

Who owns science?



Antarctica's
tainted horizons

Child labour:
a lesser evil?

Mark Thomas,
British TV maverick

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Nostalgia for Istanbul

Photos by Selim Günes*



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Through a half-open door, a glimpse into the depths of an old building in the Galata district.

The sounds and smells of the fish market, the cool of a café near a mosque, alleyways cascading down towards the sea plied by vessels large and small—the indelible memories of a leading Turkish writer

Text by Nedim Gürsel**

*Selim Günes, who was born in Turkey in 1961, is a widely-travelled photographer whose work was shown at the "Istanbul-Istanbul" exhibition at the city's Taksim gallery in November 1998.

** Nedim Gürsel is a Turkish author who writes in Turkish and French. He was born in 1951 and has published some twenty novels, short stories, travelogues and essays that have been translated into ten or so languages. Notable among his works are "A Long Summer in Istanbul", "The Death of the Seagull" and an anthology of Turkish women's literature entitled *Paroles dévoilées* (Arcantère-UNESCO Publishing, 1993). His novel "The First Woman" won the Ipekçi Prize, awarded by a Greek-Turkish foundation, for its contribution to understanding between the two peoples. Gürsel has also written the screenplay for a motion picture which is currently being filmed and will probably be called *Istanbul My Love*.

Istanbul is present in most of my books. One of my novels begins with these words: "For a long time I rose early. It was there, on the Asian shores of the Bosphorus, in my beloved city, which has followed me everywhere and whose memory is branded in my mind forever." What new can I find to say about Istanbul, as a Turkish writer who has lived in Paris for twenty-five years, except by evoking the piercing nostalgia I feel for the city from afar. My forehead bent over white pages, I imagine the city and invent it through writing.

Slowly it comes into focus in the lam-

plight. Its famous skyline of slender minarets, lead domes, castle keeps, ramparts, towers and office buildings slowly emerges. I see the peeling walls and the pigeons. I feel the cool air of a café near the courtyard of a mosque. I picture myself in a taxi. The deep, dark blue waters of the Bosphorus are flowing just alongside. As the road narrows, the trees become more abundant. Cruise ships as big as cities speed past pursued by seagulls, leaving foamy whirlpools in their wake. Long rowboats and cormorants fend the dazzlingly white foam as they glide through the water. Wooden houses and ▶

► concrete buildings seem embedded into each other. From time to time, the darkened windows of an old, decrepit *yalı* stream past the window. Then, high garden walls, narrow alleyways cascading down towards the sea, trees and more trees. Fish-nets drying in the sun, small white ferry-boats and little fishing vessels sail by. At the most unexpected moment, turning a corner or at a crossing, tombs loom up before me. I know that it is here, in one of these dilapidated tombs, that one day I shall be laid to rest. But for now I am in Paris and alive, thank God. So I picture myself on Karaköy Square, sitting at a table in a café near the fish market.

The market is livelier than ever. Passersby bustle towards Galata Bridge clutching string bags stuffed with provisions. Fresh vegetables, fish, dried fruits and nuts, smoked and salted meats, and cheese can be made out under their wrappings. Fish-mongers shout themselves hoarse, customers crowd around the stalls, blood-streaked fish heads fall into the water. Heads of tuna, bass and mackerel fall amidst rotting potatoes, cabbage leaves and leeks.

Sitting in the café on the corner of the market, I watch as the crowd swells in the coolness of the evening. String bags are bursting at the seams. Traffic is blocked on Karaköy Square. Cars for hire are packed together. Pedestrians try to make their way between the buses, lorries, pushcarts and peddlers. Their hair is disheveled and they look distraught. From where I sit, I can see people crammed into a bus, their faces streaming with sweat, lined up like sardines, Saturday travelers with lacklustre eyes, patiently waiting. The old Fords, Chevrolets, Plymouths and Buicks are jam-packed. Overwhelmed by exhaustion, the human heads remain impassive inside these airless, hermetically-sealed cans.

I want to get my breath back. To breathe in the air of the sea, of the foamy waves rumbling in the blue immensity. I am overcome by the acrid stench of burned oil, ►

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1. Ottoman house standing on the shore.

Top, minarets tower above the Eyüp neighbourhood.

Right, convivial café gathering in the Beyoğlu district.

Opposite page, lines of washing frame a classic street scene in the Balat neighbourhood of the old city.





Photos © Sehm Güneş/Spa Press, Paris

Right, a thirst-quenching snack in the heart of the old city.

Below right, taxis parked bumper-to-bumper in the Bostanci district.

Opposite page, a waterfront fish stall on Karaköy quay.



A hand outstretched to Europe

Located on the European shore of the Bosphorus Straits, Istanbul is at the crossroads of land and sea routes, Asia and Europe, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. It is Turkey's main manufacturing centre, commercial hub and port. With a population of 12 million, the city and its surrounding suburbs are the country's fastest-growing urban area.

Founded by the Greeks as Byzantium around 658 B.C., Istanbul became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire in 330 A.D. under Emperor Constantine, whose name it bore until the fall of the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople was taken by the Crusaders in 1204, reconquered by the Greeks in 1261 and captured by the Ottomans on May 29, 1453. Mehmed II, the Conqueror, made it the capital of the Ottoman Empire in 1458, changing the name to Istanbul. It was not until 1923 that the city lost its status as capital to Ankara. The famous bridge spanning the Bosphorus was inaugurated in March 1973.

"An old, ring-covered hand stretching out towards Europe" is how the French poet Jean Cocteau described Istanbul, whose historic areas, where many Byzantine and Ottoman landmarks stand side-by-side, were added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1985. The famous Hagia Sophia church, built between 532 and 537 by order of Emperor Justinian II; the Mosque of Süleyman, named after Süleyman the Magnificent and inaugurated in 1556; the Blue Mosque, Topkapi palace and the great bazaar bear witness to a history spanning well over a thousand years. ■





Photos © Selim Güneş/Spa Press, Paris

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► sweat and urine. I look away from Karaköy Square, turning my gaze left to the other bank of the Golden Horn. Suddenly the spectacle changes. The stage seems to widen. I see clouds briskly scudding past in the southern wind. Straight ahead, Bayezit Tower gradually grows fainter in the ashen light. In the distance, I can make out the spiky minarets of the Mosque of Süleyman, its heavy domes overwhelming the old houses, and stacked crates forming a wall in front of the covered market. The pigeons of the New Mosque—little black spots—stand out against the sky. Taking off from the mosque's courtyard, they land on the blackened walls and canopies of the Egyptian bazaar. Oddly, the opposite bank seems more peaceful. But the fish market makes a deafening racket. In the shimmering colours, fishing boats moored at the quay bob up and down on the filthy water. The Golden Horn is strewn with shreds of oily rags and dead seagulls.

A tide of passengers pours out of the Eyüp ferry which has drawn up alongside Galata Bridge. Thick smoke belches out of the funnel. Soot rains down on bunches of grapes and polished apples in the stalls, on the old civil servants sitting in the bridge's cafés, smoking hookahs as they finger their

prayer beads. Police motorboats, tartans and pot-bellied barges glide past. So does the boat owned by the fisherman who sells his catch near the landing pier. The severed fish heads make me feel sick. So I get up and head for a quieter neighbourhood.

Back in the streets, strolling past wooden houses with iron gates, I feel I am living through a dream. As if I am outside the city in an unknown, inaccessible place, facing a theatre set beyond which it is impossible to go. Sometimes cars pass by, and street peddlers. "Rags! Second-hand goods!," shouts one of them. Another yells that he sells watermelons or, dragging out the "o", says "tomatoes" instead of "tomatoes". And "Peppers! Eggplant! Chicory! Lettuce! Okra!" They are the cries of another age, of an Istanbul I have never forgotten. They come from an unreal world. A world I can no longer reach even if I go there. Yes, I am in Paris and, like the great Turkish poet Orhan Veli, who died there at the age of 35, "I listen to Istanbul with my eyes closed." And the lines of another Istanbul poet, whose name still burns my lips and who endured more than his share of separations and nostalgic longings, come to mind: "Two things are forgotten only in death / The face of our mother and the face of our city." ■



Minarets and domes of the Blue Mosque rise up in the distance.

Crowds on Istiklal Street in the Beyoğlu district.

