

Modern Times of Deception: Green

Our lives follow a path where the pathetic and the comical are interlaced, a situation that becomes clearer if you only step back a little. That is what generates the irony in the novel, an irony arising out of the tension between an objective viewpoint and instant grasp of contradictions. *Interviewed by Leyla Şahin, Cumhuriyet Book Supplement, 22 December 1994*

The book that made us lose sleep.

Your novel opens with Engels's typewriter at a time when statues of Lenin wash up on our shores. The technical aspect of the manuscript you've created –a task entrusted to Nedim in the novel- is taken up by a Remington bearing a plaque: Friedrich Engels.

Was there ever such a model? An Adler would have been more likely if so, as Remingtons only had English keyboards at the time. And since Engels wrote in German, it would have been more logical for him to use a German keyboard. This is where we encounter the issue of realism. In order to define my novel, examine the characters on the emotional level and comment on the political turmoil, we have to begin from this conclusion. The realism of the story in *Green* comes from the narrator-writer Nedim's point of view. But just how realistic the details on the characters, the tales and situations are unclear. The focal point in the relationships between the characters is Nedim, someone whose senses of reality and identity are split, dissected, but still manages a kindly approach. His integral ego may be strikingly real and whole. The characters in the novel may have been created in his fictional world, split and multiplied, but that's precisely why they gain a real aspect, both because they're fictional, and convincing. The themes follow a consistent progression in this fictional world, albeit with apparent clashes. The typewriter is a symbol here, one that signifies the start of the transformation of the past two decades, of the Engels reality that stretches into the religious state –or a supernatural one. A nostalgic symbol for Nedim, for an era totally lost.

Green has much to say on what modern values we stand to if an Islamist government takes over, both as individuals and as a society, and in the way it mobilises our 'big sleep'. What inspired you to write such a book? What was the starting point of the novel?

The last coup systematically depoliticised society. In a time when statues of Lenin wash up on our shores, the Left dissolves, leaving behind a befuddled void, which an unsophisticated religious movement and ideology attempts to fill, an authoritarian

and conservative ideology that has long been waiting in the wings. And fill that void it did. This success has much to thank the short-sightedness of the every multiparty era government to date and the despair of the majority of the population. I worry about the dark outcome of any movement or ideology rooted in hypocrisy, fundamentalism, concealed or overt terror or anti-democratic, outmoded and fascistic tendencies, all elements harboured by the Islamic ideology rising in the wake of 1980. Fundamentalist or nationalist ideologies have now been repackaged to appeal to those who find them contrary to globalisation, and these ideologies flood the market as rising values. Shallowness, cutting corners, egotism and blindness have, as a result, spread far and wide. It was my inability to stay silent in the face of this turmoil that I wrote this novel. Let's call it a reaction to those who launched their fundamentalist projects in one way or another. Melike Eda was originally cast as the protagonist. I was going to question the hypocritical atmosphere she was raised in, an atmosphere whose doors were firmly shut against the future, as I told her story within the framework of a romance. And I believe I have managed to do that. But the novel grew well beyond the original plan. Within six or seven months, Eda's boyfriend Nedim took over, stole my novel, and took it somewhere I'd never expected it to go to. Just as well he did. A multi-layered novel was the end result, one open to interpretation on several levels. This novel was a thrilling adventure for me.

The characters you split, beginning with their names, have lost their mental and emotional integrity, whose ethical and moral stances have collapsed; some are unable to question themselves (Çetin/Metin for instance) whereas others are (Kerim/Nedim for instance.) A similar fictional character appeared in your first novel, Dead Male Birds, although the plight of the characters in Green is much more heart-breaking.

Against the prevailing value set, Metin is the most complete character in the novel, a prototype of the ruthless, egotistical, mercenary group of people indifferent to all human values. Worse still, he is a charlatan. His story becomes ever more intricate in Nedim's hand, teasing us. Metin symbolises the corruption of the individual, one of many growing ever numerous. Nedims, too, increase in number. These are the young people who fail to keep up with the above-mentioned transformation; they're honest, vulnerable and thus unable to fit in. What Nedim undergoes is a much deeper loss of identity than a mere split that takes place in the dominant perception of identity and lack of choice.

The only two characters capable of self-repair -Nedim and Eda- ultimately are reunited...

What Eda finds in Nedim is a kindred soul, with a similar sensibility and scars. But love based on these alone could never be sustainable. In his twilight solitude, Nedim questions himself and the people he's been involved with. How well can he heal himself, unable to harm his own identity in the midst of a deep lack of communication? And just when we assume he becomes whole, the dreaded sharia coup takes place: the end of the road. That is a moment of new reality or perhaps new illusion for him; will Eda come back, or is this Nedim's fantasy? We don't know, not that it matters. The reader's already sensed how doomed their love is.

The political and economical impasses of Modern Times of Deception have gouged massive holes in the lives of individuals. But the novel also contains an incestuous relationship, one that occurs in a family that assumes piety will heal all breaches. Melike Eda is crushed between the father-stepfather-uncle but finds a shore with Nedim as Eda. My question stems from this point: what's your reaction to the healing of Eda?

Eda altered herself and grew more mature rather than heal herself. Refusing the lack of choice and the path drawn for her by others at a turning point in her life, she began seeking something new. She learnt how to exercise her right to think and comment. But quite how much progress she's made is debatable. Her later life carries deep trauma scars.

The novel's scathingly ironic.

Our lives follow a path where the pathetic and the comical are interlaced, a situation that becomes clearer if you only step back a little. That is what generates the irony in the novel, an irony arising out of the tension between an objective viewpoint and instant grasp of contradictions. I placed myself where meaning overlaps nonsense as I tried to interpret our time. I tried a bitter smile no matter how pessimistic I might be.

Personal depression and corruption leave no room for sadness. Yet Nedim is fragility itself, a sad man straight out of White Nights.

Disappointed in both life and love, Nedim causes his own denial. That's why he fails even to commit suicide. He's there... and he's not. He vacillates into and out of his own subconscious, complains of the hypocrisy of the mind and the tongue, and keeps searching for an exit, the 'whole me'. He claims his is a language formed of lost images. That's why his discourse is so gloomy.

Nedim and Metin spend one homosexual night together; a moment Nedim participates in wholeheartedly.

That night is absolutely not a homosexual relationship as far as Nedim's concerned. This is a moment of weakness characterised by the need for love, by the desperate longing for the warmth of a loved one, well beyond any reach of sexuality. What I wrote of here is companionship that might arise between two heterosexuals. This act has drawn Nedim in body and soul, but Metin, only in body. Which is why Metin's attitude on the following morning is hurtful. Nedim has a sudden insight: 'I was nothing more than an ordinary object for some unusual pleasure, but for me, he was the most suitable instrument for the self-destruction I couldn't face.' This is the event that marks the start of Nedim's fragmentation, which he explains: 'I went out. There was a vast world outside, I walked and looked for myself. I wasn't there. I was reduced to a stumbling image walking before me.'

Green is written in contrasts: Distant-near and lie-truth weave their way in and out of several events and details as a poignant symphony of the rise and fall...

The style and the text naturally followed the splits in the characters. I believe this was essential to credibility. That's what led me to re-write and break up the text, to avoid artificiality. The connection between the sections and the continuity are provided by the political structure that forms the backbone of the novel. The texts I set on this solid frame naturally connected to one another as I continued to write. Needless to say, the first thing I did was to create the worlds of my characters. This helps create a certain rhythmic harmony in the novel's atmosphere.

Scenes of a Massacre had warned us of Bloody Sivas. I hope Green awakens us from the deep sleep weighing our eyelids down.

I don't think so. This is such deep sleep. Organised Islam utilises all its resources to hurtle us towards a social reversal. It's preparing for a confrontation. Fascistic tendencies grow like an avalanche. This is no paranoia. The apathy of the politicians, of the media and society is self-evident. Liberal, humanist and democratic groups tolerate the legal conversion into an anti-secular state. In a society where democracy has yet to attain full functionality in all its institutions and rules, it's impossible to fall in with such optimism. On the other hand, my novel has no aspirations to warn society. All I do is to observe people against this background, and see how they

bleed. I know the punishment of writing such a novel in these times of deception: apathy! Sometimes I wonder if I'm not wearing a straitjacket. However much I might believe *Green* to be a good novel, my best so far...

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