

## НОВЫЕ КНИГИ

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### TOWARD THE SUN: A PREFACE TO TANER MURAT'S *THE SOUNDS OF TATAR SPOKEN IN ROMANIA*

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This article explores the specific value of Taner Murat's work in his new book *The Sounds of Tatar Spoken in Romania* and the value of linguistics, translation, and cultural preservation in general. Part book review, personal memoir, political and social commentary, philosophy, and poetry, it is a partial exploration of the beauty of language and the power of words. The article proposes the importance of "difference" as opposed to the widespread homogenization of cultures due to the proliferation of internet usage, democracy, capitalism, and efficiency. Sources cited include Joseph Joubert, Darrin McMahon, Mark C. Taylor, Peter Gay, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. One theme explores the effects of the over-unification of cultural ideas and state systems under the broader influence of larger powers, corporate or political, based on the American model or other hallmarks of contemporary Western Civilization.

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*«Drawing is speaking to the eye; talking is painting to the ear».*

Joseph Joubert,

Parisian Essayist of the Classical Era

As an American growing-up just outside of Detroit – then, the car manufacturing mecca of the world – in the 1960s, I was afforded the opportunity to study German at my local junior high school. I was in eighth grade and terribly naïve, academically. Over the course of that year, during one class hour per day, I was taught the rudiments of the German language (technically, High German, the «standard» dialect). I learned its basic grammar, phonetics, syntax, and morphology, even though these latter two terms were never used as descriptors of what we were doing. At least half of the class time each day was dedicated to «lab» work, which meant that we sat in semi-isolated work areas and listened to «real» Ger-

mans speaking the language via recordings through our own personal headsets. This was all brand new to me and very exotic. At this point in my life, I had only heard my brother-in-law's grandmother speak Polish as she prepared us lunch one day; that was the extent of my exposure to other cultures. We also chose a new name, a name that would be used in the classroom and when speaking to our fellow «German» students outside of class. I chose «Ludwig». It was simply a name on a list of authentic German names available to us. I loved the unusual sound of the «u» and the fact that the «w» was pronounced like a «v» – very few people knew these distinctions in Taylor, Michigan. My peers and I were very much alike. We were all white, none of our parents were college educated, all our parents worked at one of the «Big Three» automakers or industries that supported the «Big Three». We were what they call in America, «blue collar kids». Only later did I learn the importance of «Ludwig» regarding the study of music and, much later, regarding the study of language. Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies had yet to reach my ears. By the end of the year, however, I was playing his «Ode to Joy» from his *Ninth Symphony* – a simple version, on guitar. And, of course, our teacher also exposed us to the iconic opening of his *Fifth Symphony*. Dah-da-da dum! Those sounds, the sounds of Beethoven's music and the sounds of the words and phrases of a foreign language were rich, full, and so very different from anything I had heard before.

At a time in which English is rapidly becoming the unofficial language of the globe, it is encouraging to note that there is at least one man – somewhere – attempting to preserve a dying language, a language now spoken by fewer than thirty thousand people. That man is Taner Murat. That language is Tatar. His latest effort to save this language, *his* language, is the book you hold in your hands. Most would agree that any specific culture is undeniably tied to the language or languages that created that culture; that to preserve the distinctive aspects of a specific culture, the specific language or languages that created that culture must be preserved.

Murat states that he undertook this work in order «to better understand, in its depth, my native tongue». He also is very transparent regarding his audience, noting that his work here is mostly for specialists and students. And, for such a small book, there is much to learn here. But, even for such a novice as myself, someone who only speaks one language fluently, I can now say «mother» in Tatar, and «sold», and «give». My pronunciations of these words, I am sure, are not spot-on but I have taken Murat's instruction to mind, and into my heart, and have attempted to take in this ancient language, shape these words carefully in my mouth, and speak them out into the world.

There is much to learn from these sounds. Murat speaks with great confidence about agglutination, harmonic hierarchy, the musicality principle, phonetics, and the careful positioning of the tongue, lips, and jaw when forming the most basic components of Tatar, which then become words. Behind the veil of this work are equally important issues, however. While reading about the minutiae of this language, one cannot help but think of what else may be on Murat's

mind. Something, perhaps, that I may attempt to disclose here. A reasonable perspective, I think. Murat takes such an extraordinarily detailed approach in describing just how to form these sounds into words, through astute illustrations and comparisons, that one cannot help but think of the value of all indigenous languages and what is at stake if we do not share Murat's passion.

The cultural homogenization of the world, primarily through the gradual widespread acceptance of the American democratic/capitalist model is now kicking into high gear. The proliferation of social media usage through the internet has increased this movement toward widespread «sameness». One could argue that this is a good thing. Democracy is a good thing. Capitalism is a good thing, perhaps. The accessibility of knowledge and social connections through the internet via the World Wide Web is a good thing. Also true, perhaps. But, there are caveats. Every time I visit Europe, on average every other year for the past fourteen years, I see more and more bits and pieces of «old» Europe being replaced with iconic international brands: McDonalds, Ford, Starbucks, English speakers. All this globalization through corporate and political marketing makes my travels much easier but it also makes me less tapped-in to the uniqueness of the regions I visit. Munich without Starbucks was much more attractive than Munich with Starbucks. Venice with fewer English speakers was much more stimulating than Venice with more English speakers. To encourage even a modest sense of protective nationalism is currently not fashionable; however, appealing to one's sentiment of historical pride that comes with being different seems admirable. The preservation of languages helps to preserve that history and difference, the unique cultures that countries may offer to the world. Similarly, one should not «allow» Starbucks to put the indigenous coffee shop out of business.

There is nothing wrong with adding another language to one's repertoire. It is, indeed, a gateway to understanding different cultures, which is an extraordinarily rewarding endeavor. But, one should never lose hold of one's native tongue. One should never allow a language from another culture to become the dominate language in their culture. Darrin McMahan, in his book *Divine Fury: A History of Genius*, speaks of individual genius and its own «elevated soul, [its] own beautiful mind». Perhaps, nations and regions could retain the same. Perhaps, it is «a dangerous blessing», perhaps not. Murat is attempting to preserve, I believe, through the preservation of the language of Tatar, the elevated soul and beautiful mind of Tatar culture. It is a worthy cause, indeed. Murat has translated several of my poems from English into Crimean Tatar, and the poems of numerous other poets as well, and he has written poems in both languages. From what I have seen, Murat is an intelligent man, a peaceful man, a spiritual man, a man with a good soul. Translation is a worthy endeavor; it gently forces the meeting of two worlds, a blending that creates something new. Better two languages than just one. Better many languages than just a few. But, one must always continue to fan the flames of one's native language.

The cultural critic and historian Peter Gay sees «high culture» being threatened by «advancing technology», stating in his book *Modernism*:

*The Lure of Heresy* that «the commercial manufacture of culture has become ever more influential an activity», resulting «in an age of musical comedies». There is nothing wrong with laughter but the serious work of cultural preservation in every culture is necessary *now* more than ever. Murat's efforts in the preservation of Tatar via a book that instructs one in how to actually speak the language is a treasure, a treasure that may help to increase that language's hold on the region. Languages are fluid and everything in a culture is, indeed, in flux. Changes are to be expected, because of inside forces and outside forces, but a respect for the past and its continued influence should be expected as well. This too makes Murat's work incredibly valuable.

Another aspect of advancing technology threatening culture and, therefore, also threatening a necessary attention to language, is addressed by Mark C. Taylor in his book *Speed Limits: Where Time Went and Why We Have So Little Left*. Taylor reminds us that speed kills. Our rapid paced world and its focus on efficiency is a killer. Sameness is more efficient; the unification of languages into one language is efficient. Murat is engaged in an activity which forces one to slow down and appreciate the sounds of language, which indirectly permits Romanians and others to slow down and take stock of their culture as represented through their language. Learning to speak a language, any language other than one's native language is beneficial. To learn how to speak an endangered language, like Tatar, or to just read about that language, in general, demonstrates an empathy for cultural truths that first emerged through the spoken word. To create a book that speaks so specifically about how one should form the words in one's mouth of an ancient language, is a noble act indeed; and, a transformative one.

The Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said «The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for». Similarly, the much debated Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that the language we learned when we first became speakers determines our thoughts or, at least, influences our thoughts and thought processes. Attempting to learn *another* language must have an effect on our thoughts as well. I know attempting to learn German as an eighth grader changed me; and, I am certain that my thought processes continued to change when I took additional German courses as an undergraduate. I know that what little Tatar I know now has changed me. The beauty of language and the power of words shape our lives in ways we do not totally comprehend.

When I was young, I looked toward the traditional pillars of the history of Western Civilization for inspiration – toward Germany, France, and Italy. Or, when feeling particularly domestic, I looked toward California in my own country. Now, thanks to Taner Murat's work here and elsewhere, I look more toward the east, even more toward the Sun, toward Romania, and say:

**SPEAK**

Shape the phrase in your mouth,  
touch it with tongue and teeth,

birth it into the air,  
carry it to me  
and lay it in my arms.

I will hold it, gently.  
I will caress the vowels of its cry.  
I will open my ears.

Our skin will melt, flake,  
fly off in patches  
toward the sun.

The scratching and stretching  
of letters can bring us  
no closer than this.

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**ПО НАПРАВЛЕНИЮ К СОЛНЦУ: ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ К КНИГЕ  
ТАНЕРА МУРАТА «ЗВУКИ ТАТАРСКОЙ РЕЧИ В РУМЫНИИ»**

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В данной статье рассматривается ценность работы Танера Мурата, представленной в его новой книге «Звуки татарской речи в Румынии», а также значение лингвистики, перевода и сохранения культуры в целом. Отчасти это обзор книги, личные мемуары, политические и социальные размышления, философия и поэзия – в некоторой степени эта работа посвящена исследованию красоты языка и силы слов. В статье подчёркивается важность «различия» в противовес широко распро-

страненной гомогенизации культур, связанной с распространением Интернета, демократии, капитализма и продуктивности. Среди цитируемых источников приводятся работы таких авторов как Джозеф Жуберт, Даррин МакМахон, Марк К. Тейлор, Питер Гэй и Людвиг Витгенштейн. В статье также рассматриваются последствия чрезмерной унификации культурных идей и государственных систем под широким влиянием более крупных корпоративных или политических сил, основанных на американской модели или других отличительных особенностях современной западной цивилизации.

**Ключевые слова:** Танер Мурат, Чопсон, Татары, Румыния, Германия, Витгенштейн, лингвистика, культура

**Сведения об авторе:** Кевин Маршалл Чопсон – бакалавр искусств в области английского языка и философии (Восточный Мичиганский университет); магистр искусств в области литературного творчества (Мюррейский государственный университет); заведующий кафедрой английского языка и литературы в Академии Дэвидсона (1414 W. Old Hickory Blvd., Nashville, TN 37207, USA); адъюнкт-профессор в Волонтерском государственном колледже (1480 Nashville Pike, Gallatin, TN 37066, USA); kevinchopson@gmail.com