



LITERATURE / LONDON

## Word travels Q&A, Elif Shafak

Elif Shafak is an award-winning novelist, speaker, columnist and political scientist. She is the most-read female writer in her native Turkey and has published 10 novels so far, including *The Forty Rules of Love* and *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Her most recent book is *Three Daughters of Eve*, set in Istanbul and Oxford from the 1980s to the present. It examines faith, friendship and the struggle between tradition and modernity from the perspective of a Muslim woman who, like the author, straddles two worlds. **Georgina Godwin**

**Q. Turkey is a huge tourist destination in August. How do Turks view the swollen summer population?**

**A.** Turkish people are very welcoming, they love to have visitors around. Because of its distinctive cultural and political history, in Turkey you won't find the kind of "anti-western sentiments" that you might come across in some parts of the Middle East. But sadly the Turkish government keeps using a jingoistic, nationalistic and aggressive rhetoric whenever it suits its interests. Despite this, the people of Turkey welcome foreigners. The recent dramatic fall in the number of tourists travelling to Turkey has been a major concern, not only for those in the tourism industry but for anyone who cares about Turkey's ties with the rest of the world.

**Q. You are a migrant and have lived all over the world. Where is home for you?**

**A.** I am a nomad, intellectually and physically. All my life, since early childhood, has been peripatetic. I have lived in several cities: Strasbourg, Madrid, Amman, Köln, Ankara, Istanbul, Boston, Michigan, Arizona

and London. I do not have a static identity, I have multiple belongings. I am an Istanbulite but I am also attached to the Balkans, the Aegean, the Mediterranean. There are elements in my soul from the Middle East and I am a European by choice, by the values that I uphold – and over the years I have become a Londoner. Why can't we have multiple homes, multiple homelands? For a writer there is one main homeland and that is Storyland.

**Q. How present is Istanbul in your life?**

**A.** Enormously. Istanbul has always played an important role in my writing. Not as passive background scenery but as a character of its own. For me, Istanbul is a she-city: her energy, soul and rhythm are strongly feminine. Istanbul is a difficult lover, however. She can exhaust you. For a writer, Istanbul can be inspiring and suffocating in equal degree.

**Q. What are your writing habits? Do they differ depending on what you are writing?**

**A.** I think women writers with small children have to carve out time for themselves whenever they can. That means it's hard to have an exact schedule every day. Many authors have an unwavering schedule but they tend to be male writers.

**Q. When you're in the midst of writing, can you read the work of others?**

**A.** Depending on the subject of my novel I do a lot of research. The academic in me always takes the research part seriously. I read all the time; every writer is first and foremost a reader.

**Q. What do you do when you want to switch off completely?**

**A.** I walk, especially in a new city. I walk until I am lost. I love reading the graffiti, observing the streets. Or else I listen to music. Loud music,

on repeat: gothic, industrial, symphonic, progressive metal. The darker, the messier, the louder, the better.

**Q. Do you shove a mass-market paperback in your luggage? Any guilty pleasures when choosing what to read on holiday?**

**A.** I can read mass-market paperbacks. I can read women's magazines, cookbooks, romances and thrillers too. I can read all of these alongside philosophy, neuroscience, political philosophy. Who decides which book is lowbrow or highbrow? I don't believe in these artificial distinctions. Why feel guilty for reading?

**“I walk, especially in a new city. I walk until I am lost. I love observing the streets”**

Let's read whatever we want to read. Some books we can read for the subject matter, others for their style. There are different reasons for picking up a book. But I think it is important that we read as broadly as possible, from different genres and backgrounds.

**Q. Time for a break or have you already started writing your next book?**

**A.** When I finish a novel in English it's translated into Turkish by a professional translator, then I take the translated manuscript and I rewrite it. When that work is finally over there are tours and talks. But then there comes a moment when I stop everything and I retreat into my cocoon. I am an introvert and that solitude is something I miss dearly; that is where I dream, where I imagine, where I write.

*Three Daughters of Eve* by Elif Shafak is out now, published by Penguin Books

STOLEN ART / GLOBAL

## Exit through the gift shop

Fear strikes when thieves slip away from museums with high-priced souvenirs. But luckily many of them turn up again.

WRITER *Beatrice Carmi*

**'Woman-Ochre'**  
*Willem de Kooning*

**Stolen:** November 1985; found August 2017

**Value:** €135m

**How:** As with many great thefts, this was the result of a scheming couple. The pair entered the University of Arizona Museum of Art on 29 November 1985 and, while the lady chatted up a guard, her accomplice reached the second floor, cut the painting out of its frame, hid it under his clothes, rejoined his partner and made a swift exit – all in just 15 minutes. This year the owner of a New Mexico antiques shop found it when he bought the contents of a nearby house. He then informed the FBI.

**Next:** Once restored it will be returned to the museum.

**Audacity:** 9/10



**Mosaic street art**

*Invader*

**Stolen:** August 2017

**Value:** Similar pieces were sold for about €250,000.

**How:** Posing as employees of Paris city hall, two men chiselled off street artist Invader's tile works from city walls. One did the dirty work while the other held the ladder, before the pair fled in a Mercedes-Benz. Did Paris council hire the men to remove the artwork? "No, the City of Paris does not provide its employees with Mercedes," shrugged the local authority. Though illegal, Invader's works are beloved among Parisians and art-lovers have urged mayor Anne Hidalgo to react.

**Next:** The police are to launch an investigation.

**Audacity:** 7/10

**Five paintings**

*Francis Bacon*

**Stolen:** 2015; partly found July 2017.

**Value:** More than €25m combined

**How:** Thought to be the biggest theft of contemporary art in Spain's history, the works were stolen from the Madrid home of José Capelo, a friend of Bacon. The thieves took advantage of the owner's absence and slipped into the residence unnoticed. The gang disconnected the apartment's alarm to allow for easy thievery of other valuables. After having arrested 10 people, last month the Spanish police found three of the five missing works – which ones is yet to be revealed.

**Next:** Investigations continue.

**Audacity:** 8/10



**'Madonna con i Santi Giovanni Evangelista e Gregorio Taumaturgo'**  
*Guercino*

**Stolen:** August 2014; found February 2017.

**Value:** €6m

**How:** On 12 August 2014 a gang of robbers hid in the church of San Vincenzo in Modena before bolting its doors to act overnight and steal Guercino's masterpiece. Many wondered why the work was stolen given that it would prove impossible to sell. No more was heard until a collector in Casablanca was offered the artwork for MAD10m and warned the police, leading to arrests in Morocco.

**Next:** The painting is now at the Institute of Conservation and Restoration, where experts are trying to remedy the damage.

**Audacity:** 6/10



**13 works**

*Various artists*

**Stolen:** March 1990; reward renewed May 2017.

**Value:** More than €420m combined

**How:** In the small hours of 18 March 1990 two men in Boston Police uniforms gained entrance to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum by telling security that they were responding to reports of a disturbance. The guards were then tied up in the basement and, little more than an hour later, the two men left with art by the likes of Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet.

**Next:** The museum recently upped its reward to €8.5m for information leading directly to the recovery of all 13 works.

**Audacity:** 10/10



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