

You Forgot to Kiss My Soul

Birgün, February 2006

First of all, what inspired you to choose the theme of death?

Death is not the only theme in the book. Our perceptions of death vary, and yet this is one of the main aspects of the human condition. Sometimes a torrid confrontation overwhelms us, and evoke a variety of reactions to death in people from different walks of life. Death is inevitable, sometimes an utterly unexpected shock, but definitely an undesirable. Except for the rare instances where people long for death, especially if they've been unloved, if their souls have never been kissed... What I attempted to do in these stories is to display the ways of seeing and of grieving. My stories speak of the pain and yearning of the bereaved, of their dreams and delusions and the lonely journeys into the realms of fantasy some people take in their longing to be reunited with their loved ones.

Writing these stories must have taken you back too, making you re-live some emotions in some way. Did you ever feel powerless when you were writing?

Not in content, because these aren't dark tales of horror. What I did was focus on was questioning life, given death is a fact. My characters aren't powerless before death, quite the opposite; they're resilient. They seek ways to cope with death in their own fashion. Some of the stories view death from an ironic standpoint; like the soul of the comatose mafia boss talking as he wanders around the room. Or the man who wants to alter his fate... At times, death is more a character than a state. It was my determination to go the extra mile in pursuit of good literature that made writing them so challenging.

An accident unsettles us in the opening story, The Smell of Hay, an accident that points the reader towards death. What is the main theme of that thin line, of death?

I have explained in some length - several pages, in fact- all these themes and what the person who has the accident experiences. These are situations I've internalised as I wrote, to the extent that I became more wary of traffic accidents as I drive. Our attitude towards death is a mixture of fear, of the unknown and despair. However, death no longer has the same effect on us: endless scenes of violence on TV have inured us to death. It became ordinary, familiar, everyday. Our sensitivities to the human condition have been eroded; it's almost as if we'd lost our capacity for

empathy altogether. The book begins with an accident and the death of a young woman, because this is the opening, it's the introductory tale, and a startling one it is too. Readers find it quite stirring. Words have far more power to impress than pictures in literature. And what I'm saying there is, 'Reader, we have met death, and now, get ready: I have a few things to tell you about it...'

In the second story, tulips symbolise consolation, and even despair, for a young man who'd lost his love. Were you trying to emphasise betrayal in this story?

That would be an erroneous interpretation. What we see in this story is the way a bereaved person mourns. Hoping to communicate with his dead wife through the tulips he grows on her grave! Of course this is a desperate act, an act of self-consolation, but partly stemming from a desire to ease the process of grieving... People need to devise their own methods to cope with the pain of death.

You Forgot to Kiss My Soul also focuses on time. You suggest the subject matter developed on an axis of death, time and illusions. What is the connection between death and time in your opinion?

Our perception of time is as open to delusions as that of death. I believe our internal time to be limitless and unfettered by rules or regulations. We have the power to travel through time mentally, stack similar moments at once and even stop time. All this is delusion, but our dreams and desires frequently carry more weight than reality. I have made use of subjective time, of gaps we perceive to exist between instances and the breadth of simple present time comprising the past and the present. Whenever I took my characters to the extraordinary, time also passed into the same dimension.

The descriptions in your stories are wonderful; they make the reader take count.

This is literature. Something we might have forgotten to read, even, in pursuing personal development and mystical goals...

The questioning of death in Anatomy Lesson is impressive... It also makes us realise that you only need to fear the living. What was your main objective in writing this story?

The sight of dead bodies is generally intimidating, a fear with cultural and religious roots, connected to ghost stories and tales of the hereafter. Yet a dead body can never

hurt anyone. This is a story about how pathetically lonely the dead are. But the main idea concerns a medical student discovering his own body and life as he works on cadavers, and learns what love means, what kissing the soul means.

You once said in an interview that you'd experienced death as an integral part of life. Could you explain that please? You also stated you'd even considered suicide.

This is true of everyone. Life, living organisms, are born carrying their own death within. Life is finite. The number of people who've never considered suicide must be very low. Life is full of disappointments and devastation. Everyone must have confronted seemingly intolerable situations. What matters is finding the inner strength to survive that thought, that dark moment...

Do you think it's possible to love someone enough to kill?

That could only be an obsession, an insane perversion, rather than love. The alteration in the chemistry of the brain transforming love into a dangerous level of insanity has already been noted in some individuals. You will have heard of people killing their loved ones and even eating their flesh, undoubtedly a pathological sickness. Killing the loved one, or harming him or her for whatever reason, is no different.

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