



## **The Bastard of Istanbul**

*Elif Shafak*

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# The Bastard of Istanbul

*Elif Shafak*

## **The Bastard of Istanbul** Elif Shafak

From one of Turkey's most acclaimed and outspoken writers, a novel about the tangled histories of two families.

In her second novel written in English, Elif Shafak confronts her country's violent past in a vivid and colorful tale set in both Turkey and the United States. At its center is the "bastard" of the title, Asya, a nineteen-year-old woman who loves Johnny Cash and the French Existentialists, and the four sisters of the Kazanci family who all live together in an extended household in Istanbul: Zehila, the zestful, headstrong youngest sister who runs a tattoo parlor and is Asya's mother; Banu, who has newly discovered herself as a clairvoyant; Cevriye, a widowed high school teacher; and Feride, a hypochondriac obsessed with impending disaster. Their one estranged brother lives in Arizona with his wife and her Armenian daughter, Armanoush. When Armanoush secretly flies to Istanbul in search of her identity, she finds the Kazanci sisters and becomes fast friends with Asya. A secret is uncovered that links the two families and ties them to the 1915 Armenian deportations and massacres. Full of vigorous, unforgettable female characters, *The Bastard of Istanbul* is a bold, powerful tale that will confirm Shafak as a rising star of international fiction.

## **The Bastard of Istanbul Details**

Date : Published January 18th 2007 by Viking Adult (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780670038343

Author : Elif Shafak

Format : Hardcover 368 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Novels, Asian Literature, Turkish Literature

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## From Reader Review The Bastard of Istanbul for online ebook

### Amrita says

The book suffers due to its trite language, stereotypical characterization, and unsubtle plot. You end up not really caring for any of the characters, and wishing that the two deep questions - the Armenian genocide and the Turkish identity pre and post Ataturk, had been painted on a more deserving canvas...

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### Siria says

A florid hodgepodge of a book, *The Bastard of Istanbul* is too weak a novel to deal fruitfully with the issues it raises—the Armenian genocide of 1915; nationalism; how to navigate through your identity as the child of immigrants—and Shafak's ambition doesn't match her execution. It's cluttered and unfocused, and Shafak's characters fail to come alive beneath the weight of symbolism and stereotypes she heaps on them. The climactic revelations of the novel are also quite far-fetched and felt very manufactured. The one aspect of the novel I did strongly like, though, was the one area where Shafak didn't fall into stereotypes: depicting the multicultural, cosmopolitan nature of Istanbul, showing its mixed European and Middle Eastern influences, its secularists and its devout Muslims.

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### Chrissie says

The lines are beautiful.  
The humor is priceless.  
The questions are numerous.  
One example being: what is the value of truth?  
Is truth always to be sought, AT ALL COSTS?  
because: "the past is anything but bygone."

and as Elif Shafak also so eloquently speaks:

*"Once there was. Once there wasn't. God's creatures were as plentiful as grains and talking too much was a sin, for you could tell what you shouldn't remember and you could remember what you shouldn't tell."*

The humor - I adored the depiction of French cuisine at a restaurant where each plate was composed as a known work of art. Could you dig into a Chagall, Magritte or a Modigliani portrait?

As Asya describes her family, "this must be a nut-house". But aren't we all nuts?

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### Sarah ~ says

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**Ahmed says**

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## Moaz Mohamed says

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## **Marmor Owais says**

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Anca says

Wow! This was something! I have to admit I missed the feeling of oneness in a book.

Right after I finished it (& took a deep breath), I turned on my computer determined to read more about the author, the story, ideas, opinions. I like to do that when I don't want a book to end.

Unfortunately, I got to an old conclusion of mine again: critique and dissection of the book has no charm. I clicked on some links and there I had! opinions about how characters evolve and how the novel is built, even

criticism for too many characters (?!?) and so less about the great feeling of the book. For me, this was a bit of fresh air after a lot of mediocre novels of this type. If I started reading a few pages at my breakfast, I would regret putting it down and heading to my day intrigued on how familiar I am with the characters and how eager for more I am. Not just for the idea of reading, but for what the book itself brought to me.

Enough with that. I'm gonna put down a few of my obs, they are a lot more and not so well structured. But if you want to read a clear and good review about this book, with analysis between the characters and all that, you won't find it here, search somewhere else, my review is a long hotchpotch of personal and subjective impressions over the book.

Anyway, you'd better read a few interviews of Elif Shafak (liked this one:<http://us.penguinrandomhouse.com/static/rgu...> ) - lot less boring and blurred than interviews about a book with its author usually are.

First thing that impressed me was the name of the chapters whose significance we only get later on the book [spoiler: the ingredients for a turkish dessert: *ashure*]. Although I did not understand what was the author following in the beginning, I was thrilled by her consistency in placing little details to point to the chapter's name. That was smth special I haven't met in any other book - so it added to the book's flavour.

Then the style: though I read it in Romanian, so I can't tell how good it is in English, nothing sounded false to me, the prose flew on and hooked me in and I finally got rid of that obsession of mine to look at words and sentences and nod: hmm, is it the translation or why does this sound so awkward and fake? [i bet it's the author!;):]. So I had that childish joy of reading a book again.

The characters were very very interesting: the Aunties were intriguing each with its particularity and still with that tolerance that made them able to live together. The girls- Asya, the nihilist impressed me with her slowness and blackness, mostly for her freedom of adopting them and stand by them. I resonated with her refuse to accept the past as part of her, her wish to leave a big blank spot behind and stay in that moment with nothing to be charged for. I admired her force of thinking, honestly; I don't think it's improbable for a 19 years old to think deep. At the opposite: Armanoush, living with her ancestor's memories and history tied up to her life, decided to find her roots by taking a trip to Istanbul, Turkey, the city her forebears' old enemies, the Turks lived in. She believed that returning there would help her find herself in between her mother's hate for Armeanian culture and her father's Armenian origins.

Finally, she finds a balance between the two-she banished the typical Armenian hate for Turks while being faithful to her origin, trying to bring illumination in her stepfather's family regarding the Armenian genocide, long ignored by the Turk Republic. A quote that IMO describes the realistic state of things: "Just like the Turks have been in the habit of denying their wrongdoing, the Armenians have been in the habit of savoring the cocoon of victimhood" (p. 263) Baron Baghdasarian.

The cultural exchange between the girls was interesting to observe: each had a different stand to life but shared with the other one without notching the other one's. [asya/j.cash-armanoush/books:]

The ending was unexpected, the final third brings the full view over the two families and their connection between their histories. Despite that, there wasn't any noticeable rush -it was just how things evolved(maybe a little improbable). The multiple leaps in time and space were effective for the atmosphere. The paragraphs from the child's book and the pieces of the families' history intercalated with Mostapha's arrival in Istanbul and, in the end, his death brought up the rootless tree that man was.

A symbol I noticed: The tattoo Aram wanted to have and got refused by Auntie Zeliha: an upside down tree with its roots in the air it's a perfect definition of instability of Asya, the bastard with the no-name father and

the stability seeked by Armanoush.

Also, I liked that Shafak lined up the lifestyle of the bohemian intellectuals of Turkey and how the history is a big void even to them. Cafe Kundera had a very very worm atmosphere-the at. of a place where things are tendious and repetitive, where people go and lose themselves in one of the photos with a road hanged on the wall in front of them.

The city of Istanbul with its flavours and smells and overall, the importance of the food and spices in this book was such a delight bringer..

In the end, all characters were so properly left in the history that I don't want to know what happens next though I wouldn't have minded to stick with them a little more.

Of course, there are a lot more I left out, but I'll place them in my personal notes, i don't think anyone resists to read my chaotic review to the end.

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### **Huda Yahya says**

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**Mohamed Al says**

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**Fatma says**

I love Elif Safak and I liked this book. She makes her characters so alive when writing, good are not always good, bad are not always bad, there is beauty and poison in all of us at times. It is only a matter of how we use it.

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Lavinia says

Entertaining? Yes. Lively characters? Absolutely. Page turner? By all means. It is what I call the perfect book for holiday. One might as well consider Middlesex and The Kite Runner, not only for the captivating stories but also for the multi-cultural (Turkish-American, Armenian-American, Greek-American, Afghan-American whatever-American) incursion into people's and countries' past and present political / economical / social situation.

Beyond the complicated relationships (which got on my nerves a little bit - the soapy part) and the interesting characters (Zeliha was my favourite, if any doubts), I felt the book as being mostly about Istanbul, a character in itself, torn between two continents and two mentalities, trying to cope with the present and be a cosmopolitan city of the 21st century but still struggling to preserve national identity and values. While reading, I remembered this documentary about the music of Istanbul, so if you're interested in having a treat for your eyes and ears, give it a try.

P.S.

The gourmand in me was not necessarily pleased (I haven't come to terms with Arabic food yet, though I remember cooking a Libyan recipe once) but challenged. The one thing everybody gets enough of is food, wherever they are: Istanbul, Arizona or California. And if you are really willing and a lot into spices and stuff like that you can mentally combine all the flavours and ingredients and come up with a really satisfied nose :)

**Rima Ibrahim says**

## **Maria Espadinha says**

Verdade "Emprestadada" ?!

"A Bastarda de Istambul" foi um best seller na Turquia - uma obra polémica que em 2006, espetou com a respectiva autora em tribunal!

O conflito Arménio-Turco que entre 1915 e 1923 redundou numa matança massiva de cerca de um milhão e meio de Arménios - o primeiro genocídio do século XX - nunca foi assumido pela República da Turquia.

No livro, Elif Shafak aborda esse tema tabu, num diálogo entabulado pelas personagens Asya e Armanoush.

Acusada de heresia e de denegrir a identidade turca, a autora só escapa à prisão graças aos protestos internacionais!...

Foi pois com redobrado interesse que me entreguei a esta leitura, e devo confessar que o que mais me cativou, foi a diversidade de personagens femininas.

Habituada àquela imagem da mulher islâmica doméstica-parideira, tapada da cabeça aos pés, foi deveras gratificante deixar-me surpreender por um leque de variadíssimas muçulmanas, todas elas de personalidade vincada. Foram elas:

1 - A rebelde Asya com a sua paixão por Jean Paul Sartre e a música de Johnny Cash.

2 - A belíssima e irreverente Zhelia, uma mãe solteira de trajes arrojados, que gera um salão de tatuagens.

3 - Armanoush, uma arménia-americana em busca de si mesma no passado.

4 - A vidente Banu sempre agarrada aos seus djinns conselheiros.

5 - A disciplinada Cevriye, uma professora de história a abarrotar de auto-controlo, mas sem a menor sombra de humor.

6 - A hipocondríaca Feride, que só nos últimos 6 anos, fora diagnosticada com 8 doenças diferentes, qual delas a mais alienígena.

7 - Petite-Ma, uma bisavó de 77 anos, já com a memória carcomida pela Alzheimer, que solta suspiros a torto e a direito, sempre que um copo ou um espelho se quebram.

"Lá vai mau olhado", é o comentário que sempre acompanha os suspiros emitidos!

Etc, etc...

Loucas, sensatas, hipocondríacas ou rebeldes, elas simplesmente são, sem coerções nem pressões!...

Ficção? Verdade?

Sendo a Turquia um país Euro-Asiático, pode ser que uma Verdade viajante se vá insinuando sub-repticiamente, emprestada lá pelo lado europeu?! E que o lado asiático não a devolva?!

Com sorte, pode ser!... ;)

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## Shannon (Giraffe Days) says

It was the cover that snared me. Turkey is one of the top three countries on my mental list of countries to visit, along with the Czech Republic and Morocco, and I love Turkish architecture and design. The cover reminded me of those beautiful mosaics and arches and mosques, and then the title! Who could resist? A less impulsive person than me, sure, but this is my idea of living dangerously :)

Beautifully, gracefully, vividly written with a light, airy atmosphere that really allows you to breathe, *The Bastard of Istanbul* follows the story of two girls and their families, one Turkish, one Armenian American, and how their histories interweave. Asya Kazanci is the bastard daughter of Zeliha, raised by an eccentric group of aunts and grandmothers in Istanbul. Now 19, she spends most of her time listening to Johnny Cash records and philosophising with a group of older, cynical political outcasts at the Cafe Kundera. In Arizona, 19 year old Armanoush "Amy" Tchakhmakhchian bounces between her over-protective American mother Rose and quiet Turkish step-father Mustafa, and her father Barsham's large Armenian family in San Francisco. Struggling to understand herself and what it means to be Armenian, she decides to journey to Turkey and stay with her step-father's family, the Kazanci's.

Politics, history, philosophy, religion, and the familiar struggle for personal identity in relation to and against a collective group flesh out this lovely tale, littered with references to popular culture and classic literature. Likened to the work of Amy Tan, Shafak's prose is much more philosophical and lyrical, and her themes are less dramatic for drama's sake. I found all her characters to be instantly recognisable, and I felt that both Asya and Amy to be familiar, and similar, to myself in some ways. I identified with them far more readily than I would reading about a more conventional teenager.

The atmosphere is wonderful, from dry Arizona to misty San Francisco to loud, colourful, vibrant Istanbul - made me want to go there even more than before! I could hear and smell and see it all so clearly, though the prose is not overly descriptive. With an omniscient narrator who reveals the inner tortures and idiosyncrasies of the characters with a humorous but sympathetic touch, the narrative goes back and forth in time, skilfully revealing the past as it corresponds to the present, creating a tapestry as detailed and vivid as a Turkish carpet. I loved all the aunts too, with their quirks and Banu's djinni. Yes, there's a touch of magic realism in this book that serves it well.

The conflict between Turks and Armenians, the denial of the Armenian genocide which, I believe, is still keeping Turkey out of the EU, is dealt with with a great deal of compassion and understanding. Shafak makes an effort to show different arguments, as in, why the Turks are so ignorant of this history and why the Armenians are so stubborn to relive it. There was a wonderful quote about that but sadly I didn't mark the page and now I can't find it.

This was a random find in the bookshop and an absolute gem to read, and I highly recommend it. On a side note, the author mentions that the book was first released in Turkey in 2006 (she wrote it in both Turkish and English) and she was facing up to three years in jail because some of the things the Turkish characters said went against the nation, something like that, but the charges were dropped. Still, it's a bit scary, but also fascinating - Turkey is arguably one of the more liberal Muslim states, by western standards, where women have rights and opportunities, but where conservative traditions still play a heavy hand in domestic affairs.

## **Saddam Bouchaib says**

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## Aliaa Mohamed says

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## Aubrey says

*The mordant gap between the children of those who managed to stay and the children of those who had to leave.*

If there's one story the media in the United States should be having conniptions over right now, it's that of Mike Brown. Not Ebola, not Ukraine, not even Robin Williams, for if that man was half of the good things I've heard since depression killed him, he wouldn't want the tears of those who believe yet another black person deserved to die at the hands of white law enforcement. There's no nation quite like the US when it comes to handling the genocide card; it makes for a much messier state of things than this book's portrayal of the cosmopolitan memory of the Armenian genocide committed by the Turkish, but the indoctrination is

there, the view of abroad versus the focus of at home is there, and the compromise, oh, the compromise. The compromise is there, with no answers to tuck you in at night.

The word 'genocide' hadn't existed in concrete fullness on April 24, 1915, much as there is no singular term for what Wikipedia calls "government neglect, unfavorable social policies, high poverty rates, changes implemented in the criminal justice system and laws, and...extremely high incarceration rates" within its 'Social issues' section of the 'Post-Civil Rights Era in African-American history'. Words, words, words, all of which imply a both sides to the story and refuse to even touch upon the body count or the unwillingness of drivers in Portland, Oregon, to stop for black pedestrians in crosswalks with no traffic lights, twice as likely to keep on going and make them wait of fear for their lives. I don't invoke this as a metaphor for the relations of Armenians and Turkish people in this day and age, but as a personal reminder of the latest link in a history of oppression in my own country. ?afak doesn't solve the issues faced by oppressors and oppressed; she starts a conversation, and within my own means, I will follow.

*Am I responsible for my father's crime? A Girl Named Turk asked.*

*You are responsible for recognizing your father's crime, Anti-Khavurma replied.*

I will admit, I wish she had gone further, rather than bring forward another age old incarnation of patriarchal violation that I am far more comfortable in my stance towards. I wish she had continued her wonderfully modern take on American-centric stereotypes, her portrayal of today's Istanbul with all its novelties all the more intriguing for their familiarity and feminism, her discussions of existentialism and Eastern European literature that never felt the need to wrap themselves in esoteric pomposity. I wish she had continued that Internet chat quoted above, just one example of the many I have had online regarding oppression, social justice, what I as a white inheritor of protection what must do with such skin-deep privilege. Futile wishes, for her heritage is not mine, and yet how wonderful it is to encounter a modern author refusing to be silent, taking on the technological inundation in a world founded on millenia of might makes right.

*"I admire philosophy," Asya conceded. "But that doesn't necessarily mean I agree with the philosophers."*

I have hope for contemporary literature, and indeed the literature for the future, because of books such as these. Pretty prose has its perks, but I'll chose an unflinchingly progressive state of story over dehumanizing jargon any day.

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