

## **Saffron Yellow**

'Lose the future, and you lose love. The quest overtakes love itself.'

*Interviewed by Tolga Meriç, Vatan Book, 15 March 2010*

*As I read Saffron Yellow I wondered how you always manage to hit the bull's eye when it comes to the human condition today.*

Our society faces deeply intense, hurtful and bizarre occurrences today. Worse still, we're being skilfully inured to all this. Any perceptive, curious and sympathetic person can easily observe the latest in our lives, our despair and disintegration. As do I, except, conveying sadness and contemporary worries into writing requires painstaking attention. The greatest challenge I face in so doing without compromising literary aesthetics, eschewing coarse political discourse and the usual social clichés. What has always mattered most to me is depicting the sadness and loneliness of the individual within the context of social relationships to highlight the problem itself. I begin by examining the personality traits of my characters that lend themselves to extrapolation. I think begin to narrate the main story by reflecting it on their lives, relationships, thoughts and souls, but always consistently with the logic and drama of the novel itself. I've been trying to keep my sincerity, empathy and conscience fresh for these past thirty years in order to relate impressive and enduring tales. The ability to perceive the world and people from a dialectic viewpoint must be hugely helpful. Everything is connected. I take special pains to depict time, the old and the new, the dying and the newly born, all rites of passage, in other words, in their entirety. Pain and joy are related. The ironic aspects of life that I managed to capture in my writing, for instance, amuse, entertain and console me. I like irony; it inspires me to be both serious and light-hearted. I try to avoid wasting anyone's time. What I aim to do is hopefully entertain the reader as I make him or her think, and see something of him- or herself. It's not the simplest path, but I do my best.

*A hitherto unseen rise in adopting the hijab marks our time; Eylem, one of the main characters in Saffron Yellow, flings her headscarf out of the Ankara train window. Your uncompromising stance between catching the spirit of the time, following the trends and tempting the reader is a breath of fresh air.*

I try to avoid fashionable topics, so-called global issues, easily consumable, cheap daily politics and concerns. I have never, to date, sought attention by writing anything trendy or commercial, or jumped on a single bandwagon. I have always been honest to my reader and to myself, pursuing endurance. What really intrigues

me as a writer is the basic human condition, dependence and freedom, and people constrained into dogmas despite being born innocent. The headscarf is the product of a fanatically narrow-minded view; it's an artificial ideological issue, one that's turned into a terrible bore by now. All the same, it has a dramatic aspect for me. No matter who defends this unfathomable psychology in whatever way, all it arouses in me is pity for the woman. Eylem's story in the novel reflects the conflicting logic, forced and unnecessary aspects of this issue as part the story, but no more. I do have to state at this point that as I find this topic enervating and futile, I will enter into no cliché arguments. Wear it if it amuses you!

*Eylem's sexual relationship with Seyit, her employer and protector, comes across as inevitable. What do you think this indicates?*

Eylem is on her own, both materially and spiritually. All lonely souls need a protector at first. This could be a husband, a boyfriend, or even someone entirely unrelated; that is how we are introduced to our first lessons in life. Most people, and in particular women, find just such a person in whose arms they take their first steps. Female 'mentors' also exist; remember Nilhan, for instance, Volkan's guardian and protector. Such relationships take on a different dimension in our time, of course, turning into overtly monetary transactions. I find Seyit and Eylem to be a good match. The fresh 'businessman' with origins in the provinces, making a decent living, and relatively free of personal conflicts; the conservative lady accountant in dire straits, a friendly office and a brotherly approach. Seyit is a familiar figure in this context, perfect as a stepping stone for someone like Eylem. And on the other hand, you have the sophisticated figure of Nilhan, confident enough to bed the handsome young arrival to America, on the day they meet...

*All that robs the individual of her future, be it money or religion, appears to conspire to beckon Eylem to prostitution. How would you comment on this?*

We're living in an atmosphere where people offer themselves for sale, either forced by the system, or by their own volition. An atmosphere where people are reduced to a commodity with not only their bodies also faiths, thoughts and effort, or where people lose their innocence one way or the other. Making money is seen as essential and legitimate. Worse still, any unsavoury character who makes lots of money - prostitute or mafia boss- commands an incredible amount of respect from both the system and the man on the street. This corruption rapidly taints its admirers, and transforms them into potential thieves, prostitutes, con men or swindlers. That's

what we really have to worry about. Whilst society grows ever more corrupt, bleeding under injustice, cruelty and political incompetence, the only thing that seems to matter, or occupies the imagination is money, wealth that can buy anything. It's deplorable that defence of ethical values has become 'old hat'. Never mind all that, they say; change is inevitable, we have to side with the new, and with freedom. Except, what replaces the old is neither freedom, nor anything with sufficient depth, nor, indeed, does it make people happy. A colourless, bland and abstract individualism and an unhealthy loneliness. The world is a gigantic trade centre where wars, injustice, egotism and a vapid, artificial cheer are marketed, and where everything, but everything's for sale, living and inanimate.

*I noticed as I read the novel that we suffer the same pain even if we're not as rich as Volkan, choose Eylem's path or put up with what Melike Eda has to. It's as if whatever happens in Green first happens to us in the mind. We no longer have to live like a prostitute to feel like one; nearly everything perplexes us and makes us sick, from the cult of youth through to the media, from money –now the only value- to sexual gluttony...*

The last two decades that began with *Green* and ends with *Saffron Yellow*, that is, the period between 1985 and 2005, is the story of an era and a generation. Your description of how this generation has been mentally seduced is accurate. The metaphors and images relevant to our time can no longer stay secret. The 'New World Order' description no longer has the same glamour as it once did ten or fifteen years ago. All the lies have been deciphered. And the brand new lies proffered are so risible, so flawed that they grow old at once. The collapse of the multipolar balance laid the world wide open to global capitalism and gave rise to a peculiar new young generation: conformist, conditioned to constant consumption of unnecessary luxury as a reward for overwork, gifted, not given to thinking much, uniform, and utterly bland. Those who failed to fit in may have been freer of spirit, but also were much more prone to frequent job changes, unemployment and depression. All the same, these people were manipulated to admire the former, the group defined down to a tee. What I do in my novel is promote awareness, knowledge and insight over acceptance of self-deception. I'd prefer us to consider the process, see, understand and seek new goals, instead of subscribing to a cynical view of inevitable defeatism. This globally adverse process is undoubtedly not that easily reversible. It will have to run its course. There will be some who will deceive themselves into believing they're clinging on somehow, but the true cost will be much higher than expected.

*We read about Melike Eda and Volkan not falling in love when the opposite would have been the more traditional story line. And yet, their failure reads like a love story, one suitable for our time. Shall we talk about lovelessness and how it relates to futurelessness?*

Melike and Volkan failed to fall in love, but not for lack of trying. I as the novelist truly wanted them to, but the conditions, their surroundings and individual perceptions conflicted with novel's integrity and consistency. That's why love never grew. Love is another manifestation of dreams and hope for the future; love, in short, is imagining your own future. Someone with no future, or at least, no clear vision for tomorrow will struggle with a foundation for love. That could be one way of viewing the loves in *Saffron Yellow*. Love still offers people a branch to hold on to; people still need and long for love, but I guess the innocence and sincerity it demands have largely been lost. The total submission and dedication required by that extraordinarily childish exuberance have become rarer of late. Love is a crystallised state, a state of transparency. Yet relationships today have become disposable. The intense evanescence of yearning is diluted. Passions have grown shallower. Everything's reduced to text speak and voice mail. In these tainted circumstances, dreams and emotions predictably atrophy, expectations become more ordinary and even love becomes a commodity. So the quest for love overpowers genuine love. Just like the way the shadow girl in the novel becomes her own quest as she follows her own image. The love between Volkan and Eylem is based on the obsession with being in love. It takes place in a dimension that pushes the virtual to the limit, which is why it doesn't actually take place; it might even be an illusion altogether. Love is not entirely impossible today, but in the very near future and in practice, it will suffer even more erosion. According to my observations, anyone who loses the future loses love.

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