

The Bridge of the Golden Horn

Emine Sevgi Ozdamar

Martin Chalmers, Translator

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In her autobiographical novel *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* Emine Sevgi Ozdamar writes with wisdom and humor about the artistic political and sexual adventures of a young woman coming of age in 1960s Germany and Turkey. Driven by her desire to assert her independence and become an actress Ozdamars sixteen-year-old protagonist leaves a comfortable middle-class life in Istanbul and takes a factory job in Berlin. On her arrival she doesnt speak a word of German and knows next to nothing about how to manage life in a foreign country. But thanks to her irrepressible curiosity and fearless hunger for new experiences she soon transforms herself into a sophisticated and worldly political activist and actress.

Ozdamar herself moved from Turkey to Berlin in her youth and she draws on her firsthand knowledge of both places in order to imbue her novel with a wealth of realistic detail. She packs the books opening section with fascinating observations about working life in a Berlin radio tube factory noting for example that the workers always saw their forewoman in a distorted perspective because of the magnifying glasses they wore over their right eyes on the job.

Throughout the novel Ozdamar uses lively and lyrical prose to create an appealing voice for her nameless first-person narrator. She treats her protagonists sexual awakening with both sensuality and sensitivity and writes passionately about the great power that literature and theatre have to broaden ones understanding of the world. Ozdamars book is also often quite funny: in one passage she gently pokes fun at her protagonists naive political idealism by recounting an incident in which a peasants donkey eats her copy of Lenins *State and Revolution*. But for all its warmhearted humor the novel also does not shy away from forthrightly depicting the tragedies of poverty and political violence in 1960s Turkey.

As an actress playwright and fiction writer Ozdamar has received widespread acclaim for her work. With *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* Ozdamar has spun an appealing tale about a young immigrant who discovers herself through politics sex and the arts.

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