

## Purple

'I may appear to be relating a story of love and murder, when I actually stare out of a speeding car, counting the milestones to the awaiting cliff.'

*Interviewed by Tolga Meriç, Kitaplık, Babil Kulesi Supplement, October 2004*

*Even objects carry monetary value in your novel: Revan scorns the velvet lovers' seat as her sister Fikran's taste. The furniture is 'gigantic' now, the Viennese mirror console and dining table, gilt chandeliers, pitchers and trays bought on overseas trips are the bits of 'tat' they loved to cram into their homes.*

The period Revan refers to is the 'Eighties. Her husband İlhan Sacit's star is rising, a time of a new socio-economic order when some people earned shedloads of money, mostly illegitimately. What I wanted to emphasise was the metamorphosis in Revan's language and her perception. Wealth made easily, possibly dishonestly, encouraged profligate lifestyles marked by a pathetic degree of ostentation. Fashions changed frequently, today's most desirable became old hat in a couple of years' time. Crystal chandeliers were thrown aside in favour of uplighters, carved armchairs became commonplace whilst Italian and American furniture became 'in'. We have seen how ill at ease these people were in their architect-designed homes. In the absence of an assimilated culture, their homes began to resemble an untidy mess, a flea market. Some people found themselves overwhelmed by their furniture, like Revan does in that scene. Sad or funny, but that scene in *Purple* refers to that period and carries a political message.

*Renginur's father is on his deathbed, yet sadness appears to have been shooed away by money. Purple opens out to countless areas where money enters, and even influences personal beliefs. Revan can no longer see the face of God as she used to. What's your comment on money and freedom?*

The ascendancy of money into the value of choice inescapably eroded certain human and social values. Relationships, values and beliefs lost ground. My main objective in writing *Purple* was this phenomenon of social breakdown, of scattering and a paradigm shift in values. Placing money on par with freedom creates a shallow viewpoint, in my view, because what really matters to me is freedom of spirit. Without it freedom is never possible, quite the opposite, life and dreams atrophy. Although money signified –falsely, as it turns out- freedom for some within the picture you describe, this was a fundamental symptom of value erosion. You may find this simile strange, but I find this freedom and respect as fake as the interest

shown in his audience by a pianist-singer. A time that gave rise to such sayings as 'You're only free if you've got money' and 'Put your money where your mouth is'. Illegitimate ways to make money, establish domination with money, and in the worst instance, deliver men from 'her indoors', drive around all day long in four-wheel-drives, buy anything at all and tip in Dollars might appeal to the amoral as freedom. It is evident, however, that money alone does not liberate mentally or emotionally, quite the opposite, creates new addictions and slavery. Worship money, and you give up on so much more. You turn everything upside down and are sold for a few pieces. No price could be heavier or more humiliating. Worse still, the loss of honour and human decency creates an intense void impossible to fill in the shallow person.

*Another observation of yours that I find ironic: Revan regrets her wasted years, never having had group sex –not a standard in her cultural make-up- as divorce from İlhan looms.*

Revan is an ordinary person, trying to cope under the influence of new 'values' ousting the collapsing ones. She envies the exaggerated examples of so-called 'must have' sexuality hailed by society and women's magazines. Revan's never enjoyed sexual satisfaction in thirty years of marriage; her vision is limited to banal trends imposed as necessities. Incapable of attaining a sense of real freedom, she is flung from one extreme to the other, to dreaming of things that would once have shocked her to the core, such like hiring a gigolo or having her ugly toes broken and recast by a plastic surgeon. Even if she had the courage to try any of this, it might already be too late, only resulting in even more disappointment. All such shallow people have to latch on to when they lose their own values, however frail they might be, is money. Unable to shake off their earlier values entirely, they feel guilty. What matters here is this the moment when Revan becomes aware of her own shortcomings. The moment she realises her own identity has always been dependent upon that of her husband's, that she herself has been a nothing. So she turns to the shortest route to becoming herself, the most radical route.

*Fikran, on the other hand, puts money to full use, demanding Ramazan in exchange for money.*

This type of woman came to prominence in our society in the 'Eighties. Sexuality was commercialised even amongst the upper classes; male prostitutes published their memoirs on society women in newspapers. Where money reigns supreme, all this is to be expected, of course. Fikran is the tragi-comic example of a not insignificant number of corrupt women; she believes her brother-in-law's money liberates her.

Ramazan, on the other hand, belongs to a group devoid of all hope for an honest wage and thus invites the exploitation of the only sacred thing left to him. I have only one single taboo about sexuality: money tainting the finest, warmest and most intimate relationship between two people. I find the coarse commercialisation of this human act utterly repugnant and humiliating. Monetising the flesh cuts incredibly deep into the human psyche. Scars that defy healing. Yet this was legitimised one way or the other. Just think, a conservative Eastern family –the concierge’s family– openly market their daughter to İlhan Sacit. Renginur’s father may have been the type of man who’d easily commit murder for his honour, but here he bows respectfully before the man who’d dishonoured his daughter, the man who gave her an illegitimate child. Fatmuş, whose husband is on his deathbed, feels no guilt about having sex with the old hotel doctor... who is rich and has no heirs!

*Renginur’s maternal uncle Adem compounds this legitimisation with other so-called forbidden and sinful aspects of sexuality, and says, ‘Anything is possible in İlhan Sacit’s hotel.’*

As I made clear in *Green*, in a time when the main measure of success is money, and the power it brings, rules only apply to the weak, the small and the miserable. But those who have money command respect whatever the circumstance. Someone leaves a conservative small town, settles in Istanbul, grows rich, and later returns to the town with his homosexual partner. They make no secret of their relationship – which no one dares to criticise. He treats his entire extended family to meals in fine restaurants. Everyone is happy, no one minds his bling, his boyfriend or how he’s got to be so rich. Which leads us to the conclusion that money justifies everything. A penniless man in the same situation, however, would have been pilloried, or not actually lynched. So what commands respect is money, a deplorable set of double standards.

*Adem is instrumental in displaying convoluted power structures: ‘If he were to kowtow to İlhan Sacit, buttoning his jacket up, and then don a cap and stand to prayer with Adeviye, he’d please everyone, be everyone’s darling...’ Money on one side and religion on the other... That point where these two concepts cooperate... Quite possibly one way of suppressing anarchy.*

Precisely. İlhan regards him as awkward, difficult to place between these two concepts. Although not religious himself, he finds the faithless amongst the ‘smaller people’ perturbing, and so worries that Adem’s taking liberties -which makes him

dangerous. İlhan's the type of person who wouldn't spend much thought on someone so out of his range of influence. At any rate, people of his ilk would mostly ignore and scorn the lower classes who somehow develop their own philosophies. They take special pains to ignore them against the risk of being criticised. İlhan Sacit knows he will never find approval from Adem. He can only deign to use Adem if the latter obeys, keeps his thoughts to himself and act deferentially. Adem, on the other hand, considers himself to be immune to manipulation. There's a fine line here: his convictions are partially based on his own dispossessed status. All İlhan Sacit has to do to elicit Adem's approval is to invite him to his table, or show a little more tolerance. Partly a case of sour grapes, in other words.

*The novel also examines the triangle of death-money-sexuality. Adem wonders why they screw so frequently, are they so lonesome, or are they accustoming themselves to death.*

This is Adem's own idea, and must contain a degree of envy. On the other hand, the more vapid the lifestyle, the more exaggerated the place of sex in their lives. Sexuality is crucial, of course, but it isn't the only way of existence. What I perceive is this concern: 'We're going to die anyway. Let's enjoy this world before we die.' But reduce the pleasure of life to sex and you soon find yourself thinking, 'One day you'll lose this. You'll grow old and die.' I regard this concern as integral to the fear of death. That's not to deny the savage, dark and fatal side of sex as pure instinct. This darkness intrigues me hugely as a writer. Just cast your eyes over page three of the papers: sex, and crimes of passion, murders and deaths occur at insane levels day in, day out.

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