

A Year in Kalkan

Between A Rock and A Hard Place

A retired Englishman casts a wry eye on expat life in the Turkish mountains during the Pandemic whilst unravelling the story of one hundred years of republican turmoil from Atatürk to Erdoğan.

I remember exactly how the idea of retiring in Turkey first came up.

It was a blustery March day in 2010. We had moved from London to Frome in the West Country three years or so previously. The move was not working out well; my wife Kim, or Special K as I call her, had recently lost both her parents within three years of each other. People in Frome seemed closed and parochial. We had not really established a circle of friend. The global financial crash of 2008 had dried work up for my consultancy.

“This sucker’s going down!” as George Bush is reputed to have said.

I could not have expressed it better

But we did own a holiday villa in the resort village of Kalkan on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast and it was this that was playing on my mind, as were driving along the A30. The iconic columns of Stonehenge outlined against a lowering sky perhaps leant drama to my words

“I think we should move to Turkey” I blurted.

The Special looked at me with those big, round adoring eyes and said

“Are you completely crazy? I cannot even think about such a ludicrous idea. What on earth *is* the matter with you? Move to Turkey!! That is a ridiculous idea”

I took that as a “Yes” and six months later we moved to Turkey.

I was 59 then. I am 69 now. So for ten years I have been an Englishman Abroad. A resident foreigner in Erdoğan’s Turkey. An retired expatriate or expat. Some reject the term preferring to identify as immigrants. I merely observe that immigrants spend their waking time working. Often doing the work natives are not willing to do. The life of foreign, mainly British, nationals who have chosen to retire in this sunny corner of the Mediterranean has many features. Work is not one of them. We are expats.

Our ten years of Kalkan life have been like riding a charging bull elephant but perched safely up in an air conditioned howdah. The minibar is well stocked, the views magnificent and the mood music chilled. Unless you were to open the window, thrust out your head and look down. Then you would get a very different view: a trail of rampant destruction.

But then few of us do look down. Insulated by our lack of language and lack of responsibility we remain in our bubble, where all is well.

The Real Turkey can be chaotic. On 15 July 2016 we watched spellbound, as a coup unfolded on our television screens. It failed. In the successive years hundreds of thousands of people have been arrested, dismissed from their jobs and in many cases gaoled. The legal system and the media has been hollowed out and brought under

government control; a government control which has tightened under a new presidential system. All of which has further polarised this country.

Over ten years the Turkish currency has plunged from 2.4 down to 10 (and falling) to the pound sterling. So, if you imported capital and converted it to lira ten years ago it would have lost 75% of its value. Be warned! Moving abroad can make you poor.

But the Special and I avoided the obvious pitfalls and settled in to the rhythm of expat life in a Mediterranean resort town. Hot, busy and party-tastic in the summer, quiet in the winter.

Then we got bored of it and decided to move up to the hills. We decided to buy a property in the village of Islamlar

Next Bit

In which Alice enters Wonderland

For a foreigner (*yabancı*) buying a property in the country is to step in to Wonderland. And not in a good way. This is especially true of Islamlar. Building in Islamlar has been forbidden since 1979 when it was declared a landslip area. In addition Islamlar is designated as a “country area”, which means foreigners are not even allowed to own land.

Even the most dimwitted of homo-not-so-sapiens can see that buying a property here is extremely foolish. So we bought a house here. We entered the world of Alice in Wonderland.

Here, as the Mad Hatter put it “Nothing would be what it is because everything would be what it isn’t. And contrary wise, what it is wouldn’t be. And what it wouldn’t be, it would. You see?”.

Because we are in Turkey. Because in Turkey there is always a Way Round. Because, in Turkey, all your dreams and all your nightmares can come true. The catch is you never know which your particular project will turn out to be.

There is a Way Round everything. The only exception is roundabouts which are very difficult to find a way round. If there is a priority, it is so confusing that the dominant principle is Who Dares Wins. Which, as a cautious foreigner (except where buying property is concerned) is not going to be you.

So here is how the process of buying your dream property in the beautiful mountain village of Islamlar plays out.

First find your house, with its gorgeous views over pine clad slopes tumbling down to the azure mediterranean. The title deed will just show a field. This might cause you to pause and reflect. But do not worry! Everybody’s title deed is like that in Islamlar. Building is forbidden. So the house you are looking at does not exist in law. As you are a foreigner in addition, you are not even allowed to buy the field on which the House That Does Not Exist, exists.

Daunted? Do not worry there is a Way Round. First you will establish a Turkish company. The company will own the field. You will own the company. Perfect. However, only Turks can start Turkish companies.

But there is a Way Round that too Your accountant will send an office junior who will briefly be CEO of your company before he signs a deed transferring it over to you.

Easy. And in the process you will make some new friends; your local Notary (*noter*) and his translator. These chaps will need feeding of course. Your wallet may be a little lighter when you emerge from their office clutching papers bristling with colourful stamps.

But now you are the Director of your own Turkish company. Do not get too excited. It is a shell company. In other words it Does not Do Anything but it does own the field on which exists your House that Does Not Exist. You have also made another friend, your accountant; he will pay all the taxes and submit the necessary returns to government every year. He too will need feeding. Of course.

Get used to it. You will be shelling out every year. This is, I have concluded, is why it is called a shell company.

But, despite all the shelling out, your house still does not exist.

Bear with me. We find a way *arkadaşım*. Every decade or so a hungry Government will declare an amnesty on illegal building (*Imar Barışı*). You can pay a few thousand and get a certificate of registration (*Yapı Kayıt Belgesi*). Your house then – Cheers! – will exist.

On 15th July 2018, two years exactly after the failed coup, our house finally.. existed

So that is how we came to be living here in the Turkish mountains.

Next Bit

In which the world catches a very nasty something or other and goes to bed for a year (and counting)

It all began didn't it with that seafood and poultry market in the quaint little Chinese town of Wuhan (population 11 million).

On January 8th, according to the New York Times Chinese researchers announced they had identified a new virus, a coronavirus, behind an illness that had infected dozens of people across Asia.

There was no evidence that the new virus was readily spread by humans, which would make it particularly dangerous, and it had not been tied to any deaths. But health officials in China and elsewhere were watching it carefully to ensure that the outbreak does not develop into something more severe.

Nothing too much to worry about then.

On Jan. 11th, Chinese state media reported the first known death from an illness caused by the virus.

Or maybe there really is

January 20th The first confirmed cases outside mainland China occurred in Japan, South Korea and Thailand, according to the WHO's first situation report. The first confirmed case in the United States was reported next day.

Starting to pay attention

January 30th Amid thousands of new cases in China, a “public health emergency of international concern” is declared by WHO.

DON'T PANIC!

The Special and I spent the whole of February in the UK, where we were all slow to wake up to the threat that COVID 19, as we learnt to call it, really posed.

The number of confirmed cases in the UK doubled from four to eight by 10th February. The government declared the virus a serious and imminent threat to human public health. But it was only slowly percolating through that the virus could be a real threat to life in England.

When we returned to Turkey on 3rd March Turkey was still showing as Covid free despite bordering Covid hotspot, Iran.

It was on March 11th that Turkey posted its first confirmed case of Covid-19 “If there is an infection in the country, it is very limited,” the health minister Fahrettin Koca was quoted as saying “The coronavirus is not stronger than the measures we will take.”

However within three weeks the virus had reached all corners of Turkey. In early April the Turkish government brought in a curfew for all 65+ residents and citizens restricting them to their homes. Twelve months later we are still severely restricted.

I am going to have time on my hands. I will write a blog.

So on 30th March 2020, in A Time of Corona, my internet blog An Englishman Abroad launched.

For the best part of a year every week I sat down before a blank screen and tried to think of something amusing to say about life here. And then I would try and stir in a bit of social comment to give some “bottom” to my weekly offering.

It kept me amused. Every post achieved at least a few hundred views. The most widely read achieved 1688. I only checked every half an hour.

A year ticked by

Back to today

So here we are one year on. It is April 2021. The Pandemic is very much still with us. Vaccinations have been developed in record time. The World – yes the World! – has been living with curfews, lockdowns, masks, social distancing, travel restrictions for twelve roller coaster months.

These measures have virtually eliminated influenza, colds and other viruses. But not the Covid 19 virus. This has shown a very unwelcome knack of mutating to new variants, many harmless but some more deadly or significantly more infectious. And the most infectious and dangerous of these is the UK Variant (ripping across Europe irrespective of tariff barriers).

I find I still have time to spare. So, heartened by the enthusiasm for my blog, I have decided to attempt a book.

And this is it.

‘A Year in Kalkan: Between A Rock and A Hard Place’ is my attempt to fold two narratives into one slim volume.

One narrative will drawn from my blogs written during those first twelve months of the Covid Pandemic. Although largely spent here in Turkey, the Special and I did manage to spend a fortnight in the UK. This was during the reduction in infections brought on by the summer (even viruses need a holiday).

Interspersed between my lightweight banter about life here in Third Age semi-imbecile retirement, I want to tell another story.

As the republic approaches its anniversary in 2023, my second narrative is the story of the first hundred years of the TC, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* or Turkish Republic.

Yes alright! That’s a big subject. So, as a friend suggested, I will just be attempting to open a small window, a porthole to allow a peep at the dramatic first hundred years of the fledgling republic: a story of coups, wars, revolution, counter revolution, parties (political ones), mass movements of people, ethnic conflicts. And that is just for starters.

So it will be an idiot’s guide. But it is not all bad. It will take up a lot less room on your bookshelf than Kenneth Clark’s *Civilisation*.

So with no more ado let us crack on with our two narratives. And let us start back in those still optimistic days of March 2020.

Ah! March 2020. Oh for those easy days. A Time of Corona, but only just. Few of us had any idea of the scale of the looming disaster that had been brewed up in a Chinese animal market.

March 30th 2020

Post 1 A Man Needs a Hobby

How good it is to live in the Turkish mountains: mounting case numbers, mounting deaths, mounting fear, mounting debt, mounting unemployment.

I need a drink. The only beer I have, strangely enough, is a bottle of Corona in my fridge. It is time I got rid of the bottle anyway. If the locals get wind that I have a bottle of Virus in my fridge it could get ugly.

Turkey can be like that. It is a polarised country. Much of it sophisticated but much of it traditional and superstitious. In the mountains you get a lot of the superstitious.

The beer was left by a gluten intolerant friend. Apart from gluten he is remarkably tolerant. He tolerates me for a start. He is a builder. Let's call him Baz.

Baz is a plain speaking Yorkshireman. He has a tough exterior forged as the son of a hill farmer and hardened by a lifetime running a building company. Underneath the tough exterior those who know him find a heart of gold. One day I too will find it.

Baz is a Practical Man. He can turn his hand to most things. Recently, he turned his hand to cutting his own hair. The barbers are all shut in this Time of Corona. From the front the cut does not look too bad. From the back it looks like he took a ferret to it.

Turkish barbers! How we miss them already. Ironically, the New York Metropolitan Opera streamed a performance of the Barber of Seville on Monday. It was part of a program of operas that they are streaming daily at no cost. The lights are going out all across Europe's iconic cultural venues; the National Theatre, The Globe, Royal Opera House. Do we understand how diminished our lives will be without them?

Virtually every government is now following the same lockdown trajectory, driving the world's economies towards a steep cliff. Politicians must wake up to the unpalatable truth that destroying an economy has a balance sheet too.

Older people are the most vulnerable to death or serious illness requiring hospitalisation. So we (reluctantly I have to accept the label) older people had better get ready to shoulder the burden of isolation and let the rest of the world get on, get ill, get over it and get back to work. Herd immunity or something like it may yet have its day. We will just have to sharpen our video conferencing skills until a vaccine comes along.

"No Grandma look up at the camera. No not at the ceiling. Grandma! What have you touched now? Grandma you've disappeared. Hello! Grandma! Grandma! Prudence wants to say goodnight. Grandma! Bloody hell!!!"

Do not worry about me. I shall stay busy

I have already transformed my shed from "a bloody shambles", as My Beloved Special described it, into a Temple of Order. Tools hang in serried ranks. Light corruscates from jars of screws and fittings, neatly arrayed in size order.

Although I do sometimes think the Special, smart as she is, does not understand the male mind. She is prone to ask irritating questions like

"Why do you need such a big shed?"

Me (with barely contained impatience) “To store my tools”.

Unfazed “Why do you need all these tools?”

Between clenched teeth “To improve, renovate and maintain my shed”.

She tuts and returns to her bag of pine needles. She has been collecting these for a while now and is planning to weave them to make useful household storage containers.



That is it for this week.

Stay safe *arkadaşlarım*.

The Story of the Republic

In the Beginning

The foundation of the secular Turkish Republic out of the ruins of the Muslim Ottoman Empire is one of history’s greatest stories. Maintaining this Republic is big story too. A constant balancing and rebalancing act which never looks like ending,; between the secular and the religious, between east and west, the traditional and the modern.

The Republic will be 100 years old on 29th October 2023. It may not get a telegram from the Queen but the Turkish Republic deserves it more than most

The first hundred years of the republic have seen enormous changes and tensions. Trying to understand where Turkey is today and how it got there is essential in understanding where it is may go over the next hundred years.

For Turkey is not just for the Turks. The struggle to see off the Corona Pandemic has woken us up to the global nature of the challenges that face nations; climate change,

population growth, nuclear conflict, access to resources. Turkey, head in the West and heart in the East, is an essential player in the scrummage out of which we must hook some sort of world order.

The history of the first hundred years of the Republic is bookended by two figures, figures with very different ideas about, well just about everything.

Turkey is between a Rock and A Hard Place

The Rock; Kemal Atatürk, military commander of genius, man of letters, rationalist, statesman and visionary founder of the secular Turkish Republic. A man who attracted extraordinary levels of devotion. His lifelong friend Salih Bozok shot himself shortly after Atatürk (the *Pasha*) died. Although he survived the suicide attempt he died within three years. Atatürk still commands enormous affection and God like respect amongst his followers (Kemalists) eighty years after his death.

Let us go back to a point prior to the establishment of the Republic. The year is 1919 just after the end of the First World War. The victorious allies had reduced the Ottoman empire to an exhausted rump in the Anatolian heartland. The allies had occupied Istanbul and much else. It took the vision and drive of the only Turkish commander with a real military victory, Gallipoli, to his name to inspire and direct a determined resistance. A resistance that eventually restored all the land within the 1918 armistice lines.

Atatürk went on to realise his secret dream of establishing a republic (*cumhuriyet*) now modern day Turkey. Even 15 years after his death in 1953, when his body was transferred to the recently completed mausoleum at Anıtkabir, 21 million Turks all over the country stood motionless for five minutes.

The Hard Place; It was three years after our move here that I realised Erdoğan was going to be a very considerable figure. I remember the moment.

On 16th October 2013 the local internet newspaper Kalkan Turkish Local News invited (foreign) residents to a lunch to meet American author and academic Judy Light Ayyildiz (whacky name indeed).

Ayyildiz was promoting her book, based on the memoirs of her Turkish mother-in-law a one time associate of Atatürk. One of our number asked Ayyildiz if she thought Turkey would ever produce a politician with the stature and charisma of Atatürk. I found myself declaring, to a very sceptical company, that it already had.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, born into humble circumstances in Istanbul, semi professional footballer, Islamic conservative, then radical politician, (jailed for inciting religious hatred), Mayor of Istanbul, was co-founder of the governing AK Party. At that time he was approaching the end of his second term as Prime Minister.

Erdoğan went on to become President of Turkey, without loosening his grip on power despite the supposedly ceremonial nature of the office. On 15th July 2016 he defeated an attempted military coup. Using the opportunity presented by this “Gift from God” he has consolidated his grip on power. In 2018 he narrowly won a controversial election to convert Turkey’s parliamentary system into an executive Presidential one. He has held

power continuously since 2003 and at the time of writing all effective authority is concentrated in the president's office.

During his tenure so far he has unarguably made huge changes to Turkey and its institutions. The military, authors of several coups and guardians of the secular Kemalist tradition, have been tamed. The judiciary and media put under presidential control. The face of Turkey has been changed by enormous amounts of construction, including many huge infrastructure projects personally championed by Erdoğan. He has restored respect to the religious masses who populate Anatolia.

Devil to some hero to others, he will remain in undisputed charge until the next presidential elections in 2023, the momentous and highly charged 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic.

This is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Hard Place

In their own words

“I have no religion, and at times I wish all religions at the bottom of the sea.” Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

““I want to create a pious generation that will work for the construction of a new civilization.” Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

““What a lovely drink this is, it makes one want to be a poet” Atatürk on tasting *rakı*

“The national drink is Ayran (soured Yogurt)” Erdoğan

April 7th 2020

Post 2 Fear takes a grip

I will show you fear in a handful of dust T S Elliot, *The Wasteland*

The news that the British Prime Minister had been admitted to Intensive Care feels like a game changer.

This is Boris we are talking about. Bombproof Boris, Bluffer Borris, Bombastic Boris. Boris the Bad, who had to apologise to the city of Liverpool after the Hillsborough Stadium fire. And to Portsmouth (“city of drugs, obesity and underachievement”). Breezy Boris, who made it from the best chairman of “Have I Got News for You” to the nation's highest political office. Biographer Boris (on Churchill). That Boris.

Bear that in mind and now imagine, stretched out on a hospital bed, the deathly white, silently wheezing, hardly breathing Boris.

If Mother Nature is having a joke it is A Very Bad Joke. The Virus has spoken “Take me seriously, Humankind!”

I for one am suddenly listening. The Corona Virus has my attention.

I said as much to the Mistress of Leto.

The Special and I were sitting in companionable silence. The fire blazed cheerfully in the hearth. I was humming along to Meatloaf spinning on the Bose. My Life's Joy was tying off a bundle of pine needles prior to weaving them into the base of breadbasket she is making.

The basket by the way is part of a nest of three. A five year project that has generated a quite considerable excitement on Pinterest (the "and here is one I made earlier" internet site).

"Should we be panicking?" she asked suddenly, left of field. Kim never comes right of field. Her questions often surprise.

I paused before replying. A couple of days ago I would have offered reassurance. But the downing of the Downing Street Don had discombobulated me. Boris may be a bit of a fraud but his presence at the helm, his ability to absorb flak and his, occasionally misplaced, optimism offer a kind of rallying presence. With him stretched out and struggling for breath who is on the bridge?

Dominic Raab! Give over! He may be quietly efficient. He sounds quietly efficient. Although if I was looking for a sinister name for a cartoon villain Dominic Raab would do nicely. He may be the man to have your back but we need someone to have our front. Boris has front. Except he is on his back. It's all back to front.

So yes. Maybe we should panic. Not too much. We are, *après tout*, British. Moderation in all things. But the moment demands, even if measured, panic. A cleansing, cathartic, panic. Enough to vent the toxins.

I suggest 19 seconds, a nice, roundish, end of adolescence, dawn of youthful hope sort of number.

Ready.....now!

Young Mustafa

The young Mustafa was born into a Middle Class Muslim household in the year 1881 in the Ottoman waterfront town of Selanik. This is now the Greek city of Salonica (Thessalonica).

Ottoman Salonica was a cosmopolitan town. The majority population was Jewish with a large community of Turkish Muslims and a sizeable Greek population, along with a scattering of Europeans.

There were (sound familiar?) tensions between conservatives and modernisers fed by a free flow of ideas from Europe. This discourse was distributed by newly established state

schools. The waterfront cafes, run mainly by Greeks, were no doubt hotbeds of radical thinking too.

In contrast the century meanwhile was closing around the dog days of the Ottoman empire, the 'sick man of Europe' as it was dubbed.

Perhaps to guard against just such radical ideas, Mustafa's mother, Zübeyde Hanım, insisted on sending him to a local religious school. An unhappy experience for the seven year old. Luckily for him and perhaps for us, his father, Ali Rıza, a man of less conservative ideas had him transferred to a more contemporary establishment. His father was not to remain on earth for much longer however. Ali Rıza succumbed to illness and died while Mustafa was still at Şemsi Effendi's Primary School

Death was all around the young Mustafa. Four of his five siblings died at an early age. Only his sister Makbule survived. Hard to imagine just how harsh reality was for the still young Zübeyde.

The formation of the young Mustafa took a game changing step when, facilitated by an uncle, he achieved his dream of entering military school at the age of 12. "It was when I entered the military preparatory school and put on its uniform that a feeling of strength came to me, as if I had become master of my own identity".

He acquired the name of Kemal at the military High School in Monastir. From here he transferred to the Military College in Istanbul 1899.

What must it have meant to be a young blood, officer cadet at the turn of the century in one of the world's most exciting cosmopolitan cities. Mustafa Kemal had already been exposed to, and fired up by, the ideals of the French revolution. In the bars and brothels of the European Beyoğlu district of the capital, he now acquired the tastes and habits of free living, free thinking *gavur* (non-believers).

Here too he experienced his first taste of the aniseed flavoured, clear spirit *rakı*.

You can try this yourself. On a warm Mediterranean evening clink a cube or two of ice into three fingers of *rakı*, and pour a measure of chilled water. Watch the clear spirit turn a beautiful milky white. Take a sip. As the chilled liquor soothes the throat it delivers a gentle punch. The bitter sweet, aromatic flavours of the cool ambrosia will smooth the edge of even the most brutal day.

It is reputed that that his first taste provoked Atatürk to turn to his high born friend Ali Fuat and say "What a lovely drink! It makes one want to be a poet."

It was a taste that followed him all the way through his life and contributed to his early demise at 57.

It is probably an apocryphal story that Atatürk, taunted by an opponent who thundered that Turkey was ruled by two drunks (the other being İsmet İnönü) riposted "Turkey is certainly not ruled by two drunks. It is ruled by one."

Apocryphal or not it is a great story.

It is important to understand that alcohol still today, indeed especially today, has the kind of resonance that abortion has in America. It is a huge fault line. Conservative Turks will insist on all alcohol being removed from their hotel minibar. They may hightail it out of restaurants that serve it.

Drinking, you see, is a political statement in Turkey. Those who drink know they can trust others who drink. Just as referencing the Guardian or the Washington Post marks you as a social and political liberal, so a Turk accepting or offering a glass of wine situates him in the Kemalist camp or certainly not in Erdoğan's.

Drink is a very, very definite dividing line. In Turkey today the Bottle is wedged uncomfortably between The Rock and A Hard Place. Which is odd, as the fermentation of grapes to produce wine started a long time ago somewhere around this part of the ancient world.

Such is history! Full of ironies. And Turkey has a lot, I mean a lot, of history.

Of which more later.

April 12th 2020

Post 3 A Weekend In

Many people in Turkey are wondering why this weekend's lock down, from midnight Friday until midnight Sunday, across 30 municipalities was declared with only two hours notice.

I am able to reveal events behind the decision. Please do not ask me for my source.

It all happened after a supper meeting for Middle Eastern potentates held at the *Yeni Saray* (I did tell you a little bit of Turkish would be required). A game of Forfeits was in progress to much amusement all round.

Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (Tam for short) Emir of Qatar, looking at the card he has drawn from a red fez in the centre of a low table, speaks

“This one's for you Tayyip. Your forfeit is.....Confine half of your population to their homes for the weekend.”

The President of Turkey (For it is he) “What! Give me a break Tam. That is in just three hours time bruv. Hardly fair! Sabby (Sabah Al-Ahmad Al Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait) only had to give an imitation of Donald Trump calling the Faithful to prayer in Ohio.”

“Yeah in *American*” the Emir protests. “You try it”. Jibes, winks and nudges follow thick and fast around the table

“Thought he said he was in charge”

“I could bang my whole country up in half an hour. Max bruv”

“Half an hour! Luxury. Give me ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes! Take a day, why don’t you? I could confine the whole of Saudi in 10 seconds”

“Ten seconds...”

“Ok!” Visibly nettled, the President of Turkey reaches for his iconic iPhone....

Whatever and however, people across much of Turkey were given just two hours warning of a midnight lockdown. In the proscribed municipalities (*büyükşehir*), which include our own of Antalya, people surged on to the streets straight after the 10.00 announcement. The surging ones were intent on snapping up from the shops whatever they could, and especially bread.

To cater for the demand, some shops reopened especially. All of which prompted one Turkish academic to tweet that he expected the whole of Turkey to be infected within 48 hours.

Maybe it is A Cunning Plan to achieve Herd Immunity.

These are strange times. Strange is the new normal. I spend a lot of time talking to my dog. Which probably would not be a concern if I actually had a dog.

Meanwhile my Life’s Love has set aside the pine needles for a while. The poor Special is complaining of an allergic reaction in her index finger. She has now transferred her attention to a group called ‘View from my Window’.

A harmless enough pastime you say but my attempts to write are constantly interrupted by cries of “Oh my God! Sweetheart you just *have* to come and look at this! A bear crossing a woman’s garden in Montana. Amazing! What a garden though! She’s got some money! Come on. It will only take a second.”

I wonder if Shakespeare had to put up with this kind of thing?

“When you going to fix that hole in the thatch Will? You promised you would do a few jobs around the house! ‘As soon as I have finished this Macbeth play’ you said. Depressing bloody yarn anyway. Who’s gonna pay hard earned groats to watch old hags dancing around a bleeding cauldron?”

A sigh from the great man’s study.

“Here’s another thing Will. The world is not going to stop turning because you need to take a break from – What is it now? Another cheerful little story I suppose? The Tempest or something. That sounds fun..... And meanwhile this bloody window is stuck solid. Place is falling apart. When are you going to earn any money from all this effort I want to know?”

Talking of Shakespeare and language, Wars and Pandemics leave their mark too. Expressions such as 'Avoid like the Plague' or 'A plague on all your houses' spring to mind.

Here are a few words and phrases that are in danger of falling out of common usage:

Diary

Handshake ('like sort of touching elbows you mean grandad?')

Kiss ('To people you hardly knew?! That's disgusting grandad')

And here are a few new ones:

Socially distanced

Zoom

PPE

Once upon a time we read books, books that were printed on paper, books with titles like 'Brave New World' and '1984'.

Now we read screens and in Wuhan you carry an app that grades you Green, Yellow or Red and shares your location with the Authorities.

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

T. S. Elliot The Wasteland

Stay safe

Mustafa Kemal Military Commander

'Then a soldier,

Bearded like the pard,

Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,

Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth.'

All the World's a Stage from 'As You Like It' William Shakespeare

For all the delights and distractions of metropolitan life, Mustafa Kemal passed through Military College and then Staff College in Istanbul very successfully. It was a time in which he took on many revolutionary ideas too. He and other young officers were disgusted by the corrupt and ineffective, absolutist regime of Sültan Abdülhamit II.

The Military Medical College was a potent source of revolutionary thinking, out of which grew the Committee of Union and Progress. Its membership of medical students, civil servants and army officers were the Young Turks that eventually went on to stage a successful coup in 1908. The coupists forced the Sültan to restore the Ottoman Parliament that he had suspended three decades earlier.

The radical discourse amongst young army officers promoted freedom of thought, human rights and the sort of revolutionary zeal that had led the French to throw off oppression and establish a new constitution. Mustafa Kemal was so inspired that he learnt to speak and read fluent French.

Liberté Egalité Fraternité were ideas that made a deep impression on the young officer, appalled by the decline evident in the oriental world around him; a decline which was in sharp contrast to the huge advances in medicine, science and technology coming out of Europe. These ideals were to stay with him and find eventual expression in his project to transform a post World War defeated Turkey in to an independent, secular republic.

Mustafa Kemal came out of Staff College top of his class, with the rank of Captain. However, his subversive activities had not gone unnoticed. Far from it. He was detained and interrogated for a month before, on the insistence of the palace, a posting, almost a banishment, to distant Syria.

In the following ten years his fortunes were mixed but his absence from centre stage meant that he was not a leading light in the radical movement of Young Turks who mounted a successful coup in 1908. This was fortunate in that the group, of whom Ismail Enver is the most well known, ultimately destroyed themselves. Whereas when Mustafa Kemal's time came he knew how to take the opportunity.

Sometimes you need a bit of luck.

And Mustafa Kemal certainly had that. The most indisputable example of this happened during the Battle of Gallipoli (known as *Çanakkale* to Turks). Mustafa Kemal led a counter-attack on the strategic heights of *Conk Bayırı*, charging with his men in to an infernal volley of fire. He was struck in the chest by a piece of shrapnel but saved from certain death by his pocket watch, which took the main impact deflecting the piece of iron.

Gallipoli was the making of Mustafa Kemal as a soldier and as a national hero. Mustafa Kemal's generalship inspired his men to feats of bravery and endurance that won praise from allied commanders. It was the only Turkish victory of any substance in World War 1.

Many of the soldiers who faced the Turks were young men drafted from Britain's far flung colonies. In particular the ANZAC troops, from Australia and New Zealand. Even today their relatives come to the town of Gallipoli (*Gelibolu*) for ANZAC day on 25th April every year.

Twenty years after the victory, in 1934, Atatürk wrote a heartfelt speech about the battle. It is rightly regarded as a masterpiece, offering comfort, peace and reconciliation in words that it is impossible to read without deep emotion. Here it is

*“Those heroes that shed their blood
And lost their lives.
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country.
Therefore, rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Johnnies
And the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side*

*Here in this country of ours,
You, the mothers,
Who sent their sons from far away countries
Wipe away your tears,
Your sons are now lying in our bosom
And are in peace
After having lost their lives on this land they have
Become our sons as well".*

In these words we can find the essence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, soldier, orator and nation builder.

Much of Atatürk's philosophy, his lifestyle and his tastes were Western to the bone. They struck a very discordant, alien note with the mass of religious, uneducated Turks who constituted the bulk of Anatolia. It is impossible then to overestimate the enormity of the challenge he overcame in wresting Turkey away from the grip of the Ottoman palace and the clerics who had held sway for centuries.

For an explanation we need to understand both his personal bravery as a soldier and his ability to feel and express strong emotion. Perhaps most importantly he combined an unshakeable belief in self without its usual bedfellow, an equally strong sense of self. He was not an egotist.

This rare combination enabled him to reach out and touch people across boundaries of birth, race and belief. Together with a genius for strategy and a clear unwavering vision he was able to achieve what can only be called the transforming miracle of the Turkish Republic.

But for all that, even at his death in 1938, that transformation was still a work in progress.

As it is today, 73 years after his death.

April 18th 2020

Post 4 Stayin' Alive

Merhaba arkadaşlarım

Here in Turkey one of the less obvious Victims of the Virus is the motor vehicle.

I refer particularly to those vehicles belonging to we seniors (as I have reluctantly come to define myself). Confined to base our Harleys, Hummers and mobility scooters sit motionless in the driveway.

I occasionally pour myself a glass of wine, sit in the sun and watch Donald the Dacia Duster gently depreciate. It's all it does now. I did wash it yesterday. Cars have feelings too.

Perhaps The Special and I will go for a virtual drive. You know, sit in it and make engine noises. People do seem to be doing all sorts things in a virtual kind of way. I have no idea how the Zoom birthday party which Daisy (our granddaughter) participated in yesterday actually went but I suppose it was at least easy to clear up afterwards.

Mind you, our vehicles can withstand idleness a lot better than our bodies. The well tuned machine that is my own muscular skeletal biomass requires constant maintenance. The Devil after all finds work for idle hands. It usually involves making cheese sandwiches and pulling corks.

Edmund Blackadder observed that "When the going gets tough, the tough hide under the table." Not me! I have converted Leto Towers into a veritable exercise Boot Camp.

The first thing was my mountain bike, The Trek. Although not a fan of fixed wheel cycling (spinning) I have had to suck it up and buy a Turbo Trainer. This clever device sets the back wheel on resistance rollers and away you go. Or don't go, as it were.

The only problem is that it emits a fearsome whine like a 1960s dental drill. The solution is headphones and music. After experimenting unsuccessfully with Cosi Fan Tutte I was forced to concede the point and download some exercise beats from Spotify. I found two invigorating playlists titled Kiss My Tuss and Shake Yo Batty Grandad.

Both of which sounded like pleasant enough activities if I knew what they were. It was my granddaughter Daisy who finally explained them to me. Not, I add, without a good deal of embarrassment. On my part that is. Today's seven year olds are quite shameless.

I have bought a bungee harness to attach for swimming. This too enables you to go nowhere whilst exerting considerable amounts of energy. Which is the effect one is after.

All of this is fine for we landed gentry, living on spacious mountain estates with pools, terraces and views. For those of you battered down in the teeming slums of Kalkan, I highly recommend the skipping rope (jump rope if you want to sound more like a boxer than a primary school girl). I am on three repetitions of 100, which go something like this.

"One, two, three, ouch, four, five, six, fuck, seven eight, nine, shit.."

To add a bit of excitement I walk out of the gate down the road bordering our bit of forest, then jump over the stream back on to our land and run uphill, five pull ups on the pergola, then across to the gate and start again. 200m in all. Ten circuits equals 2 km.

The excitement comes in the possibility of encountering the flashing light of the regular *Jandarma* patrol whilst out on the road.

How shrunken our lives have become

Get fit! Stay safe