

## about method

This book brings together the short stories Ara Güler penned during his early period, and his photographs. Güler is known internationally as a photographer, however, he is a relative unknown as a short story writer, and the various aspects of Güler the writer appear in breathtaking range in *We Will Live After Babylon*.

The original Armenian edition of the book was published in 1995 with the title *Papelonen verch bidi abrink*, while its Turkish translation was published later (1996, 2000). This new edition of three simultaneously published volumes in Turkish, Armenian and English, brings together Güler's visual production with his texts, who appear to also take photographs through the medium of the short story, to form a "photograph-short story album" and becomes a brand new book.

The stories Ara Güler wrote in Armenian were published in periodicals of the time including *Carakayt* (Beam), *Hantes mshaguyti* (Culture Magazine), *Jamanak* (Time), *Macmara*, *San* (Student), *Surp Prgich*, *Yerchanik* (Happy), and the book titled *Hamaynabadger hancabedagan shchani Istanbulahay kraganutyanyan* (A Panorama of Istanbul Armenian Literature in the Republican Period [İstanbul: Alumni of Aramyan School, 1957]). Since it was not possible to determine the specific publication some of the Armenian cuttings the short stories were compiled from belonged to, at the end of the relevant short story, the name of the source - quite probably, one of the publications above - and/or its publication date was given as "?".

*We would like to thank the Ara Güler Archive and Research Centre for its valuable support and contribution during the preparation of this book.*

## publisher's note

**we will live  
after babylon**

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# we will live after babylon

ARA GÜLER

Translated from Turkish by  
Nazım Dikbaş



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**ARA GÜLER** was born in 1928 in Istanbul. Internationally renowned, he is considered the most important representative of creative photography in Turkey. During his childhood, he was strongly influenced by cinema. He worked at film studios while he was at high-school. He graduated from the Getronagan High-School in 1951. He began to receive drama and acting training under Muhsin Ertuğrul. He wanted to become a director, or a playwright. During this period his short stories and interviews were published in literature magazines and Armenian newspapers. He attended the Faculty of Economics at Istanbul University, however, deciding to become a photojournalist, he quit university. He began his career in journalism in 1950, at the *Yeni İstanbul* ['New Istanbul'] newspaper. He worked as the Near East photojournalist for *Time Life*, *Paris Match* and *Stern*. He joined Magnum Photos. His photo-interview on Noah's Ark was distributed by Magnum Photos to more than a hundred publications. During the same period, he also made his Mount Nemrut photo-interview, and Mount Nemrut came to the attention of the international reader through his photographs. In another important interview, he focused on the ancient city of Aphrodisias, and helped the city to be rediscovered and known throughout the world. Until 1961 he worked as photography department chief at *Hayat* ['Life'] magazine. In 1961, the British Journal of Photography Year Book published in the UK listed him as one of the best seven photographers in the world. The same year, he was accepted into the American Society of Magazine Photographers (ASMP). In 1962, he earned the Master of Leica title in Germany. The same year, *Camera* magazine, the most important publication in the world of photography at the time, dedicated a special issue to him. He took the photographs for Lord Kinross's book *Hagia Sophia, A History of Constantinople*, published in 1971. In 1974, he was invited to the United States of America, and after taking photographs of many famous Americans, presented his exhibition titled Creative Americans in many cities of the world. The same year, he shot a documentary film titled *The End of the Hero* about the scrapping of the Yavuz battlecruiser. His photographs of the works of Mimar Sinan, a project he worked on for many years, were published in 1992. He has opened hundreds of exhibitions across the world and published tens of books. He has taken photographs of many world-famous figures, including Bertrand Russell, Winston Churchill, Arnold Toynbee, Picasso, William Saroyan and Salvador Dali, and also of the leading artists of Turkey, and conducted interviews with them.



## From the author

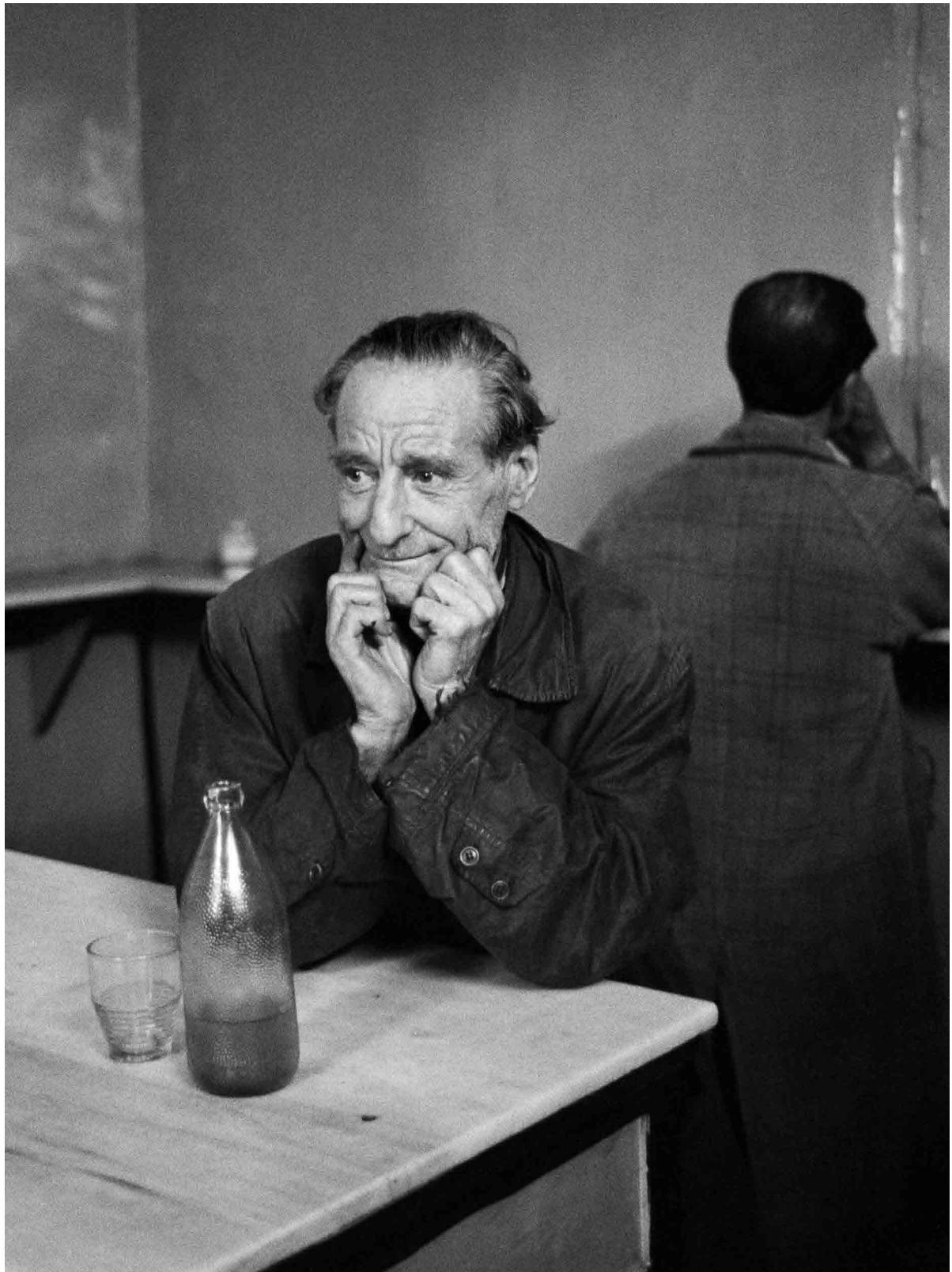
I glanced through this book, and realized I wrote my last short story fifty-nine years ago. And my first one sixty-four years ago. And finally, in 1986, while carrying out a war interview in Eritrea, I scribbled a brief memoir. I added that piece, and My Father's Story to this book. I realize now that my emotions in these short stories, somehow, turned into a visual narrative. Even then, I must have fallen into a visual world. It seems to me that there is a common style of narrative to writing and visuality. In fact, there is no doubt about it, otherwise, we wouldn't have the art of cinema. After all, when I look at my photographs, from time to time, I find impressions from my theatre work, or from what I imagined adding to my short stories. So perhaps I owe my ability to "capture a moment, and form a composition" in photography to all my old work. I believe I was inspired about forming a composition within a "frame" during my theatre days, and about capturing meaningful moments and combining them in a narrative from the time I wrote short stories.

Anyhow, it appears that, as a result of this kind of thing, one gathers visual material. And visual material, just like poetry, writing, painting or the performing arts, gathers its own from somewhere, takes on a new form, and becomes visual art. After all, if one pays attention to the short stories I wrote, one can observe that they are, in a sense, a kind of photography. I had no idea about it, but even then, I was a man of the visual world.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends who compiled and published these old short stories.

*Istanbul, August 2018*

***A strange  
New Year's  
Eve***



**T**here was no change at the tavern on the coast that night. All the entertainment venues had been made up for New Year and lanterns in every colour were hanging at their entrances.

The sea had disappeared in darkness. Every now and then one could hear the sound of the waves crashing on the jetty. The flashing red light of the lantern added the only bright colour to this dark atmosphere. All the boats that had taken cover in the jetty were covered in darkness.

The night guard napping under the lantern on the corner stood up from his place after lighting a cigarette, and walking away in slow steps, he disappeared in the dense darkness.

The noise from the nearby brothel could be heard in the distance. A little while later, a potbellied shadow coming from that direction came as far as the lantern on the corner of the tavern, and passed out under the light. Those who saw him said, "Just a drunk," and walked on by.

Despite all the bustle outside, the Tavern on the coast was empty. The young tavern keeper, as always, had taken his place behind the counter and was drying the glasses. His neighbour, the shoemaker, who had made a habit of dropping in every night, had again sat in his usual place. With his usual calm gaze, he was watching the flashing red light of the lantern.

The fool had also come as he did every day, and had taken his place. He, too, dropped in every night. He didn't drink much. He would drink a glass of wine and pay forty kurush for it. He had never strayed from his standard until today. It was clear that he could only pocket forty kurush from his mother, who looked after him by working as a maid. Every night, a glass of wine in return of forty kurush...

The young tavern-keeper was drying the glasses. Boredom was written all over his face. He probably had plans for tonight. Perhaps he had a lover. Who knows, perhaps he was vexed about something else.

"It's New Year tonight," he muttered after taking a deep breath. "We'll get over tonight as well..." then he got back to his job.

His neighbour, the shoemaker finished his last sip. He pushed the glass to the corner of the table, "You're very lonely tonight," he said. "Don't you think the guards will come?"

"I don't think they'll come tonight," replied the tavern-keeper. "They'll have drunks to chase." He paused, then he added: "They are here around this time every night, but you never know about today."

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*This play was written in 1948, in Turkish, as a one-act play. It was then rewritten as a short story, and in this form, it won an award at an international literature competition organized by the New York Times in 1950, and later it was translated into Armenian, and published by Istanbul's Armenian press.*

The shoemaker nodded in approval, "After all..." he said, "This is the kind of day they wait for."

The young man hadn't listened to those last words. After drying the last glass and putting it in its place, he picked up the sponge in the corner and began to wipe the counter. He grumbled as he did so: "My old man insisted. He still thinks this place is how it used to be. Used to be very busy in his time. Foreign ships used to dock at the harbour frequently. All the sailors and stokers used to ask after the Harbour Restaurant and rush here. This place used to be a restaurant back then. Six different dishes used to be served everyday. But nowadays no one drops in apart from neighbourhood guards and a few idlers." He paused for a second, then he continued: "My father still hopes and waits for this place to do business. Let him wait, he'll see!"

The shoemaker lifted his head: "A man lives with hope, with hope..." he said.

The tavern-keeper put down the sponge in his hand and turned his gaze towards the shoemaker. "Yes," he shouted. "Hope, hope..." He breathed in for a second, then he continued: "To hope, to hope and to dream only. That's all great. But the fact is, wherever people find money, that's where they look for life, and for happiness." He took a deep breath and then asked the shoemaker: "Isn't that so?"

Pausing, the shoemaker looked at him. The tavern-keeper picked up the glass in front of him and went over to the counter.

"You're right," approved the shoemaker. "But what else can he do at this age, my son? He is almost seventy, he can't work anymore. That's why he left this place to you. From now on, everything is yours. To fix it up, and if necessary, to change it around... That's all your responsibility from now on."

"I have run this tavern for exactly six years," said the young man. Then, trying to add some special meaning to his voice, he added: "Shall I tell you the truth? I have been here all these years, and I still haven't managed to earn a decent sum of money."

The shoemaker sought to sympathise with his discomfort: "When God closes one door, he opens another."

Instead of giving hope to the young man, these words angered him: "They say he does, but the tax man who comes here to collect taxes hasn't heard about that at all! Look, it's New Year's Eve, and the two of us are chatting here like doves. Look around you..." he pointed to the Fool, who was sitting at one of the tables at the back, "Is there anyone in here apart from that Fool?" he said. Then he sat at the old man's table, and continued: "This fool comes here and sits down every

evening at the same hour. All he drinks is a glass of wine, and that costs forty kucush. I have never heard him say a single word. He's mute. He gawks at me straight in the eye, and then asks for a glass of wine. When he was new around, I tried a few times to give him a second glass, but each time nothing but forty kucush came out of his pocket." He stopped and took a deep breath. "All these strange people, all these sedated brains around me..." he moaned. He stood up, and continued: "And all the same bottles here. This wine bottle, red. And those are mineral water bottles. There are glasses on the shelf below them, and over there tables, the same chairs, the same dirt, the same poverty..." His voice was getting more and more ill-tempered and he ended his words with a long curse.

During the silence that followed the curse, the old shoemaker turned towards the other side, and the Fool lifted his head and looked at the tavern-keeper with a smile on his face.

The young tavern-keeper wasn't finished yet. "After every storm comes a rainbow, they say!" he said. "But I've had enough of all that talk, they are clichés and nothing else. To be patient, to wait, to be trapped in this seedy place..."

As the young man spoke, the mute kept nodding in approval, got more and more excited and made strange sounds. At one point he showed his blackened teeth and began to laugh.

The tavern-keeper turned towards him. "And more than anything I have had enough of this Fool's looks. And besides, only for forty kucush. I would like to be mute like him. Perhaps I would be a calmer person..."

Right then, a few drunks letting out yells passed by in front of the tavern.

"See," said the tavern-keeper. "They drank, and they got drunk..." He suddenly raised his voice and began to shout: "I've had enough of this nightmare! I want to live, too. Why doesn't God see me? Why does he grudge me the things he grants others?"

The old shoemaker looked at him in great surprise. The young man raised his voice, "The youths who just passed by were drunk," he said. "Their heads were spinning. Why were they drunk, huh? Yes, why? Perhaps they, too, are depressed like I am, they too have had enough of living; lost away in this life which never changes; and perhaps they drank, they wanted to get drunk to escape from all that... Yes, they quaffed their drinks like they were thirsty for water, until they could forget everything." He had said all this in a single breath. He took another deep breath and continued: "Probably, they, too, dream of a different life like I do... But they don't know that the life they seek exists only in dreams..."

Just then, the door of the tavern opened, a man in a black coat came in. He had lifted his collar, his face was not visible. He took slow steps towards a table and sat down. The young man, the old shoemaker and the Fool looked at him with suspicion. Then the Fool looked away, and the shoemaker looked down.

"Now I have to serve his orders," the tavern-keeper moaned to himself, and unwillingly scoured towards the new arrival.

The shoemaker was left alone. "It's New Year's Eve tonight," he moaned under his nose.

"Give me a drink," the customer said to the young tavern-keeper.

"What shall it be?"

"A drink, whatever!"

"Rakı?" said the tavern-keeper.

"Fine... Make it strong."

The tavern-keeper went to the counter, filled up a glass of rakı, then came back.

"Here it is," he said. "Rakı."

"What if I asked for another?"

"It's closed... A new bottle."

The stranger pulled the glass towards himself. The young man walked towards the shoemaker's table in unhurried steps and sat down. He had calmed down.

"It wouldn't be right to leave and go, and to break the old man's heart," he said.

The shoemaker must have had enough of listening to troubles, he stood up. "Time to go home," he said and slowly walked towards the counter, picked up his coat from the hanger on the wall and put it on. He stopped when he came to the door of the tavern, and turning to the young man, he asked, "Do you have any idea what time it is?"

Only the young tavern-keeper heard these words. The Fool sitting in the corner, and the stranger who had just arrived were absently gazing at the view. The tavern-keeper didn't have a watch. A few days ago he had dropped the tavern's alarm clock and broken it. So he said, "I don't," then added, "But when it's exactly midnight all the sirens in the city will ring out. Since they haven't, it's not midnight yet."

The shoemaker muttered a few words as a thank you, and then slowly went out of the door, and disappeared in the deep darkness of the night.

The stranger had not failed to notice the flashing red light of the lantern outside. He kept looking outside. He hadn't drunk his rakı yet. He had squeezed the glass between his fingers, and was twisting it nervously. Then, with a single move, he brought the glass to his lips,



