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"Insulting Turkishness": Charges Reopened Against Author Elif Shafak

By KIMBERLY MAUL

A case against author Elif Shafak, who is charged with "insulting Turkishness" under Article 301 in the Turkish Criminal Code, reached a new level this week. Shafak wrote *The Bastard of Istanbul*, in which a character references Armenian genocide. Last month, a public prosecutor in Istanbul dismissed the charges, based on Shafak's argument that the book is a work of fiction and therefore un-prosecutable.

A complaint from a member of the Unity of Jurists, a group of right-wing lawyers, caused the seventh high criminal court to overrule the decision. The charges have also been brought against Shafak's translator, Asli Bican, and publisher, Semi Sökmen, of the Metis Publishing House. "The situation in Turkey has changed since the introduction of Article 301 last year," Sara Whyatt, director of the Writers in Prison Committee at International PEN, told *The Guardian* on Monday. "I think the trials are intended to harass and intimidate these writers and journalists. Elif Shafak is at the beginning of what could be a long and painful process." Shafak faces three years in prison if convicted.

At the end of 2005, Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk was persecuted under Article 301, but the charges were later dropped. In Shafak's *Bastard*, two families—one in Istanbul and one, an exiled Armenian family, in San Francisco—share an old secret that affects their current lives. It is set to be released next year from Viking Penguin. The date for Shafak's trial has not been set. Farrar, Straus & Giroux released in the U.S. last year an English translation of the author's *The Saint of Incipient Sanities....* **THE END**

WORDS TO THE WISE

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