlar da bütin serap
Hak bulunmaz kudüm ile def ile
Eskidiler, sen aklından def'eyle
Sen canını Hak için hedef eyle
Zevk ile bul, boşuna çekme azap⁵.*

İsmail's refusal to adhere to any brotherhood or organised religion did not mean however that he did not consider them as perfectly good paths to God.

Even if the religions are separate, the road is one
Dinleri ayrıysa yolları birdir⁶

he asserted towards the end of his life. Indeed, the plurality of the ways to spiritual perfection is a constant theme of his poetry :

Through whatever religion, the seeker seeks for Thee.
Arayanlar arar Seni her dinde⁷.

This spirit of tolerance, which made İsmail look kindly on all religious ways, also made him reluctant to proselytise: "*How many people pass by this street every day?*", he once asked his circle, "*Can you approach each one of them and ask him to walk along with you?*"⁸

THE INITIATOR

Before embarking on any attempt — however incomplete — at presenting İsmail Emre, I should say something about the nature of the available evidence, which is oral in its essence. On the one hand we possess İsmail's poetry delivered over three decades in a state of trance, and on the other sayings and anecdotes about his life, as handed down by his family, friends and pupils, as well as the records of conversations that he held with his circle. All this material is pervaded by a hagiographical aura which I have not attempted to excise, though I have obviously played it down.

İsmail Emre was born in Adana in 1900. His father, grandfather and great grandfather, who had emigrated to Adana from Harput, were all *ulema*, and the family was known locally as Kocahocalar — the Great

⁵ D. I. 261 (28.10.43)

⁶ D III.25 (7.9.67).

⁷ D II.59 (18.5.52).

⁸ K 452.

Hodjas. At the age of six İsmail lost his father and at the age of ten his mother, while he himself was the only child to survive out of three boys and two girls. His paternal uncle, who was a blacksmith, then gave him a home and taught him his craft. At seventeen, İsmail joined the army, where he met another blacksmith, a certain Hüseyin, who recommended him to fill the lonely hours of vigil by repeating the name of God, Hafız — the Preserver. When that same night the young soldier began to pronounce the name of God, there appeared to him just outside the ammunition depot an old man in a *şalvar*. İsmail instinctively turned his rifle on him, and the old man vanished. This incident was repeated a second and a third time, and İsmail began to fear for his sanity. As soon as dawn broke, he ran to his friend and related the episode. Hüseyin was jealous, and he remarked bitterly: “*I have been trying for years now without any luck, and to you he appeared as soon as you called*”⁹.

The figure which had appeared to İsmail was that of Hafız Halil who at that time lived in nearby Tarsus. For two years İsmail remained in love with his vision, until one day in 1919 Hüseyin told him that Hafız Halil had arrived in Adana and was to be found in a central café. Many years later İsmail described his first meeting with the man whose influence on him was catalytic.

About thirty people sat in a circle. Among them there were some turbaned hodjas as well. The old man [of the vision] sat on a stool. Hüseyin approached him and said: “*Efendim, this is İsmail*”. The old man made a signal to me to sit on a stool opposite. As I looked into his face my whole being left me — this world and the world to come, my ambitions and desires. I could not even swallow. I was only looking at him. He too was looking at me and suddenly he asked “*What do you want from me?*” I could not speak; my tongue was as if tied up, but within I kept repeating “*I want nothing*”. He asked again and again, and when he received the same silent answer a second and a third time, he gave out a long whistle and said “*The shepherd played on the flute*”. Not a whisper was to be heard. At that point Develioğlu turned to the circle and asked: “*Do you know the story?*” Some voices cried out “*No!*” And he began:

The agha of a village had three servants who slept in the stable. One cold and rainy night there was a knock upon the door, and, opening it, they saw an old dervish. They took him in, gave him food and drink and let him sleep. The dervish was satisfied with his reception and before leaving in the morning he asked each one of the servants for a wish. The first asked for riches, the second for wisdom, but the third one, the shepherd, said nothing.

“*What do you want?*” asked the dervish.

“*Nothing*”, said the shepherd.

But the dervish insisted, and finally the shepherd said

“*All right then, I would like to be like you.*”

“*To be like me, what for?*” asked the dervish, “*Don’t you see the state I am in?*”

“This is what I want. If you can give it, do so; if not, I am happy as I am.”
Seeing that the shepherd’s wish came from the heart, the dervish gave way and said: “Well, be like me!”

Some fifteen years passed by. Two of the servants left the village. One, who used to walk the agha’s children to school, learned to read and write and, when the schoolmaster died, he succeeded him. But he could not forget the dervish. Each night, as he locked the school gate, he would give out a whistle and say: “It was the shepherd who played on the flute”. The pupils who heard these words did not dare ask for their meaning out of respect for their master.

When he finished the village school, one lad went to the nearby town and there he found work as the accountant of a merchant. The very first evening, as he was locking his shop, the merchant gave out a long whistle and said: “It was the shepherd who played on the flute”. At this the young man could no longer restrain himself and, mentioning the village teacher, he asked for the meaning of the phrase. The merchant told him the whole story and concluded: “That one acquired learning; I became rich; doubtless the shepherd became a saint. He is the one to have played on the flute”.

Develioğlu had hardly finished the story when one of those present pointed out İsmail and asked: “Do you mean to say that from now onwards this one will be playing the flute?”

“Wait, replied Develioğlu, and you will see what flute he will play on!”¹⁰

THE SONG

Develioğlu died in 1933. A few years later one of his pupils was reading a poem by Nesimi in a small gathering. As soon as he had finished, İsmail said spontaneously “Now, much better things than this will come out of me”. Hardly had he uttered these words than he became ashamed and confused, yet at the same time he felt seized by a power whose action he could not fight. Rhythmically touching a kind of tambourine, he began to sing, and at that moment Hafız Halil appeared in all his glory and gave him the following order: “*kendinden oku*” (read from yourself!) İsmail, who was illiterate, was surprised, but he let himself go and started reciting, or rather singing, a poem. Not

⁹ For the date, D I 871 (28.6.46):

*Onyedi yaştan beri
Gönül bu yola düşmüş*

since my seventeenth year,
my heart fell on this road.

¹⁰ K 14.

realising what was happening, those around him did not take the song down. This situation continued for some time, and this is how the first *doğuşes* were lost¹¹.

As from 1921 İsmail worked at the Adana Railway Station mending the steam cauldrons. There he met Mustafa Baba, the cleaner, who was a bektashi. Having heard a few *doğuşes*, Mustafa was moved to such an extent that he used to make his broom into a saz and sing all kinds of amané to the rhythm made by the trains, until İsmail fell into a trance and began to sing¹².

Inspiration came more and more frequently. As from the 1930s a circle formed around İsmail, informal, fluid and unhomogeneous in the religious, national and social sense. Increasingly, İsmail's house became a place of reunion for people who sought God or simply a solution to practical problems. He was never alone and from 1942 his utterances began to be taken down, at first on cigarette packets, later on less casual material, and in the 60s sometimes on tape.

In 1946 there came to the circle Şevket Kutkan, a local schoolmaster who was so struck by the personality of İsmail and by the tenets of his teaching that he made it his life's task to publicise his work. He began to take down systematically both İsmail's utterances and his normal speech and, at the same time, he encouraged others to do so. In this way were formed two volumes of poetry, each containing over a thousand *doğuşes*. Privately published in 1950 and 1965 respectively, these two volumes circulated mainly among the members of the circle, failing to reach a wider audience. Between 1951 and 1960 Şevket Kutkan also issued on a fortnightly or monthly basis two consecutive journals (*Yeni Yunus Emre* and *İç Kaynak*), made up almost exclusively of İsmail's poetry and teaching. Finally in the 1980s the retired schoolmaster circulated typed notes of the circle's discussions as taken down by himself.

In one of his rare comments, Kutkan records his experience as a witness during the birth of the *doğuşes*.

“Beating a tambourine, İsmail would shout ‘Allah, Allah!’. His face blushed and the skin covering his left cheekbone trembled rhythmically. Then he would begin to sing. Those who were literate would then take the words down. After finishing his song, İsmail would ask them to read what they had written, so that he too could hear what had come out of his mouth”¹³.

¹¹ K 5. The word *doğuş*, which means “birth”, was used by İsmail and his circle to designate the spontaneous song which was “born” out of him as he fell in a state of trance.

¹² K 5.

¹³ K 2.

We are fortunate enough to possess a parallel testimony to the above by another witness, Annemarie Schimmel:

“During the so-called “birth” (*doğuş*) of two of these songs in an unheated car, between Ankara and Konya in December 1958, when the temperature outside was about 25 degrees Fahrenheit (-3 degrees Centigrade), the inner heat of the singing mystic warmed up the car to such an extent that the windows became fogged and those of us travelling with him felt no discomfort from the cold throughout the last hour of the journey”¹⁴.

More importantly, we have a testimony by İsmail himself. In the conversation he had with the theology professor from Ankara, he relates how it was when inspiration seized him: “*Even if all the tongues in the world gathered together, still they would not be able to describe this state. I do not submit myself to it voluntarily — I am condemned to it (ben ona mahkûmum). I am doomed to it. (...) This state (hal) can be manifested through any of us; unfortunately our desires stifle it*”¹⁵. In another conversation with the same man, İsmail spoke even more clearly about his trance:

“The *doğuşes* have nothing to do either with what I know or with what I have experienced, because they are not mine. They are not even subject to inspiration. They are so boundless a thing that, if I did not put confines on it by eating, drinking, sleeping and waking, it would be giving voice unendingly. But each *doğuş* makes me ill. It speaks continuously from within to within. Those outside talk about meters and rhymes and verse. I do not understand any of these things. When the Power which gives voice comes and orders me, I begin to say (...) To say *doğuşes* is not in my hands. The Power that rules me speaks. Sometimes it begins to give voice in the midst of the Bazar. Somehow I understand that it is speaking and, in order not to disturb the passers-by, I get out of the way”¹⁶.

These words were spoken in 1952. A couple of years later, in the course of another conversation, İsmail gave more details about the state of trance in which he uttered his poetry: “*When I return to myself, I cannot complete those parts which remained blank. I am then trying to be united once more with the Power, but she does not repeat what she has already said. She only comes once*”¹⁷. This is the reason why some *doğuşes* are incomplete, while others present several readings differing in detail according to the way in which those present heard a particular word or phrase. Over such discrepancies the final

¹⁴ A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill 1975, 337; cf. K 12.

¹⁵ K 43.

¹⁶ K 48.

¹⁷ K 145.

decision normally resided with İsmail, though sadly I am beginning to discover that some ideological editing has been done by Şevket Kutkan. The clearest declaration of how a *doğuş* was born came one evening in 1957 in the form of a *doğuş* :

This birth is not in my hand
 The bird in heaven is not caught by effort
 When I say, I do not know it, my ear is deaf
 I open my eyes, I look, and there it is, born !
 Except for my helplessness I possess nothing
 I own nothing, God be thanked, but love
 Grief in me groans without respite
 My tears are not for the possessions of the two worlds.

I ended up the captive of sorrow — I do not know how
 This world and the world to come are too narrow for this heart !
 My wish, my desire, my aspiration have been granted
 God the Pardonner has accepted it.

He made of me a toy in his hands
 and plays by throwing it up and down
 He will seize this tongue and make it speak
 the word *I am God* is His.

He is the speaker and the listener. I am but an instrument.
 He who does not understand says “he has sinned !”.
 This poor Emre through this love of his
 has sold himself to the Beloved.

*Elimde değildir bu doğan doğuş
 Çalışsan tutulmaz gökte uçan kuş
 Söyler iken bilmem, kulağım duymaz.
 Gözümü açarım bakarım, doğmuş !*

*Hiç aczimden başka benim kârım yok
 Şükür aşktan gayri hiçbir varım yok.
 Dertlerimin başı dâim inilti
 İki dünya için âhım zarım yok.*

*Bilmem nerden oldum derde giriftâr
 Dünya ve âhiret bu başıma dar
 Makkûl oldu dilek arzu emelim
 Aldı kabûl etti istedi Gaffar*

*Ellerinde etti beni oyuncak
 Bazı yüksek eder, bazı da alçak
 Alır bu dilini bana söyletir
 Kendi sözü ile bana Enelhak*

*Diyen duyan kendi ; ben bir vasıta
 Anlamayan der ki : eyledi hata*

*Anca bu aşk ile biçare Emre
Kendini götürüp Mâşuk'a sata*¹⁸.

Though there is usually a connection between external circumstances and the birth of a *doğuş*, in most cases this relation cannot be traced beyond the first few lines. For example many songs start as lullabies, but soon the personality of İsmail's grandchild melts into the form of the beloved in the way it happens in dreams. This is the reason why masculine and feminine alternate in this poetry even from one line to the next. The ephemeral symbols which serve as the reminders of divine beauty may be a child, a pupil or Hafız Halil himself.

FROM FINITE FORM TO INFINITE LOVE

"*Even now I am in love with him*" said İsmail in 1952, more than twenty years after Hafız Halil's death. And in a conversation held in Athens in October 1961 he described how he came to be unalterably in love with his master. Almost as soon as he met Hafız Halil, İsmail began to fast and meditate. For about three years he starved body and mind and very soon he became a virtual skeleton and had visions; yet the secret of universal unity remained closed to him. One day his teacher told him: "*Say I am Hafız Halil*". "*And if I say it, what will happen?*", thought İsmail, "*If a grocer says 'I am a lawyer', does this mean that he has become one?*". His teacher, who probably guessed his thought, told him at that moment: "*I took you, and you should give yourself to me*". "*And I thought, what have I got to give?*"

"One day", continued İsmail, "I was lying down and it seemed to me as if in a dream, though I was awake, that my master gave me a sword: 'With this sword, he said, you will kill whomsoever comes before you'. Several people whom I knew and loved began to pass before me, and I was bringing down the sword and killing them. Then came the Prophets. I killed Adam, Noah, Jesus. At that point I found myself face to face with Muhammad. I stopped. 'Strike!' ordered Hafız Halil. I obeyed, and did not stop even when I saw God. 'Now, said my master, the two of us remain. This sword can cut both you and me. Strike the one you want'. '*Efendim*, I said without thinking, I must die and you must remain alive'. As I pronounced these words I saw in my master's eyes two tears before whose brightness the light of the sun was nothing. He embraced me. Man dies of an excess of love, but not in a bodily sense (...) Whoever loves kills himself. And between the two who died of love a life is born which never dies. This life is God. The mind cannot understand. Only love understands. The understanding of love is greater than the understanding of the mind"¹⁹.

¹⁸ D II. 596, (21.5.57).

¹⁹ Συζητήσεις

Without love men will not solve the riddle of the world
Even if they were all to start from one religion.

*Halledemez aşksız cihanda âlem
Bir araya gelip olsalar da cem*²⁰.

sang İsmail while in a trance, and, commenting in another poem on the bridge of the Last Judgement, which according to popular belief is thinner than a hair and sharper than the sword, he sang :

It is a bridge finer than a hair
that you can cross on Love's steed.

*Kıldan ince bir köprüdür
Aşk atına binen yürür*²¹.

But this love, whose coming makes man "like silk", has many enemies; first of all the temptations of the world which send one to sleep :

Come my heart, if you have understood, fly quickly away
However hard you work, your needs will never end.
He who comes here is caught in the storm of the world
This tree which invites the birds to rest, traps them.

A magic mistletoe is entwined among its branches
Wake up and fly away before your wings are stuck
As soon as you settle down, it numbs you, leads you astray.
Wake up! ; hear the word before you sink.

*Gel ey gönül! bu âlemden, anladiysan, çabuk kaç,
Hiç durmadan çalışırsan, aslâ bitmez ihtiyaç,
Ayak basan, tufanına tutulmuştur dünyanın:
Her kuşları kondurarak sayd eylemiş bu ağaç.*

*Dallarında tılsımla bağlanmış bir tıbık,
Kanaadların yapışmadan uyan da kaç sen çabuk;
Konar konmaz uyuşturur, sihir eder, uyuma,
Mahmur oldun, sen dalmadan sözü dinle tez ayık*²².

The heart has to fight unendingly against its two biggest enemies — desire and fear— and achieve acceptance (*rızâ*) or rather resignation, a most difficult task :

How difficult it is to conquer the peak of acceptance
When we meet with His grace we see it as punishment
If you do not understand that everything comes from God
The gift of life becomes a burden.

²⁰ D II.1 (30.4.51).

²¹ D II 5 (10.6.51).

²² D II.31 (20.12.51).

*Ne kadar zor imiş kazanmak rızâ
Lûtfâ rastgelirse sanıyor cezâ
Her hali Mevlâdan bilmezse eğer
Kendine yük olur verilen âzâ²³.*

and when this happens, one condemns oneself to a life of privation, for

If you are not content with the universe
The cupbearer will not fill your glass.

*Razı olmaz isen sen cümlesine
Doldurup da vermez sana o Sâkî²⁴.*

Acceptance (*rızâ*) is indeed the key to the matter. Acceptance, and not gnosis (*ilim*)—the piling up of knowledge—is the way to God as İsmail understood it. But in order to be able to accept, one has to stop wanting, one has to pulverise as it were the mountain of the self:

If there remains as much as a little dust from my self
from the brain, the thoughts, the body you have given
you are offended, oh beautiful one, and don't reveal yourself.

*Eğer kalır ise toz benliğimden
Aklım fikrim bana verdiğin beden
Küser görünmezsin, ey Dilberim sen²⁵.*

Yet, as he well knew

It is not easy to erode the mountain of the self
Listen Emre, if you do not kill this ego of yours
That world will remain shut for ever.

*Benlik dağı kolay kolay delinmez
İşit, Emre, bu âleme kolayca
Öldürmeden bu benliği gelinmez²⁶.*

In one of the very first poems to have been taken down, İsmail asks for help from outside:

Kill me, oh kill me
Reveal yourself through the mind
For twenty years I have been crying
Give me laughter from now on!

*Öldür beni, öldür beni,
Aklın ile bildir beni*

²³ D II.358 (3.12.54).

²⁴ D II.101 (6.12.52).

²⁵ D II.30 (20.12.51).

²⁶ D II.271 (16.3.54).

*Yirmi sene ben ağladım
Şimden geri güldür beni* ²⁷

Little by little İsmail understood that the mind and its pride were his biggest obstacles on the way to love. And, following the great Sufi tradition of standing up to God and accusing Him on account of our imperfections, he complained:

How can we come to you
When you have tied our legs with the rope of the brain?

*Sana doğru bizler nasıl gelelim
Akıl ipi ile bağlanğ ayağđ?* ²⁸

Deep down though he knew that the fault was his:

Whoever puts his heart into the mind
sticks in this world

*Kim gönül verir akıla
O bu dünyaya takıla?* ²⁹

He also knew that the decision resided exclusively with him and that if he were not strong enough to abide by it, the fault would be his:

How great is the ocean of meditation
How small are those who swim in it
If you do not lose yourself, be as strong as you like
You will not get a drop, the sea will become a weight

*Tefekkür deryâsđ ne kadar büyük
İçine dolanlar o kadar küçük
Orda mahvolmazsa gücü mü yeter
Damla götüremez deniz olur yük* ³⁰

But when losing himself, İsmail became one with the ocean:

I am hell and heaven, I am Adam and Eve
I have boats to save me from Noah's flood
I was with Gabriel and with Muhammad on the night of the ascent
I am Mount Hira, the seven-year guardian of the divine message.

...

Mine is the creation, the soul is mine, myself is mine, I am I
I am the animal and the plant. I am he who keeps the body alive
I am the you which found existence once it renounced the self
I am the unblemished mountain water which streams joyfully down.

²⁷ D I.3 (n.d.).

²⁸ D II.49 (20.3.52).

²⁹ D I.29 (n.d.).

³⁰ D II.483 (8.3.56).

I am helpless, I am earth. You proclaimed it my God
 When you seized my body, I could not stop
 Is a servant like Emre worthy of bringing the message?
 You made this tongue speak. What can I say? I am a fool

*Hemi tamu, hemi uçmak, hem de Havvâ, Âdemim!
 Nûh olanı halâs eder, tûfânımda var gemim,
 Cibril ile göğe çıkan Ahmed ile hemdemim,
 Yedi sene hıfzeyliyen Hırâ denen bir dağım.*

...
*Mülk benimdir, can benimdir, ben benimdir, ben benim!
 Hayvan benim, nebat benim, diri tutan ten benim!
 Yok olup da vâr olana Vâhid olan sen benim!
 Su olup da derelerden berrak akan, ben ağım.*

*Ben âcizim, hem toprağım, ilân ettin sen Mevlâ!
 Duramadım, bedenimi eyleyince istilâ;
 Lâyık mıdır haber vermek Emre gibi bir kula?
 Bu dilimi sen söyledin, neyleyim, ben ahmağım³¹.*

And as the perfect fool, İsmail was blessed with the beatific vision:

The view of her face is the ultimate wisdom
 He who has known it is eternally drunk.

*Yüzünü seyretmek ilimler başı
 Lezzetini alan ebedî mesttir³²*

But self-annihilation on a permanent basis is an impossible task. No technique will procure it —it demands utter humility and utter love which are incompatible with the human condition:

This body of mine is kneaded with pain
 I cannot get out of it through the mind
 The ephemeral world has become my shroud, but I am alive
 This is because of plurality, because of the self.

I flutter and struggle and cannot get out
 My beloved calls me. I cannot see him
 An ocean appears. I cannot flow into it
 This is because of plurality, because of the self.

*Gamınan uğrulmuş bendeki beden
 Akilla çıkamam ne eyleyim ben
 Fânî cihan oldu dirtyken kefen
 Bu kesret elinden, nefsin elinden*

³¹ D II.48 (19.3.52).

³² D II.306 (7.5.54).

*Çırpınır çırpınır çıkamaz oldum
Dostum çağırıyor bakamaz oldum
Umman görünüyor akamaz oldum
Bu kesret elinden, nefsin elinden³³.*

As with all mysticism, İsmail's poetry is an unending cycle of longing, hopelessness, bliss and angry despair. A disarmingly simple man without any pretensions or formal education, İsmail revolts against received knowledge and tradition and attempts to break the fetters of scholasticism

I have read at last! Not syllable by syllable
I read fluently whatever I see
Should the world plunge into darkness
I am the eveningless dawn!

*Okudum, etmem hece
Okuyorum gördükçe
Her daim olsa gece
Akşam olmaz sabahım³⁴*

Such theopathic utterances shocked people. İsmail was considered at best a seeker of paradox, at worst blasphemous.

The world calls me infidel — the faith is mine — why should they care?
Through blasphemy I saw — God is mine — why should they care?
Allah, Allah — God is mine — why should they care?

*Alem bana kâfir diyor, iman benim! kime ne?
Küfr içinden seyreyledim, Rahman benim! kime ne?
Allah, Allah Rahman benim! kime ne?³⁵*

retorted İsmail, clothing his protest in the form of a famous ode by Nesimi³⁶:

What İsmail really tried to do was to lift the veils that organised religion has hung between God and man. To his view, the thickest of these veils consisted of ritual and of literal interpretation, the two avenues by which religions become ossified.

What haven't they added to our faith which is as pure as daylight!
Can the ignorant meddle in matters of religion?

³³ D II.46 (19.3.52).

³⁴ D I.114 (28.9.42).

³⁵ D II 9 (10.8.51).

³⁶ "Ben yitirdim ben ararım, Yâr benimdir, kime ne?"

Gâh giderim öz bağıma gül dererim, kime ne?"

as given in S. NÜZHET, *Bektaşî Şairleri*, Istanbul 1930, p. 295.

God does not need an interpreter
Emre speaks the truth, and they stone him.

*Neler koymuşlardır gün gibi dine
Cehil karışır mı dini mübine ?
Mevlâ'nın kâtibe ihtiyacı yok
Emre doğru söyler, taşlarlar yine³⁷*

But no amount of disapproval, however violently expressed, was enough to make him hold his tongue, as he attacked fossilised religion :

He who has mastered his own self has mastered the universe
Has freed his soul from fear and desire
Does not depend on fasting, praying or the haj
These are not the medicines for the wound inside.

*Nefse hâkim olan cihâna
Hiç onlarda olmaz havf ile recâ
Güvenmez savm, salât hem dahi hacca
Kalb yarası muhtaç değil ilâca³⁸*

And the ultimate defiance to the literalists :

One cannot pray to the dead. I prostrate myself before the living
For me the obligations of the faith are love ; this is where I turn and worship.

*Ölüye secde olmaz — diriye dir sücüdüm
Bana farzdır muhabbet — ona doğrudur yönüm³⁹.*

At about the time when these words were uttered, İsmail said in normal conversation the following : “ *Muhammad is not a body ; he is a state of mind ; he is ecstasy itself. Can ecstasy die ? Muhammad is our spiritual guide. The guide is not behind, he is in front, for he is showing the way. But we walk the path of life backwards, with our face fixed onto the past and our back turned to the future. And since our face is turned to the past, we look for Muhammad at a point in time 1368 years behind us* ”⁴⁰. This is how Emre talked to his circle, that informal Protean group of people who surrounded him for almost all hours of day and night for more than three decades. At the same time he worked at the railway station and from 1942 at a workshop which he opened in one of Adana's bazars. As from the late 50s, when he gave up regular work and

³⁷ D II 34 (4.1.52).

³⁸ D II.59 (18.5.52).

³⁹ D II.94.(2.12.52).

⁴⁰ K 46-47.

entrusted the workshop to his son, İsmail began to spend the whole summer at Namrun, a beautiful village on Mount Taurus. This was the *yayla* where Hafız Halil had ended his days and is buried. There in 1960 İsmail acquired a house and — what is more important — a garden. His attachment to this garden, which was his personal creation and which, at least a few years ago, still stood as İsmail had left it, was at times excessive for one who knew that all earthly beauty has a purely symbolic value. Torn by this contradiction, one August morning in 1966 İsmail addressed the following prayer:

My God, do not bind me to this garden, to this vineyard,
to these stones and this mountain which do not give out light.

*Yarab, haşreyleme bahçeye bağa
Nurunu saçmayan taş ile dağa*⁴¹

But the beauty of the mountain (and pride in his own achievement) never ceased to tempt him. Exactly a year later, in one of his very last *doğuşes*, he could be heard warning himself:

Careful! Do not bind yourself to the stones and the mountain
You will wrap life in a shroud and will go.

*Sakın haşrolma sen taş ile dağa
Hayatı kefene sarıp gidersin*⁴²

Seldom has a man been as wide-open to the gifts of life as İsmail. As a wise Oriental, he did not differentiate between work and leisure, and regarded everything he could do, from digging his garden to listening to music, as a blessing. He enjoyed travelling, playing with children, swimming in the river, walking in the mountains, having poetry read to him, since he himself remained illiterate to the end of his days. A lover of life and of progress in all its aspects, Emre had chosen a hobby which combined inventiveness with curiosity and skill: he photographed the world around him and developed the results of his observation in a small dark-room of his own.

But the best field for the exertion of his broad and open mind was that of theoretical speculation. Then his progressiveness was sometimes transformed into revolutionary speech. As he told a Christian interlocutor one night in the spring of 1951:

Unity [mystic union -*Vahdet-i vücüt*] is the state of ecstasy in which one understands that everything other than God is transitory. Then one sees that nothing is separate from God, and one loves the whole of creation (...). What comes after this state is peace in God. At this moment [the period of

⁴¹ D III.9 (11.8.66).

⁴² D III.20 (10.8.67).

the cold war], the whole world craves for peace. By seeking it, it will find it. And material peace will bring to mankind inner peace. There will come a time when the religious ideal will unite humanity. Our religions are like the tributaries of a great river. When they come together, they create a mother-river; this mother-river is mysticism. And when the streams of religion unite to create the river of mysticism, they will flow into the ocean of the divine union. But for this to happen, men must love each other; and the condition for this is for us to kill the snakes inside ourselves. (...) If we look at men with the eyes of unity, we see that they are all the children of Adam and Eve, that we are all siblings. What little by little divides people and plunges them into enmity is nationalism and religion. The day is near when all people and all religions will unite. The religion which does not progress is condemned to strangulation. (K 32-33)

Polymnia ATHANASSIADI, *İsmail Emre (1900-1970): A Dervish without an Order*

İsmail Emre (1900-1970) was an illiterate welder from Adana who in his thirties began to produce verse in traditional metres in a state of trance. These poems, which are passionate addresses to God, were taken down by his daughters and by the members of the informal circle of pupils that gradually formed around him. A characteristic of this circle, which for many decades extended to both sides of the Aegean, was its ethnic, social and denominational variety. Though categorically denying that he belonged to a dervish order, İsmail provides ample information on his spiritual ancestry, an austere saint by the name of Hafız Halil Develioğlu and the tradition that he represented. Apart from the spontaneously “born” poems (*doğuşlar*), İsmail held regular conversations with his circle on a variety of topics, which have also been recorded. From the corpus of his talks there emerges a moral philosophy founded on common sense and love of humanity, and an ardent desire to reach union with God.

Polymnia ATHANASSIADI, *İsmail Emre (1900-1970): un derviche sans confrérie*

İsmail Emre était un soudeur illettré d'Adana qui, depuis les années trente, tombait de plus en plus souvent en transe et chantait son amour pour Dieu en vers traditionnels et rimés. Ses filles et les membres du cercle qui se forma petit-à-petit autour de lui notaient son chant au moment même où il naissait (les *doğuş*). Ce cercle informel (qui pendant plusieurs décennies s'étendit des deux côtés de la Mer Egée) présentait une grande variété ethnique, sociale et confessionnelle (plutôt que religieuse). İsmail niait catégoriquement toute appartenance à un quelconque ordre de derviches, mais parlait ouvertement de son maître spirituel Hafız Halil Develioğlu et de la tradition qu' il incarnait. En dehors des poèmes, on possède quantité de notes prises lors des conversations qu'İsmail engageait avec son cercle ; il en découle une philosophie morale fondée sur le bon sens et sur l'amour de l'humanité, et l'ardent désir de s'unir avec Dieu.