

## **Saffron Yellow**

Selim İleri asks İnci Aral five questions...

*Interviewed by Selim İleri, Dünya Book Supplement, 2 March 2010*

*1. İnci Aral, allow me to congratulate you on thirty years in literature that began with the story entitled June Times in the Türk Dili Magazine of January 1977... And now Saffron Yellow; how does that make İnci Aral feel? Which takes precedence: joys and gladness, or disappointments, withdrawal or even deliberate retreats?*

These thirty years were filled with an undeniable passion to write, a dogged determination to succeed and an intense effort that occasionally complicates my private life. The more I write, the more I grow as a writer. I find myself more experienced, more mature and more aware of my own actions today, but I cannot claim that writing comes any easier. I might even be working harder than before, and assigning nearly all my joy of life to writing. Writing has made me noticeably lonelier. Nothing else gives me the same pleasure now as writing does. All the same, I am not entirely at peace. I'm still as thin-skinned as an emotional child precariously balanced on a fine line. I'm easily disconcerted by any adversity, an unexpected headline above a newspaper interview or some brutal scene in life. I obviously harbour old scars and loneliness, but I'm no longer as introverted as I once was. An established readership and the admiration of young writers give me solace, making writing even more inescapable. However, each new book I finish frightens me even more, as I'm convinced the art lover has grown accustomed to everything new. The sweeping domination of popular culture blurs the conflict between value and cheapness. The shallowest and most facile tripe is dressed up as quirky, consumed heartily and literature becomes ever more dispossessed.

*2. The introduction of your latest novel Saffron Yellow informs the reader of that Modern Times of Deception, is now to be known as Green, and that together with Purple, they constitute a trilogy. Saffron Yellow, however, still stands alone as a novel. The common denominator between these three must be your concept of 'loss of values'. When did this social upheaval first have an impact on you? What was it that led you to write of loss of values novel after novel?*

*Modern Times of Deception will not undergo a title change, but will bear the subtitle Green in future editions, whilst the other two will bear the legend Modern Times of Deception as a small surtitle. I had to write a third of Saffron Yellow before I realised these three seemingly discrete novels actually create a major whole in depicting my*

characters and the human condition surrounded by the social, economical, political and cultural phenomena of post-Eighties Turkey. The scales fell from my eyes when in-out lists force fed 'globalisation' and 'trends' into our daily lives. 'NEW!' says global capitalism, and overpowers even the madness of material consumption, leading to mental erosion and exhaustion. I'd like to point out I eschew approaching this matter from a conservative viewpoint. What concerns me is the loss of the meaning of life for those who seek it. Young people are presented with a so-called new philosophy instead of human beauty and concerns. The hallowing of the individual has made no one happy, since it led to uniformity and lack of identity instead of generating the awareness of being individuals. This curious phenomenon is not restricted to Turkey either. These latest trends in people here and around the world, their loves, relationships and unhappiness offered me, the novelist, a plethora of highly tragic material.

*3. I cannot emphasise enough what an absorbing read Saffron Yellow is; the tension in the plot that starts right at the beginning makes the novel so hard to put down. What I'd like to point out is this: you face your reader, in your thirtieth year in literature, as an entirely new İnci Aral. Reinventing yourself is a terrifically brave step for an established writer. Weren't you in the least bit daunted? If I were to ask you about the adventure that was writing Saffron Yellow...*

True, the plot does carry you along in *Saffron Yellow*, but I still worked on the internal worlds of the characters and their transformations with as much detail as I did in my previous novels. I believe *Purple* is similar too. The tension in the novel might stem from reality, which is equally pacy. On the other hand, I have never –neither by upbringing, nor as a method- aimed to become an elitist writer, read by a small circle of a couple of thousand. I have preferred, instead, to describe people in a multi-faceted way. It is important for me to attract readers' precious attention, and to avoid boring them. *Green* is the odd one out in this trilogy. I chose a postmodern structure for this novel precisely to refute the popular dismissal of postmodernism as vapidity. *Purple* and *Saffron Yellow* overlap in style. My novels virtually write themselves after the first paragraph; countless experiments and hopeless starts eventually give way to the novel that shapes itself and its own expression. The distinction and variety that emerges is not frightening, quite the opposite: it thrills me. As for the adventure of *Saffron Yellow*: my son inspired me a few years ago when he said, 'Mother? You're always writing about your own generation; why don't you tell our story for once?' The most crucial aspect of this generation is the blurring of a vision of their future and their dreams. That was the foundation of the novel.

4. *Saffron Yellow* has quite a large cast. You first offer a love affair between Volkan and Melike, which soon turns into a social panorama, to sex, antiques smuggling, modern politics and many other problems. Our Istanbul and Turkey today. The world of holding companies... What inspired these characters and the atmosphere?

I sensed *Saffron Yellow* would be a tricky project and kept postponing the start date. This became an accumulative process for me. I'd opened my eyes and antennae as wide as I possibly could. I did background research on certain matters, reading up on economics, investment companies and global capital. I spoke to my own children and several young people who only temporarily 'made it' in the system, and some who got nowhere, and listened to their troubles. I observed their concerns on love, work, family, daily lives and worries about the future. I consulted newspapers, magazines, TV and similar media reflecting the relationships and the world of a certain segment of society. I ever read a few cheap books on call girls. This all takes place right before our very eyes; all you need is to look a little more closely, possess a certain world view and adequate experience as a writer, and know what to say. The rest comes from letting your imagination run free, and letting the plot to run its natural course.

5. *I'm not sure if you'll agree, but Saffron Yellow gives the impression of a colourful, bright and a prosperous world. Look within, where the novelist loses no time to turn, and the external glitter is extinguished like phosphorescence: a deep, dense, cloying, magma-like darkness. How does İnci Aral see the future of this darkness?*

I'm impressed by your general definition and comments on *Saffron Yellow*. This was precisely the idea that guided me to name the novel. I began by describing the world of money, of material values, of wealth, of grandeur, a dazzling splendour and abundance. I observed the people in that hollow world, the frustrated, unhappy, yet powerful figures who'd command the future of the country. Then there was another, contrasting world, where young, highly educated, refined, yet hopeless people selling their own bodies. An atmosphere of corruption where everything's for sale, everything becomes an easy object of exchange. The darkness I mentioned grows even more hopeless and intimidating the deeper you walk in. There are, sadly, such sad, dark truths that even the novelist shies at depicting them, because she cannot fit them into a novel. All the signs point to this darkness continuing and growing even more intense. What matters is the ability to see despite the darkness, the growth in numbers who can see; that is the only way that the darkness will eventually be pierced.

*Dünya Book Supplement – 2 March 2007*