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Çıplak Berlin (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2006);
Yedi Dervişler (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2007);
Allah’ın Kızları (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008);
La Turquie: une idée neuve en Europe (Paris: Empreinte temps présent, 2009);
Hatırla Barbara (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009);
Derin Anadolu (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2010);
Şeytan, Melek ve Komünist (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2011);
Yine Bana Döneceksin (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012);

Editions: Paris Yazarlar, 2 volumes (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2000)—includes Görünüm ve Görüşler and Durumlar ve Duruşlar;

“The Award,” translated by Aron R. Aji, in Medinah: City Stories from the Middle East, edited by Joumana Haddad (Manchester: Comma, 2008), pp. 1–10;

PRODUCED SCRIPT: Sevgilim İstanbul, motion picture, 1999, Amenis Film.

“Quelques mots sur le Roman du conquérant,” in Conscious Voices: Concepts of Writing in the Middle East (Proceedings of the Berne Symposium, July 1997), edited by Stephan Guth, Priska Furrer, and Johann Christoph Bürgel (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft / Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1999);


Nedim Gürsel is a novelist and a short-story writer as well as an academic working in the field of literature. He is a prolific writer who has produced poetry, essays, and travel writing in addition to his fiction. While his academic research focuses on Turkish literature from a comparative perspective, in his literary work he explores journeys, solitude and loneliness, and the search for belonging; cities and women figure prominently in his writing. Although he has lived in Paris for most of his life and publishes most of his scholarship in French, he writes his fiction in Turkish. For Gürsel the great legacy of his homeland, which he only returns to for visits, is his native tongue.

Gürsel was born in Gaziantep, in southeast Turkey, on 5 April 1951, the second child of Orhan and Leyla Gürsel. His parents were both teachers—his father taught French and his mother mathematics—who met in Istanbul when they were students at Istanbul University. They married in Gaziantep, the city they were appointed to as teachers, in 1948. Both of them also wrote and translated for literary magazines. His older brother, Seyfettin, who became an academic and an economist, was born in 1949.

The family moved to Balıkesir in western Turkey as a result of the parents’ appointment. Gürsel went to 6 Eylül Primary School in this city. A great part of his childhood was spent in Balıkesir and Akhisar, a province of Manisa, where his grandfather lived. His grandfather, Ahmet Nedim Tüzün, was an impressive man who could speak French and Arabic. He had fought in World War I and was taken prisoner. A lawyer and a devout Muslim, he acted as a religious mentor to the district’s people and provided legal services. He was a major influence on the upbringing of young Gürsel and taught him the Koran. During his time in Manisa, Gürsel was close to nature as there were fields to explore, in contrast to his life in Balıkesir, which was, as he puts it in Sağ Salım Kaşvusuk, Çocukluk Yılları (2004, May We Reunite Safe and Sound, Childhood Years), a time of streets. The train journeys between the two places became a pattern not only of his life but also of his writing, for he often travels across the world and journeys are prevalent in his texts.
Balıkesir in particular has been a significant place that years later he revisited personally and in his books. He fondly remembers his teacher, İffet, who taught him how to read and write. Gürsel’s childhood reading began to open the world to him and became an activity of immense pleasure. Even as a child, he wrote poetry and his poems were published in the children’s sections of magazines. They were poems written in rhyme with the national pride of a nine-year-old. In Sağ Salim Kavuşsak, he recalls these years and his poetry as being a somewhat natural reaction of a young mind to the official ideology. Yet, he is also highly critical of these years as being too serious for a child of his age. He sold newspapers to save up pocket money. Like many children of his time, he read Tommiks (Captain Miki) and Tekşas (Il Grande Blok), popular heroic Western comics that were iconic in Turkey for many generations of youngsters, and watched Western movies at the scarcely available theaters. His first engagement with literature was through the melodramatic and conservative novels of Kemalettin Tuğcu.

Gürsel’s father died in a traffic accident in 1961 at the age of thirty-eight, a trauma that marked Gürsel’s life and writing. His mother was in Paris at the time and had to rush back to Turkey. The family moved to Istanbul after his father’s death, and he succeeded in the examinations to enroll at the prominent Galatasaray High School, famous for its literary and intellectual alumnae. In 1962 he began his junior-school education as a boarding student and visited home over the weekends to spend time with his mother and aunts. His brother was studying and his mother was teaching at the same school. Yet, he said to Hâle Seval in Verryüşünde Bir Yolcu (2006, A Traveler in the World) that he felt lonely as a boarding student, mainly because of his relatively early awakening of sexuality. A shy boy, he became a melancholic adolescent. His life at a boarding school in the city center, with its enticements and restrictions, was formative in his character and writing. At school he was nicknamed “Jean Valjean-the Wretched,” after the hero of Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables (1862), and his poems and other pieces were published in the school newspaper, “Tambur” (Tambour).

Gürsel learned French and got to know French literature during his years at Galatasaray High School. He was a good student; he read avidly and was affected by poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Gérard de Nerval. This interaction with a different language and literature opened up a new world to him. It offered him ways of seeing, thinking, and expressing himself that nourished his aesthetic sensitivities. In the 1960s he was introduced to Marxism and the leftist movement, and in his final years at high school he got involved within the movement as a sympathizer. In 1967 his first proper short story, “Yolculuk” (Journey), was published by Vedat Günyol in Yeni Üfuklar (New Horizons), in which his translations from French were also being published. He later published other stories in Yeni Dergi (New Journal), directed by Memet Fuat. The experience he gained writing for this journal was invaluable. Günyol and Fuat, along with Tahir Alangu, his teacher, had great influence on him becoming a writer. Still, he stated in his interview with Seval that from early on his mother was his main support in his aspiration to write and that she was the first person to show his work to her poet friends. In 1970 his mother, who was in her forties, had a serious brain operation in Zürich. This incident, combined with the

Upon graduation from high school in 1970, Gürsel was offered a scholarship to study in France, which he initially rejected. He changed his mind, however, following the 12 March 1971 military intervention, when he was put on trial for an article he had written on Vladimir Lenin and Maxim Gorky. He left for Poitiers after this incident. In 1972 he moved to Paris and studied Modern French Literature at the Sorbonne, graduating in 1975. He met the woman who became his first wife, Angeliki Ploutis, in Greece in 1974, to whom he later dedicated the short-story collection Kadınlar Kitabı (1983, Book of Women). While he was in France, his works continued to be published in literary magazines such as Yeni Ufuklar, Yeni Edebiyat (New Literature) and Birlikim (Erudition).

Gürsel’s first book, Uzun Sürmüş Bir Yaz (1975, A Long Lasted Summer), comprises a short story and a long story in five sections. Both focus on the lives of young activists traumatized by the oppressive Turkish regime, including their encounters with counter-guerrilla units and torture. The activists are haunted by the deaths of comrades and bear the guilt of their own survival. The repetitive imagery of the long summer parallels their trauma through a prevalent feeling of suffocation and heat. Depicting the political condition of the country in the early 1970s as it overshadows the lives of government opponents, the collection was deemed a necessary and bold literary representation of the times. In 1976 the author received the Türk Dili Kurumu Hikaye Ödülü (Short-Story Award of the Turkish Language Association). This book was also Gürsel’s first work to be translated into French in 1980. Some of the stories in this collection were adapted to the stage by a Swiss theater company and were performed internationally. Despite such reception of the work, the politics of the country were still tense, and the author was prosecuted once again. His trial went on for years, drawn out by bureaucratic wrangling.

In 1978 Gürsel published two separate literary studies, Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı Üzerine (On the Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin) and Çağdaş Yazım ve Kültür (Contemporary Literature and Culture). The former is a study on Nazım Hikmet’s Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı, a poem published in 1936 (translated as The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin, 1979), discussing both its socio-political content and its poetic world. The latter is a collection of essays on literature, culture, and the art of writing, examining the relationship among them. Gürsel received his Ph.D. from the Comparative Literature program of the Sorbonne with his thesis on Nazım Hikmet and Louis Aragon in 1979, under the supervision of René Etiemble. Although he returned to Turkey briefly in 1979, he went back to Paris following the 1980 coup. He considers his life in Paris both as an experience of exile and as a gift that offered him what he had been dreaming of since childhood. Both his mother and father had spent time, however brief, in Paris, and this unknown, distant land appreciated by his parents manifested itself in his psyche as a magical, mysterious world. The dream invoked by the postcard picturing Palace de la Sorbonne, which he had received from his father, became his reality. Accordingly, the experience of having a sense of home and belonging—or lacking that fundamental feeling—is a dominant theme in his works. Its power is coupled with his restless soul that seeks journeys. As is clear in the commentary by Camille Lamotte, the condition of not-being-at-home urges him to know more about the home that he left behind. Similar to many
other authors in exile, he turns the disadvantages of his situation into a richness that feeds his work through its lacks as well as provisions, enabling a hypersensitivity to the soul of the place.

In 1982 Gürsel completed his compulsory military service in Burdur and returned to Paris to join Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, The National Center for Scientific Research), where he currently continues his research as a director. The following year he published Kadınlar Kitabı, his collection of stories on an adolescent male boarding-school student’s early experiences with sexuality and the ensuing emotional and psychological traumas. Gürsel also treated the transformation of the boy’s interests into a man’s intense sensuality. Although his book was initially confiscated and banned and he was prosecuted on grounds of obscenity, Gürsel was soon cleared of the charges and the book was republished. In 1985 he compiled his pieces on art, culture, and literature in France and Turkey in Yerel Kültürden Evrensele (From Local Culture to the Universal). He published Sorgulam İstanbul ( İstanbul, My Beloved), a set of stories that revolve around the subjects of journeys, home, and longing in 1986. In the later editions of the work, Gürsel also included his script for a short film, which was produced in 1999.

Also in 1986 Gürsel received the Abdi İpekçi Dostluk ve Barış Ödülü (Abdi İpekçi Friendship and Peace Prize) for his contribution to Greek-Turkish relations and the Prix de la Liberté by the French PEN Club. The same year he married Angelikli Ploutis and traveled through the Mediterranean and the Greek islands. Sorgulam İstanbul earned the Haldun Taner Öykü Ödülü (Haldun Taner Short-Story Award), which he shared with Tomris Uyar and Murathan Mungan, in 1987. Another short-story collection, Sorguda (Under Interrogation), came out in 1988. The three parts—“Bozkır” (The Steppe), “Kentler” (Cities), and “Bir Yazanın Dört Portresi” (Four Portraits of a Writer)—consist of stories that depict various kinds of physical and psychological oppression, cities and people, and loneliness, love, and memory.

In 1990 Gürsel published Seyir Defteri (The Logbook), the earliest example of his travel writing that combines literary forays with his impressions of cities. This collection covers his travels to such cities as Rio de Janeiro, Moscow, Boston, and Paris. Published from his travel diaries, in these pieces he gives information on the societies and cultures of the places, along with literary figures and works that he remembers as he travels through them. These references are often psychologically and emotionally charged as the settings impress themselves upon him, bringing to the fore texts he had written or read, their writers and characters, and connections with the souls of the cities. Another story collection, Son Tramvay (1991; translated as Last Tram, 2012), included “Mendil” (Handkerchief), which was awarded the best short-story prize by Radio France Internationale. As interviewer Seval notes, quoting Feridun Andaç, the dominant feeling in these stories is the author’s attempt at finding a home in the very homelessness itself. Also in 1991 Gürsel brought out Pasifik Kıyısında (On the Shore of the Pacific), a collection of his pieces on his travels in the United States.

In 1992 Gürsel’s published his second study on Hikmet’s poetry, Nâzım Hikmet ve Geleneksel Türk Yazısı (Nâzım Hikmet and Traditional Turkish Literature). The same year he received the Macedonian Struga Golden Plaque Award for his essays in criticism. In his personal life, his mother passed away on 21 May 1992; the following year he married Zihâl Türkkan. His collection of his essays on Turkish literature, Bozkırdaki Yabancı (1993, The Stranger in
the Steppe), is mainly made up of articles previously published in French. He was among the six writers who visited Sarajevo during the Bosnian War, and his experiences were published in the Hürriyet (Freedom) newspaper at the time. He revisited the city after the Dayton Accords.

The year 1995, which included the birth of his daughter Leyla Gün, was productive for Gürsel. He published Balkanlara Dönüş (Return to the Balkans), a collection of his impressions of his trips to Sarajevo, Macedonia, and Thessalonica, and Paris Yazarlar: Edebiyat, Sanat, Kültür Üzerine (Paris Writings: On Literature, Art and Culture). The latter is a collection of essays on literature and culture in France and Turkey, as well as his views on writing and art. In addition, a section of Kadınlar Kitabı, titled İlk Kadın (First Woman), was adapted to the stage by the Istanbul State Theater. (This section was published separately as a novella in 2004.)

Also in 1995 Gürsel published his first novel, Boğazkesen, Fatih’in Romanı (1995; translated as The Conquerer: A Novel, 2010). It tells the story of a writer, Fatih Haznedar, who is working on a novel on the conquest of Constantinople, and how his life changes with the arrival of a young woman, Deniz, while he is writing it. In a sense, it is a historical novel with the conquest in the focus. However, unlike conventional historical novels, it is not an adventure story of the Romantic kind. Instead, the story is told from the perspectives of a variety of characters, including Sultan Mehmed II, his grand vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha, and an enslaved Italian sailor, Nicolo, through third-person narration, flashbacks, and diary entries.

Furthermore, the narrative structure is multilayered. It opens with the daily life of the writer-narrator, with a tense political atmosphere in the background, which complicates the work's storyline. As the narratives of the writer-narrator and the historical story intermingle, so do the respective tensions in them. The ambition of Mehmed II in his wish to conquer Constantinople, the oppressive atmosphere of the military taking over Turkey’s government on 12 September 1980, and the affect of Deniz’s presence as a fugitive at the writer-narrator’s home culminate in the latter’s murder of the former to be able to finish writing his novel. The title, Boğazkesen, which literally means “the one that cuts throat,” consequently becomes all the more significant. “Boğazkesen” is both the general name given to fortresses that control straits and the name of the particular one that was ordered to be constructed by Mehmed II for the conquest of Constantinople. This technicality, combined with the figurative “cutthroat” reign of the Sultan and the writer-narrator’s literal cutting Deniz’s throat enhance the complex nature of the text.

The framed narrative of an author in the process of writing the story that makes up the novel points to the fictive nature of the work, a narrative technique often employed in postmodern novels. That history is being depicted within such a frame emphasizes its own narrative nature. As a multivo
cal historical fiction, the novel challenges the taken-for-granted objectivity and stability of history writing. Semih Gümüş considers the novel an exemplary text of historical fiction because of the way history, reality, and fiction are fused. In contrast to Gümüş, Orhan Duru admits to being puzzled by the way Gürsel chose to present his historical narrative and his use of violence and sexuality, Boğazkesen, Fatih’in Romanı was also criticized by conservatives who objected
to the portrayal of Mehmed II keeping Nicolo as a member of his harem.

In the next few years Gürsel published a variety of works. *Uzun Bir Aşılık İçin Köşk Kisa Sür* (1996, Forty Short Poems for a Long Separation) is his first and only poetry collection. *Başkaldıran Edebiyat* (1997, Literature that Rebels) is a collection of his essays on literature written between 1966 and 1995. He began writing for the travel magazine *Atlas* in 1997. *Gemiler de Gitti* (1998, The Book of Paris) is another collection of his impressions of Paris. *Yüzyıl Biterken* (1999, As the Millennium Comes to an End) is a collection of his interviews with various writers both from Turkey and abroad. His *Sevgilim İstanbul* was adapted into a movie of the same name in 1999, though because of problems with the production company, it was not screened until 2007. He published two more literary studies in 2000: *Yaşar Kemal: Bir Geçiş Dönemi Romançısı* (Yaşar Kemal: A Novelist of a Transition Period) and *Aragon: Başkaldıranın Geçeği* (Aragon: From Rebellion to the Real).

Gürsel visited and spent time in Venice for his second novel, *Resimli Dünya* (2000, Illustrated World). The work opens with the arrival in the city of the protagonist, Kâmil Uzman, an art historian and a painter. Uzman is on a research trip to study the paintings and the lives of the Bellini family at their home, a lifelong wish being fulfilled. Having been a successful academic throughout his life, he is now old and embittered, trying to come to terms with aging and the consequent changes in his social status. His name, meaning mature (Kâmil) and expert (Uzman), is symbolic in this context. Once a motto, the phrase “Kâmil Uzman uzman olmadı konuda konușmaz!” (Kâmil Uzman would not talk about a topic that he is not an expert on) has turned into one that people joke and mock him about. Thus, his research trip is paralleled with a journey of self-discovery, as he remembers his past and associates it with the present through internal questionings, a somewhat resentful self-assessment. His falling in love with an Italian woman, Lucia, further transforms his trip into a mysterious journey among the canals of the enigmatic city. As the narrative of his life in Istanbul and experiences in Venice intermingle through a colorful imagery that befits the paintings he studies, his professional visit becomes an evocative personal quest, culminating in a surprise ending.

As he did in his first novel, Gürsel creates a multilayered narrative structure in *Resimli Dünya*. Kâmil Uzman’s story, given in numbered chapters, is broken by titled chapters, each telling the story of a member of the Bellini family. Such a multileveled structure fuses the personal with the historical. Parallels are established between various histories, whether it is that of the Bellini family or the Ottoman Empire, as the narrative focuses on the western perception of the Ottomans through their portrayal in the paintings. The main link is Gentile Bellini’s portrait of Mehmed II, known as the Conqueror. The novel thus revisits a significant period in Ottoman history, one that Gürsel previously portrayed through the conquest in *Boğazkesen, Fatih’in Romanı*. The painting of the sultan is a momentous first, for by allowing it the sultan breaks a major Islamic law that bans the realistic painting of the faces of important personages. Gürsel’s narrative approach in depicting history through its relation to art is a manifestation of his emphasis on the interdisciplinary and intertextual nature of the human condition.

Two other short-story books, *Öğleden Sonra Aşk* (Love in the Afternoon) and *Cicişapa, Toplu Öyküler 1967–1990* (Pain Perdu, Collected Stories), came out in 2002. The former consists of stories of romance, love, sensuality, and sexuality, and the latter gathers some of his previously published stories, several unpublished ones, and a couple of essays. In 2003 he collected some of his earlier travel pieces under the title *Bir Avuç Dünya Toplu Gezi Yazları 1977–1997* (A Handful of the World, Collected Travel Writing) and another travel-writing collection, *Güneşte Ölüm—İspanya İzlenimleri* (Death in the Sun—Impressions on Spain). In 2004 Gürsel received the Fernand Rouillon Literary Prize and the France-Turkey Prize. He was also given the title Chevalier des Arts et Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture.

In 2002–2004 Gürsel spent a year in Berlin upon invitation from the German Academic Exchange Service. He completed his *Sağ Salim Kavuşsk* and began writing *Seytan, Melek ve Komünist* (2011, The Devil, The Angel and The Communist) during his stay in the city. *Sağ Salim Kavuşsk* is a retrospective gaze of the adult Gürsel to the little boy Nedim, and it is historically contextualized, paralleling the social changes in the country. He returned to Balıkesir to make a documentary based on this autobiography. It was directed by Cengiz Özkarabekir and broadcast on CNN Türk in 2004.

In *İzler ve Gölgeler* (2005, Traces and Shadows), a collection of essays on his travels, Gürsel he
İki sesleki

GÜZEL AŞK.
Pages from Gürsel’s manuscript for a novel to be published in early 2014 (courtesy of the author)
brings together travel writing with literary history. He explores cities such as Saint Petersburg, Prague, Paris along with their connections to artists, poets, and writers from Pieter Brueghel, Charles Baudelaire, and Franz Kafka to Nikolay Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Nazım Hikmet, along with their works. His translation of Jorge Semprun's *Le Grande Voyage* (1963) was published in 2005 as *Büyük Yolculuk*. In 2006 he published a memoir-travel book of his experiences in Berlin under the title *Cıplak Berlin* (Berlin Naked). To his established blend of daily life and literary history, he adds a touch of eroticism to his memories of the city, describing a bohemian existence marked by loneliness and a lack of a feeling of belonging. The same year he served as a jury member for the Lettre Ulysses Award given internationally for the Art of Reportage. Written on a trip that was a part of his contract with the *Atlas* journal, *Yedi Dervişler* (2007, Seven Dervishes) relates the stories and histories of seven of the Anatolian dervishes, including Mevlana, Hacı Bektas, Kaygusu Az Abdal, and Geyikli Baba.

In 2008 Gürsel published another novel, *Allah’ın Kızları* (The Daughters of Allah), which he dedicated to his grandfather Ahmet Nedim Tüzün. There are two main narratives in the work—one set in pre-Islamic Arabia and the early period of Islamic conversion and the other in the present time of the narrator who was brought up as a devout Muslim but has grown out of his belief in his adult years. The narrative set in the past has direct intertextual relations with the Koran and folk beliefs that precede it or have evolved out of it. The three pre-Islamic Goddesses of the city of Mecca—"the daughters of Allah," Lat, Uzza and Manat—narrate the pre-Islamic order and the arrival of Islam through their separate chapters.

The narrator of the present time enters the narrative just after the story of the Prophet Mohammed’s birth, which symbolically links historical and contemporary narratives. He addresses his younger self in the second person while weaving in and out the strands of the historical story of Islam and the stories of his grandfather. There is much autobiographical reference in this layer of narration. The stories are set in Balkesir and Manisa, and the remembered grandfather is similar to Ahmet Nedim Tüzün as presented in Gürsel’s memoirs. The novelist skillfully intermingles present, past, and history along with folk, historical, and religious narrative traditions.

*Allah’ın Kızları,* in which the Prophet Mohammed appears as a character and Islamic history and tradition is explored through a demystifying storytelling, provoked strong reactions in predominantly Muslim Turkey. Following its publication, the novelist was charged with insulting religious values, an accusation that recalled the furor surrounding Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses.* In his 2008 interview with İlhan Yılmaz, Gürsel explained that he did not aim to be provocative and that on the contrary the Prophet Mohammed was his childhood hero. He responded to the charges by arguing that the material he fictionalized was taken directly from the Koran and that he wanted to question without offending. In June 2009 the charges were dropped; soon after, Gürsel as author received the İfade Özgürlüğü Ödülü (Freedom of Speech Award) of the Türkiye Yayıncılardan Birliği (Turkish Association of Publishers).

Also in 2009 Gürsel’s *Türkiye: Yağlı Avrupa’ya Genç Damat* (Turkey: Young Bridegroom to Old Europe), which was originally published in France as *La Turquie: une idée neuve en Europe* (2009), came out. In this work, he brings together his knowledge on the cultures of Turkey and Europe, especially France, in order to analyze and discuss the European Union and Turkey’s candidacy. Another autobiographical work, *Hatıra Barbara* (Barbara, Remember), was published the same year. Similar to much of his writing, whether describing his travels or of autobiographical nature, the pieces in *Hatıra Barbara* stand out as being a kind of self-search through externalization and projection. As he notes in his retrospective exploration, “aşlanan şimdidi yaşamak; geçmişin hayaleleriyle boğuşmak değil. [...] Söylemesi kolay, yapması zor. Bir türlü kurtulamıyorum geçmişin muthu ya da mutsuz anılarından” (what matters is to live the now; not to grapple with the ghosts of the past. [...] Easier said than done. I just can’t shake off the happy or unhappy memories of the past).

In 2010 Gürsel prepared a book of his impressions on Anatolia during his travels for the *Atlas* journal: *Derin Anadolu* (Deep Anatolia). Appropriating the French phrase “la France profonde,” which refers to the profound Frenchness of southern, provincial France, the author narrates his travels through western, southern and central regions of Anatolia from Pergamum to Antioch. He relates the historical narrative of the Anatolian culture from ancient myths to modern politics. The book is enriched with photographs taken by his friend Denis Guillaume who accompanied him with his father (and Gürsel’s publisher), Damien.

In 2011 Gürsel published *Şeytan, Melek ve Komünist,* the novel he had begun to write in Berlin, again employing a self-reflexive narrative structure.
The narrator, a biographer of the famous communist poet Nazım Hikmet, flies to Berlin to meet a mysterious man, Ali Albayrak, who claims to possess documents that reveal personal, classified information on the poet. A fictional character not modeled on any real person, Albayrak is presented as Hikmet’s friend from the military, a fellow communist but also a party informant who spied on the poet. The story of the narrator-writer intermingles with the stories of Albayrak and Hikmet through flashbacks to a love affair the poet conducted in the city. The main narrative, however, is not Hikmet’s personal life but Albayrak’s life, which parallels the story of the narrator-writer. Essentially, the narrator and Albayrak are reflections of one another in terms of characterization, be it their emotional worlds, perceptions of life, or admiration for the poet.

Albayrak’s typed documents, bearing lines from Hikmet’s poetry as titles, are the works of an eccentric, homosexual spy who was in love with the poet. Once called “the angel” but now calling himself “the devil,” Albayrak’s perspective embodies the feeling of jealousy for a sublimated love, transformed into an admiration that is tainted with frustration. His emotional and sexual frustration leads to betrayal as a form of revenge, but his guilt eventually results in his intense desire to dispose of all his records by giving them away to the biographer, which becomes his attempt at clearing his conscience. Rather ironically, the precious materials of Ali Albayrak do not impress the writer-narrator, who is preoccupied with his own emotional turmoil. The novel ends with Albayrak being shot dead by person or persons unknown.

Seçan, Melek ve Komünist was criticized by some leftists who considered it as an attack on the communist movement in Turkey. As Asuman Kafaoğlu-Bükė points out, one of the main themes of the novel is to explore what makes a communist and what communism is really about. The critic maintains that within its multiple narrative layers, the novel essentially portrays a period with its perceptions and representations. Sennur Sezer, on the other hand, finds the novel offensive and considers the novelist’s position a purposeful attack on communism. In his interview with Bülent Gönal, Gürsel predicted that conservative leftists would not be happy with the novel. He argues, “Komünizm güzel ve büyük bir utopiyadır. Ali Albayrak’ın romanında söylediğim gibi komünizm yanlış uygulamalar sonucu büyük bir yalanına dönüştü” (Communism was a beautiful and grand utopia. As Ali Albayrak says in the novel, communism turned into a big lie due to wrong practices). The novel received the International Literature Award of the Balkanika Foundation in 2012. The same year his Allah’ın Kızları was short-listed for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt Award in Germany.

In Yine Bana Dönecedik (2012, You Will Return to Me Again), Gürsel returned to travel writing, exploring such cites as Rio de Janeiro and Sarajevo and mixing his observations of his journey with insights into the writer’s inner world. He received the 2013 Prix Méditérranée with Seytan, Melek ve Komünist. He had revisited Venice with his daughter, out of which came his latest book Aşk Kırınları (Those Hurt by Love) in the February of 2013. It is a collection of pieces that focus on stories of Venice, the way it is perceived, represented, and imagined. The main trajectory of the work, in which the city of Venice itself is the protagonist, is love affairs that ended in this romanticized geography.

A founding member of the International Parliament of Writers, Nedim Gürsel is also members of PEN, Fédération des maisons d’écrivain et des patrimoines littéraires, and the Mediterranean Academy. He continues to teach contemporary Turkish literature at the Sorbonne and to work as research director on Turkish Literature at CNRS. His works have been translated into more than twenty languages, including French, German, English, Spanish, Italian, and Arabic. With an international reputation as a scholar and author, Gürsel is one of the writers who are true ambassadors for Turkish letters abroad.

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