

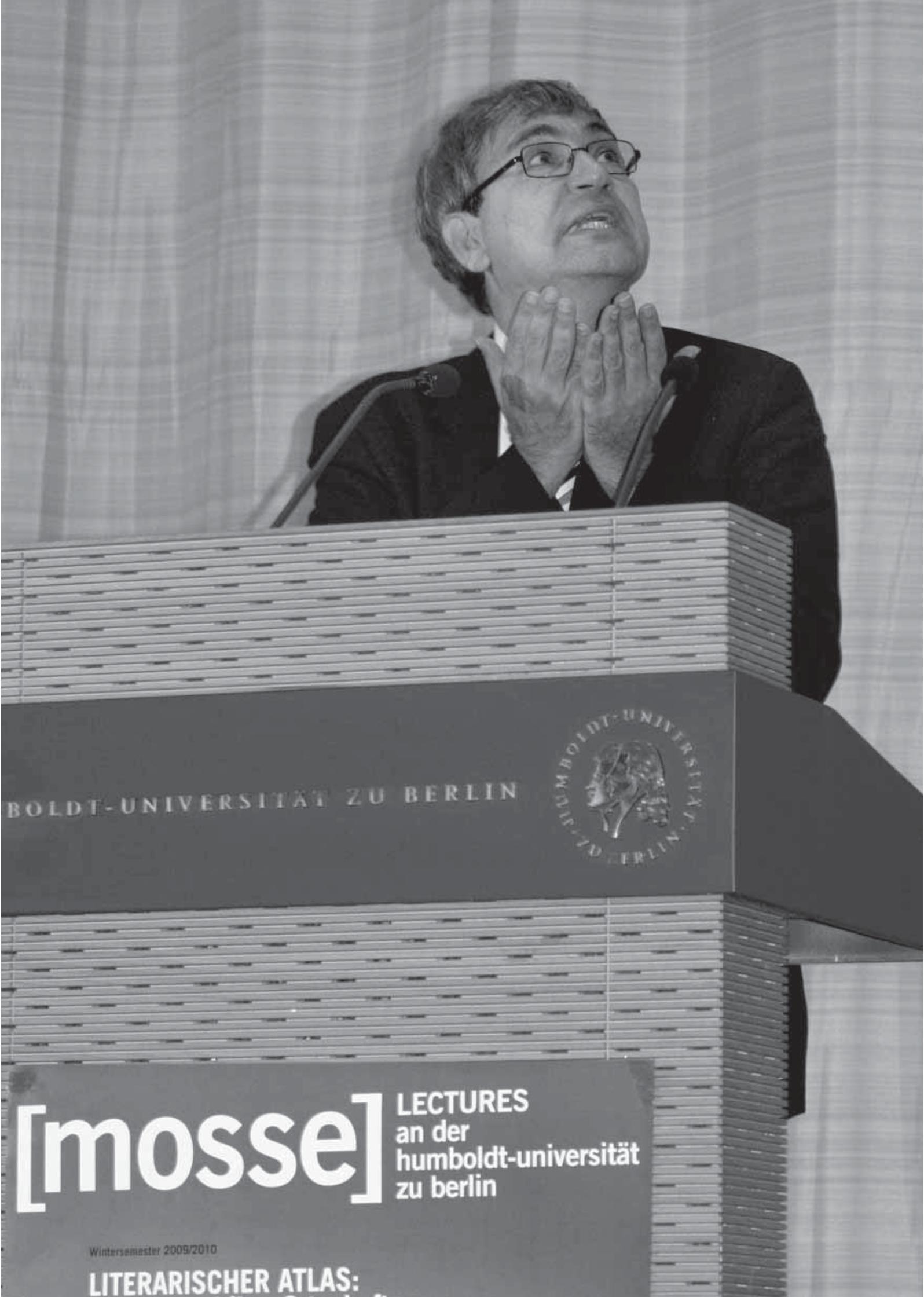
MOSSE LECTURES MIT ORHAN PAMUK

»In contrast to people in Western Europe, people in Istanbul do not treat the remains and memorials of the fall of a great empire as museum pieces, nor do they proudly display them; people in Istanbul just live right among them« (Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul).

Should I, the president of this university, be so bold as to present myself to you not as a host, but as a reader, as one among so many who have enthusiastically read, even devoured what you have written about Istanbul? About this most fascinating metropolis, about Hüzün and Robert Burton's anatomy of melancholy, about your own grandmother, and about the steam of the boots on the Bosphorus which has become a rare phenomenon? Well, why ever not? For quite a while, I thought that tonight I could welcome you primarily as such a reader, not to say, a great fan. This would have given me the chance to spend my time in preparation of your visit by sitting in my office rereading what you wrote about the great city of Istanbul, and finally getting a chance in my far too busy schedule to open your latest book.

A president who reads novels might be a »rare bird« among some of his German colleagues who prefer to read management books and think that this would help them to form a modern and entrepreneurial university. By the way, for me this seems to be at the core of the ongoing student protests against the misery of our current educational system, a protest which I share in parts. Looking around, you see the traces of this protest here in our university building, particularly in this hall. From my point of view, it is not possible to determine what we understand as education and culture, what we understand as Bildung according to economic aspects or even according to a savings scheme. So, alas, it is not the task of the president of this university to analyse and to comment on literature, but of our literary scholars, my dear colleagues Klaus Scherpe and Joseph Vogl who together with their team organise these wonderful Mosse Lectures and to whom not only I am most grateful.

Thus, the president as a literary layman should not come up with remarks about literature, and the theologian Markschies should not comment on the subtle ways in which Orhan Pamuk portrays the political Islam like a scientist using a microscope: Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Christians, Muslims, Jews –



HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN



[mosse] LECTURES
an der
humboldt-universität
zu berlin

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LITERARISCHER ATLAS:

Istanbul, Kars: You, dear Orhan Pamuk are a living example of the fact that Turkey is indeed a part of Europe and for the fact that there are many people in your home country who are, with their hearts and their minds, confessing Europeans; people who not only regard their own country in a critical manner from outside, but also with great affection and love from inside; people who are able to combine these two perspectives, not only in a status of equilibrium, but always with the one or the other balance. Furthermore, your literary works demonstrate that humour and irony are crucial preconditions for the ability to keep things in a balance, to bear with the imbalance of things, and to sustain things which we all need to sustain, not only in your, but also in our country; things we need to sustain, yet not to accept.

But if I do neither speak about literature, nor about theology, what else could I tell you? At least as interesting as my remarks about the books I have read and those I have not, and as interesting as my remarks about religion and politics, might be a first reaction of the president to the very title of Orhan Pamuk's talk: »What happens to us as we read novels?« Fortunately, I am not only an administrator of some thousand students, hundreds of professors and many administrative staff members, but also a historian. As such, I also try to be a historical narrator. You might guess that for such a historian, a historian who explores the history of ancient religions – for instance the religious history of Orhan Pamuk's hometown at the times when its name was Constantinople -, that for such a historian the title of your talk is of great importance, albeit in a slightly modified way.

What happens to the historian as he reads novels? Here are my attempts to answer this question: Does the historian sharpen his or her own understanding of historical phenomena as he or she learns what kind of literary writing skills are necessary to produce a proper historical narrative? Does the historian realize how poor and humble the alternative, once expressed by great and bright German historians, is; namely: »not narrating, but analysing«. Does the historian realize what poor consequences this dictum exerted on German historiography? Or does the historian refer to his or her consciousness as a German historian, shaped by the Bielefeld School? And does he or she as a follower of the

Bielefeld School wonder whether the phantasy of a historian who reads novels can be controlled, or indeed needs to be controlled in order to prevent us from an unaware transition from Gustav Droysen to Felix Dahn. Yet, instead of continuing to ponder about the question in which ways one could, dear Orhan Pamuk, apply your thoughts about the novel to the tasks of a historian, instead of continuing to speculate in which ways a historian can be inspired by your thoughts, I should come to an end, and first of all listen carefully to what you have to say to us tonight.

Thus, I will keep silent from here on and join those who are eager to listen to you. Please let me assure in the name of my entire university that we are very much looking forward to your talk here at Humboldt-Universität, as you are combining in a most impressive manner your talent of narrating and the ability to reflect about this talent. In this way, you will not only entertain, but also teach us tonight.