



# OTHER COLORS

ESSAYS AND A STORY

ORHAN PAMUK

A K N O P F  B O O K

*Istanbul*

*Snow*

*My Name Is Red*

*The White Castle*

*The Black Book*

*The New Life*

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ESSAYS AND A STORY

## Orhan Pamuk

*Translated from the Turkish by*

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## PREFACE

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This is a book made of ideas, images, and fragments of life that have still not found their way into one of my novels. I have put them together here in a continuous narrative. Sometimes it surprises me that I have not been able to fit into my fiction all the thoughts I've deemed worth exploring: life's odd moments, the little everyday scenes I've wanted to share with others, and the words that issue from me with power and joy when there is an occasion of enchantment. Some fragments are autobiographical; some I wrote very fast; others were left to one side when my attention was elsewhere. I return to them in much the same way that I return to old photographs, and—though I rarely reread my novels—I enjoy rereading the essays. What I most like are the moments when they rise above the occasion, when they do more than just meet the requirements of the magazines and newspapers that commissioned them, saying more about my interests, my enthusiasms, than I intended at the time. To describe such epiphanies, such curious moments when truth is somehow illuminated, Virginia Woolf once used the term “moments of being.”

Between 1996 and 1999 I wrote weekly sketches for *Öküz (Ox)*, a magazine devoted to politics and humor, and I illustrated them as I saw fit. These were short lyrical essays written in one sitting, and I very much enjoyed talking about my daughter and my friends, exploring objects and the world with fresh eyes, and seeing the world in words. Over time, I have come to see the work of literature less as narrating the world than “seeing the world with words.” From the moment he begins to use words like colors in a painting, a writer can begin to see how wondrous and surprising the world is, and he breaks the bones of language to find his own voice. For this he needs paper, a pen, and the optimism of a child looking at the world for the first time.

I gathered up these pieces to form a totally new book with an autobiographical center. I discarded many fragments and shortened others, taking only excerpts from my hundreds of articles and journals and assigning quite a few essays to strange locations that seemed to fit the arc of that story. For example, the three speeches that have been published as a separate volume in Turkish and many other languages under the title *My Father's Suitcase* (containing the Nobel lecture of the same name, as well as “In Kars and Frankfurt,” the speech I gave to mark the German Peace Prize, and “The Implied Author,” the speech I gave at the Putebaugh Conference) appear here in separate sections to reflect the same autobiographical story.

This edition of *Other Colors* was built from the same skeleton as the book of the same name first published in Istanbul in 1999, but the earlier book took the form of a collection, while this book is shaped as a sequence of autobiographical fragments, moments, and thoughts. To talk about Istanbul, or to discuss my favorite books, authors, and paintings, has for me always been an excuse to talk about life. My New York pieces date from 1986, when I was visiting the city for the first time, and I wrote them to record the first impressions of a foreigner, with Turkish readers in mind. “To Look out the Window,” the story at the end of the book, is so autobiographical that the hero's name might well have been Orhan. But the

older brother in the story is, like the older brothers in all my stories, evil and tyrannical, bearing no relation to my real older brother, Şevket Pamuk, the eminent economic historian. When I was putting together this book, I noticed with consternation that I had a special interest in and predisposition toward natural disasters (the earthquake) and social disasters (politics), and so I left out quite a few of my darker political writings. I have always believed there to be a greedy and almost implacable graphomaniac inside me—a creature who can never write enough, who is forever setting life in words—and that to make him happy I need to keep writing. But when I was putting this book together, I discovered that the graphomaniac would be much happier, and less pained by his writing illness, if he worked with an editor who gave his writings a center, a frame, and a meaning. I would like the sensitive reader to pay as much attention to my creative editing as to the effort I put into the writing itself.

I am hardly alone in being a great admirer of the German writer-philosopher Walter Benjamin. But to anger one friend who is too much in awe of him (she's an academic, of course), I sometimes ask, "What is so great about this writer? He managed to finish only a few books, and if he's famous, it's not for the work he finished but the work he never managed to complete." My friend replies that Benjamin's oeuvre is, like life itself, boundless and therefore fragmentary, and this was why so many literary critics tried so hard to give the pieces meaning, just as they did with life. And every time I smile and say, "One day I'll write a book that's made only from fragments too." This is that book, set inside a frame to suggest a center that I have tried to hide: I hope that readers will enjoy imagining that center in being.



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# LIVING AND WORRYING

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## The Implied Author

I have been writing for thirty years. I have been reciting these words for some time now. I've been reciting them for so long, in fact, that they have ceased to be true, for now I am entering into my thirty-first year as a writer. I do still like saying that I've been writing novels for thirty years—though this is a bit of an exaggeration. From time to time, I do other sorts of writing: essays, criticism, reflections on Istanbul or politics, and speeches. But my true vocation, the thing that binds me to life, is writing novels. There are plenty of brilliant writers who've been writing much longer than I, who've been writing for half a century without paying the matter much attention. There are also the great writers to whom I return again and again, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Thomas Mann, whose careers spanned more than fifty years.... So why do I make so much of my thirtieth anniversary as a writer? I do so because I wish to talk about writing, and most particularly novel writing, as a habit.

In order to be happy I must have my daily dose of literature. In this I am no different from the patient who must take a spoon of medicine each day. When I learned, as a child, that diabetics needed an injection every day, I felt bad for them as anyone might; I may even have thought of them as half dead. My dependence on literature must make me half dead in the same way. Especially when I was a young writer, I sensed that others saw me as cut off from the real world and so doomed to be "half dead." Or perhaps the right term is "half ghost." I have sometimes even entertained the thought that I was fully dead and trying to breathe life back into my corpse with literature. For me, literature is a medicine. Like the medicine that others take by spoon or injection, my daily dose of literature—my daily fix, you will—must meet certain standards.

First, the medicine must be good. Its goodness is what tells me how true and potent it is. To read a dense, deep passage in a novel, to enter into that world and believe it to be true—nothing makes me happier, nothing more surely binds me to life. I also prefer that the writer be dead, because then there is no little cloud of jealousy to darken my admiration. The older I get, the more convinced I am that the best books are by dead writers. Even if they are not yet dead, to sense their presence is to sense a ghost. This is why, when we see great writers in the street, we treat them like ghosts, not quite believing our eyes as we marvel from a distance. A few brave souls approach the ghosts for autographs. Sometimes I remind myself that these writers will die soon and, once they are dead, the books that are their legacy will occupy an even more cherished place in our hearts. Though of course this is not always the case.

If my daily dose of literature is something I myself am writing, it's all very different. Because for those who share my affliction, the best cure of all, and the greatest source of happiness, is to write a good half page every day. For thirty years I've spent an average of ten hours a day alone in a room, sitting at my desk. If you count only the work that is good enough to be published, my daily average is a good deal less than half a page. Most of what

write does not meet my own standards of quality control. These, I put to you, are two great sources of misery.

But please don't misunderstand me: A writer who is as dependent on literature as I am can never be so superficial as to find happiness in the beauty of the books he has already written, nor can he congratulate himself on their number or what these books achieved. Literature does not allow such a writer to pretend to save the world; rather, it gives him a chance to save the day. And all days are difficult. Days are especially difficult when you don't do any writing. When you cannot do any writing. The point is to find enough hope to get through the day, and, if the book or the page you are reading is good, to find joy in it, and happiness, only for a day.

Let me explain what I feel on a day when I've not written well, am unable to lose myself in a book. First, the world changes before my eyes; it becomes unbearable, abominable. Those who know me can see it happening, for I myself come to resemble the world I see around me. For example, my daughter can tell I have not written well that day from the abject hopelessness on my face in the evening. I would like to be able to hide this from her, but I cannot. During these dark moments, I feel as if there is no line between life and death. I don't want to speak to anyone—just as well, since no one seeing me in this state has any desire to speak to me either. A mild version of this despair descends on me every afternoon, between one and three, but I have learned how to treat it with reading and writing: If I act promptly, I can spare myself a full retreat into death-in-life.

If I've had to go a long stretch without my paper-and-ink cure, be it due to travel, an unpaid gas bill, military service (as was once the case), political affairs (as has been the case more recently), or any number of other obstacles, I can feel misery setting inside me like cement. My body has difficulty moving, my joints get stiff, my head turns to stone, my perspiration even seems to smell differently. This misery is likely to grow, for life is full of things that conspire to keep a person from literature. I might be sitting in a crowded political meeting, or chatting with my classmates in a school corridor, or eating a holiday meal with my relatives, struggling to converse with a well-meaning person of unlike mind, or occupied with whatever is on the TV screen; I can be at an important business meeting or making an ordinary purchase, making my way to the notary or having my picture taken for a visa—when suddenly my eyelids grow heavy and, though it is the middle of the day, I fall asleep. When I am far from home, and so unable to return to my room to spend time alone, my only consolation is a nap in the middle of the day.

So yes, the real hunger here is not for literature but for a room where I can be alone with my thoughts. In such a room I can invent beautiful dreams about those same crowded places—those family gatherings, school reunions, festive dinners, and all the people who attend them. I enrich the crowded holiday meals with imagined details and make the people themselves more amusing. In dreams, of course, everything and everyone is interesting, captivating, and real. I make the new world from the stuff of the known world. Here we come to the heart of the matter. To write well, I must first be bored to distraction; to be bored to distraction, I must enter into life. It is when I am bombarded with noise, sitting in an office full of ringing phones, surrounded by friends and loved ones on a sunny seashore or at a rainy funeral—in other words, at the very moment when I begin to sense the heart of the

scene unfolding around me—that I will suddenly feel as if I'm no longer really there but watching from the sidelines. I'll begin to daydream. If I'm feeling pessimistic, I think only about how bored I am. Either way, a voice inside urges me to go back to the room and sit down at the table.

I have no idea how most people answer such voices, but my manner of response turns people like me into writers. My guess is that it turns us more typically into writers of prose and of fiction than of verse. Here, then, is a bit more insight into the properties of the medicine I must make sure to take every day. We can see now that its active ingredients are boredom, real life, and the life of the imagination.

The pleasure I take in this confession and the fear I feel speaking honestly about myself—taken together they lead me to a serious and important insight I would now like to share with you. I would like to propose a simple theory that begins from the idea that writing is a solace and even a remedy, at least for novelists like me: We choose our subjects, and shape our novels to suit our daily daydream requirements. A novel is inspired by ideas, passions, furies, and desires—this we all know. To please our lovers, to belittle our enemies, to extol something we adore, to delight in speaking authoritatively about something of which we know nothing, to take pleasure in times lost and remembered, to dream of making love or reading or engaging with politics, to indulge in one's particular worries, one's personal habits—these and any number of other obscure or even nonsensical desires are what shape us, in ways both clear and mysterious.... These same desires inspire the daydreams to which we give voice. We may not understand where they come from or what, if anything, our daydreams may signify, but when we sit down to write it is our daydreams that breathe life into us, as wind from an unknown place stirs an aeolian harp. One might even say that we surrender to the mysterious wind like a captain who has no idea where he's bound.

At the same time, in one part of our minds, we can pinpoint our location on the map exactly, just as we can remember the point toward which we are traveling. Even at those times when I surrender unconditionally to the wind, I am able—at least according to some other writers I know and admire—to retain my general sense of direction. Before I set out, I will have made plans: divided the story I wish to tell into sections, determined which ports my ship will visit and what loads it will carry and drop off along the way, estimated the time of my journey, and charted its course. But if the wind, having blown in from unknown quarters and filled my sails, decides to change the direction of my story, I will not resist. For what the ship most ardently seeks is the feeling of wholeness and perfection in plying its way under full sail. It is as if I am looking for that special place and time in which everything flows into everything else, everything is linked, and everything is aware, as it were, of everything else. All at once, the wind will die down and I will find myself becalmed in a place where nothing moves. Yet I'll sense that there are things in these calm and misty waters that will, if I am patient, move the novel forward.

What I most long for is the sort of spiritual inspiration I described in my novel *Snow*. It is not dissimilar to the sort of inspiration Coleridge describes in "Kubla Khan." I long for inspiration to come to me (as poems did to Coleridge—and to Ka, *Snow's* hero) in a dramatic way, preferably already formed as scenes and situations that might sit well in a novel. If I wait patiently and attentively, my wish comes true. To write a novel is to be open to the

desires, winds, and inspirations, and also to the dark recesses of our minds and their moments of mist and stillness.

For what is a novel but a story that fills its sails with these winds, that answers and builds upon inspirations that blow in from unknown quarters, and seizes upon all the daydreams we've invented for our diversion, bringing them together into a meaningful whole. Above all else, a novel is a vessel that carries inside it a dream world we wish to keep, forever alive and forever ready. Novels are held together by the little pieces of daydreams that help us, from the moment we enter them, forget the tedious world we long to escape. The more we write, the richer these dreams become and the broader, more detailed, more complete seems that second world inside the vessel. We come to know this world through writing, and the better we know it, the easier it is to carry it around in our heads. If I am in the middle of a novel and writing well, I enter easily into its dreams. For novels are new worlds into which we move happily through reading or even more fully by writing: A novelist shapes his world in such a way as to most easily carry the dreams he wishes to elaborate. Just as these worlds offer happiness to the attentive reader, so, too, do they offer the writer a solid and sound new world in which to lose himself and seek happiness at any hour of the day. If I feel able to create even a tiny part of such a miraculous world, I feel content the moment I reach my desk, with my pen and paper. In no time at all I can leave behind the familiar boring world of every day for this other, bigger place and wander freely; most of the time I have no desire to return to real life or to reach the end of the novel. This feeling is, I think, related to the response I am happiest to hear when I tell readers that I am writing a new novel: "Please make your novel really long!" I am proud to boast that I hear this a thousand times more often than the publisher's perennial entreaty: "Make it short!"

How is it that a habit drawing on a single person's joys and pleasures can produce a world that interests so many others? Readers of *My Name Is Red* like to recall Shekure's remarks on the effect that trying to explain everything is a sort of idiocy. My own sympathies in this scene are not with Orhan, my little hero and namesake, but with the mother, who is gently poking fun at him. If, however, you will permit me to commit another idiocy and act like Orhan, I'd like to try to explain why dreams that work as medicine for the writer can serve the reader the same way: Because if I am entirely inside the novel and writing well—if I have distanced myself from the ringing phone, from all the troubles and demands and tedium of everyday life—the rules by which my free-floating heaven operates recall the games I played as a child. It is as if everything has become simpler, as if I am in a world where I can see into every house, car, ship, and building because they are all made of glass; they have begun to reveal to me their secrets. My job is to divine the rules and listen: to watch with pleasure the goings-on in each interior, to step into cars and buses with my heroes and travel about Istanbul, visiting places that have come to bore me, seeing them with new eyes and, in so doing, transforming them; my job is to have fun, be irresponsible, because while I'm amusing myself (as we like to tell children) I might just learn something.

An imaginative novelist's greatest virtue is his ability to forget the world in the way a child does, to be irresponsible and delight in it, to play around with the rules of the known world—but at the same time to see past his freewheeling flights of fancy to the deep responsibility of later allowing readers to lose themselves in the story. A novelist might spend the whole day playing, but at the same time he carries the deepest conviction of being more serious

than others. This is because he can look directly into the center of things the way that only children can. Having found the courage to set rules for the games we once played freely, he senses that his readers will also allow themselves to be drawn into the same rules, the same languages, the same sentences, and therefore the story. To write well is to allow the reader to say, "I was going to say the same thing myself, but I couldn't allow myself to be that childish."

This world I explore and create and enlarge, making up the rules as I go, waiting for my sails to fill with a wind from an unknown quarter, and poring over my map—it is born of that childlike innocence that is at times closed to me. This happens to all writers. A moment arrives when I get stuck, or I will go back to the point in the novel where I've left off sometime before and find I am unable to pick it up again. Such afflictions are commonplace though I may suffer from them less than other writers—if I can't pick up where I left off, I can always turn instead to another gap in the novel. Because I've studied my map very carefully, I can begin writing in another section; I needn't work in the order of reading. Not that this is so important. But last autumn, while I was grappling with various political matters and running into a similar problem of getting stuck, I felt as if I'd discovered something that also bears on novel writing. Let me try to explain.

The case that was opened against me, and the political quandaries in which I then found myself, turned me into a far more "political," "serious," and "responsible" person than I wanted to be: a sad state of affairs and an even sadder state of mind—let me say it with a smile. This was why I was unable to enter into that childlike innocence without which no novel is possible, but this was easy to understand; it didn't surprise me. As the events slowly unfolded, I would tell myself that my fast-vanishing spirit of irresponsibility, my childish sense of play and childish sense of humor, would one day return and I would then be able to finish the novel I'd been working on for three years. Nevertheless, I would still get up every morning, long before Istanbul's ten million other inhabitants, and try to enter into the novel that was sitting unfinished in the silence of midnight. I did this because I so longed to go back into my beloved second world, and after exerting myself greatly, I'd begin to pull bits of a novel from my head and see them playing out before me. But these fragments were not from the novel I was writing; they were scenes from an entirely different story. On those tedious, joyless mornings, what passed before my eyes was not the novel on which I'd been working for three years but an ever-growing body of scenes, sentences, characters, and strange details from some other novel. After a while, I began to set down these fragments in a notebook, and I jotted down thoughts I had never before entertained. This other novel would be about the paintings of a deceased contemporary artist. As I conjured up this painter I found myself thinking just as much about his paintings. After a while, I understood why I had been unable to recapture the child's spirit of irresponsibility during those tedious days. I could no longer return to childishness, I could return only so far as my childhood, to the day when (as I describe in *Istanbul*) I dreamed of becoming an artist and spent my waking hours doing one painting after another.

Later, when the case against me was dropped, I returned to *The Museum of Innocence*, the novel on which I had already spent three years. Nevertheless, today I am planning the other novel, which came to me scene by scene during those days when, unable to return to pure childishness, I half returned via the passions of my childhood. This experience taught me

something important about the mysterious art of writing novels.

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I can explain this by taking “the implied reader,” a principle put forward by the great literary critic and theorist Wolfgang Iser, and twisting it to my own ends. Iser created a brilliant reader-oriented literary theory. He says that a novel’s meaning resides neither in the text nor in the context in which it is read but somewhere between the two. He argues that a novel’s meaning emerges only as it is read, and so when he speaks of the implied reader, he is assigning him an indispensable role.

When I was dreaming up the scenes, sentences, and details of another book instead of continuing the novel I was already writing, this theory came to mind, and what it suggested to me by way of corollary was this: For every unwritten but dreamed and planned novel (including, in other words, my own unfinished work) there must be an implied author. So I would be able to finish that book only when I’d again become its implied author. But when I was immersed in political affairs or—as happens so often in the course of normal life—my thoughts were too often interrupted by unpaid gas bills, ringing phones, and family gatherings, I was unable to become the author implied by the book in my dreams. During those long and tedious days of politicking, I could not become the implied author of the book I longed to write. Then those days passed, and I returned to my novel—a love story that takes place between 1975 and the present, among the rich of Istanbul or, as the papers like to call it, “Istanbul society”—and to my former self just as I had so longed to do, and whenever I think how close I am to finishing it, I feel happy too. But having come through this experience, I now understand why, for thirty years, I have devoted all my strength to becoming the implied author of the books I long to write. It is not difficult to dream a book. I do this a lot, just as I spend a great deal of time imagining myself as someone else. The difficult thing is to become your dream book’s implied author. Perhaps all the more so in my case because I only want to write big, thick, ambitious novels, and because I write so very slowly.

But let’s not complain. Having published seven novels, I can safely say that, even if it takes some effort, I am reliably able to become the author who can write the books of my dream. Just as I’ve written books and left them behind, so too have I left behind the ghosts of the writers who could write those books. All seven of these implied authors resemble me, and over the past thirty years they have come to know life and the world as seen from Istanbul as seen from a window like mine, and because they know this world inside out and are convinced by it, they can describe it with all the seriousness and purposeful abandon of a child at play.

My greatest hope is to be able to write novels for another thirty years and to use this excuse to wrap myself up in other new personas.

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## My Father

I came home late that night. They told me my father had died. With the first stab of pain came an image from childhood: my father's thin legs in shorts.

At two in the morning I went to his house to see him for the last time. "He's in the room at the back," they said. I went inside. When I returned to Valikonađi Avenue many hours later, just before dawn, the streets of Niřantaşı were empty and cold, and the dimly lit shop windows I had been passing for fifty years seemed distant and alien.

In the morning, sleepless and as if in a dream, I spoke on the phone, received visitors, and immersed myself in the funeral arrangements; and it was while I was receiving notes, requests, and prayers, settling small disputes, and writing the death announcement that I came to feel I understood why it is that, in all deaths, the rituals become more important than the deceased.

In the evening we went to Edirnekapi Cemetery to prepare the burial. When my elder brother and my cousin went into the cemetery's small administrative building, I found myself alone with the driver in the front seat of the taxi. That was when the driver told me he knew who I was.

"My father died," I told him. Without forethought, and much to my surprise, I began to tell him about my father. I told him that he had been a very good man and, more important, that I had loved him. The sun was about to set. The cemetery was empty and silent. The grand buildings towering over it had lost their everyday bleakness; they radiated a strange light. While I spoke, a cold wind we could not hear set plane trees and cypresses swaying, and the image engraved itself on my memory, like my father's thin legs.

When it became clear that the wait would be much longer still, the driver, who by now had told me that we shared a name, gave me two firm but compassionate slaps on the back and left. What I'd said to him, I said to no one else. But a week later, this thing inside me merged with my memories and my sorrow. If I didn't set it down in words, it would grow and cause me immense pain.

When I'd told the driver, "My father never once scowled at me, never even scolded me, never hit me," I'd been speaking without much thought. I'd omitted to mention his greatest acts of kindness. When I was a child, my father would look with heartfelt admiration at every picture I drew; when I asked his opinion, he would examine every scribbled sentence as if it were a masterpiece; he would laugh uproariously at my most tasteless and insipid jokes. Without the confidence he gave me, it would have been much more difficult to become a writer, to choose this as my profession. His trust in us, and his easy way of convincing my brother and me that we were brilliant and unique, came from a confidence in his own intellect. In his childishly innocent way, he sincerely believed that we were bound to be as brilliant, mature, and quick-witted as he, simply by virtue of being his sons.



He was quick-witted: He could, at a moment's notice, recite a poem by Cenap Şahabettin, take pi to the fifteenth digit, or offer up a brilliantly knowing guess about how a film we were watching together would end. He was not very modest, relishing stories about how clever he was. He enjoyed telling us how, for example, when he was in middle school, still in short pants, his math teacher had called him into a class with the oldest boys in the lycée, and how—after little Gündüz had gone to the blackboard and solved the problem that had stumped these boys three years older than he and the teacher had commended him with “Well done”—the little boy then turned to the others and said, “So there!” In the face of his example, I found myself caught between envy and a longing to be more like him.

I can speak in the same way about his good looks. Everyone was always saying that I resembled him, except he was formed more handsomely. Like the fortune left to him by his father (my grandfather) that he had never, despite his many business failures, quite managed to exhaust, his good looks allowed a life of fun and ease, so that even in the worst days, he remained naïvely optimistic, afloat on good intentions and an unrivaled, unshakable sense of self-worth. For him, life was not something to be earned but to be enjoyed. The world was not a battlefield but a playing field, a playground, and as he grew older he came to feel slightly annoyed that the fortune, brains, and good looks he had enjoyed so fully in his youth had not magnified his fame or power as much as he might have wished. But, as in a number of instances, he did not waste time worrying about it. He could shrug off frustration with the same childish ease as he dispensed with any person, problem, or possession that brought him trouble. So even though his life went downhill after he reached thirty, leading to a long succession of disappointments, I never much heard him complain. When he was an old man he had dinner with a renowned critic who, when next we met, exclaimed with some resentment, “Your father has no complexes whatsoever!”

His Peter Pan optimism delivered him from fury and obsession. Although he had read many books, dreamed of becoming a poet, and had, in his time, translated quite a few of Valéry's poems, I believe he was too comfortable in his skin, and too assured about the future, ever to be gripped by the essential passions of literary creativity. In youth he had a good library, and later he was happy for me to plunder it. But he didn't read the books as I did, voraciously and dizzy with excitement; he read them for pleasure, to divert his thoughts, and mostly he let off reading them midway. Where other fathers might speak in hushed tones of generals and religious leaders, my father would tell me about walking through the streets of Paris and seeing Sartre and Camus (more his kind of writer), and these stories made a big impression on me. Years later, when I met Erdal İnönü (a friend of my father's from childhood and the son of Turkey's second president, who was Atatürk's successor) at a gallery opening, he told me with a smile about a dinner at the presidential residence in Ankara that my father, then twenty, had attended; when İsmet Pasha brought the subject around to literature, my father asked, “Why don't we have any world-famous authors?” Eighteen years after my first novel was published, my father somewhat bashfully gave me a small suitcase. I know very well why finding inside it his journals, poems, notes, and literary writings made me uneasy: It was the record—the evidence—of an inner life. We don't want our fathers to be individuals, we want them to conform to our ideal of them.

I loved it when he took me to films, and I loved listening to him discuss the films we'd seen with others; I loved the jokes he made about the idiotic, the evil, and the soulless, just as

loved hearing him talk about a new kind of fruit, a city he'd visited, the latest news, or the latest book; but most of all I loved it when he caressed me. I loved it when he took me out for a ride, because together, in the car, I felt at least for a while that I wouldn't lose him. When he was driving, we couldn't look each other in the eye so he could speak to me as a friend, touching upon the most difficult and delicate questions. After a time, he'd pause to tell a few jokes, fiddle with the radio, and speak about whatever music reached our ears.

But what I loved most was being close to him, touching him, being at his side. When I was a lycée student, and even in my first years at university, during the deepest depression of my life, I would, in spite of myself, long for him to come to the house and sit down with me and my mother and say a few things to lift our spirits. When I was a small child, I loved to climb onto his lap or lie down next to him, smell his smell, and touch him. I remember how, on Heybeliada, when I was very small, he taught me how to swim: As I was sinking to the bottom, thrashing wildly, he would grab hold of me and I would rejoice, not just because I could breathe again but because I could wrap my arms around him and, not wishing to sink back to the bottom, cry, "Father, don't leave me!"

But he did leave us. He'd go far away, to other countries, other places, corners of the world unknown to us. When he was stretched out on the sofa reading, sometimes his eyes would slip away from the page and his thoughts would wander. That was when I'd know that, inside the man I knew as my father, there was another I could not reach, and guessing that he was daydreaming of another life, I'd grow uneasy. "I feel like a bullet that's been fired for no reason," he'd say sometimes. For some reason this would make me angry. Quite a few other things made me angry. I don't know who was in the right. Perhaps by then I too was longing to escape. But still I loved it when he put on his tape of Brahms's First Symphony, passionately conducting an imaginary orchestra with his imaginary baton. It would annoy me when, after a lifetime of seeking pleasure and running away from trouble, he would lament the fact that self-indulgence offered no meaning beyond itself and seek to blame others. In my twenties, there were times when I said to myself, "Please don't let me turn out like him." There were other times when I was troubled by my failure to be as happy, comfortable, carefree, and handsome as he was.

Much later, when I'd put all that behind me, when anger and jealousy no longer clouded my view of the father who had never scolded me, never tried to break me, I slowly came to see—and to accept—the many and inescapable similarities between us. So that now, when I am grumbling about some idiot or other, or complaining to a waiter, or biting my upper lip, or throwing some books into the corner half read, or kissing my daughter, or taking money out of my pocket, or greeting someone with a lighthearted joke, I catch myself imitating him. This is not because my arms, legs, wrists, or the mole on my back resemble his. It is something that frightens—terrifies—me and reminds me of my childhood longing to be more like him. Every man's death begins with the death of his father.

## Notes on April 29, 1994

*The French weekly Le Nouvel Observateur asked hundreds of authors to describe their activities on April 29 in whatever corner of the world they happened to be that day. I was in Istanbul.*

TELEPHONE. I disconnected the phone and, as always happens during the hours I spend working—for better or for worse—on my novel, a moment arrived when I imagined that someone was trying to reach me at that very moment to speak to me about something important, a matter of huge consequence, but could not get through. But still I did not reconnect the phone. When I did, much later, I had a few conversations I would immediately forget. A journalist calling from Germany told me he would visit Istanbul and hoped to talk to me about the rise of “fundamentalism” in Turkey and the success of the Islamist Refah Party in the municipal elections. I asked again what television station he worked for, and he rattled off a few letters

LETTERS, LOGOS, AND BRANDS. Once again I was most struck by the letters in the blue jeans and bar advertisements I came across in newspapers, on television, and on street signs. A friend I met on the street, a university professor, dipped into her bag to give me a list of companies and brand names that I come across every day. Their owners support the Islamist Refah Party, she'd been told; she informed me that quite a few people had decided to stop buying the brand of biscuits and that brand of yogurt and never again to set foot in the shops and restaurants on the list. As always, extreme boredom prompted me to ignore the mirror in the lift in my building and to look instead at the plaque: Wertheim. On a Casio calculator I made a simple computation that will appear at the end of this essay. On the street I came across a 1960 Plymouth, and a 1956 Chevrolet still in service as a taxi.

STREETS AND AVENUES. Although Turkey's currency halved in value overnight two months ago, plunging us into an economic crisis, the streets and avenues were as crowded as ever. As always, I wondered where all these people were going, and this in turn reminded me that literature was a futile profession: I saw women with children gazing into shop windows, lycée students whispering and giggling in huddles, vendors who had spread their wares—black market foreign cigarettes, Nescafé, Chinese porcelain, old romance novels, and well-thumbed foreign fashion magazines—along the full length of the mosque wall; I saw a man with a three-wheeled cart selling fresh cucumbers and buses packed with people. The men gathered in front of the buffets in the foreign exchange shops were clutching sandwiches or cigarettes or plastic bags stuffed with money as they watched the rise of the dollar on the electronic notice board. A grocery boy was unloading a crate of bottled water, lifting the demijohn onto his back. I caught another glimpse of the madman who had recently arrived in the neighborhood, noticing that he was the only person on the crowded pavement who was not carrying a plastic bag. In his hands was a steering wheel salvaged from a real car; he twisted it to the left and to the right as he made his way through the crowd. At lunchtime, after I had

drunk my orange juice and was returning to the small office where I write, I saw an old friend in the crowd coming out of Friday prayers and we had a few laughs.

JOKES, LAUGHTER, AND HAPPINESS. My painter friend and I were laughing about several rich people we knew who were facing ruin after various banks in which they had money had gone under. Why were we laughing? Because it had turned out that they were neither as adroit as they assumed nor as intelligent, that's why. In the early evening, a translator friend of mine ran to invite me to come out to drink in the street outside a few *meyhanes* "in protest" against Istanbul's Refah Party mayor, and we had a good laugh too. Because the new mayor had been harassing *meyhanes* and removing the tables they'd set up in the streets, hundreds of intellectuals were planning to take to the streets and drink themselves senseless on the pavements. Once upon a time, politically minded friends took a dim view of drink, but now suddenly it seemed to have been decided that to drink was to engage in a mature political action. When my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Rüya, laughed as I was tickling her before bedtime, I laughed too. Perhaps these several laughs were not expressions of happiness; perhaps they were merely appreciation of the sort of silence that a person longs for in a city like Istanbul, with its ceaseless roar.

ISTANBUL'S NOISE. Even when I am paying it the least attention and feeling most lonely, I (along with some ten million others) hear this roar all day long: car horns, grumbling buses, sputtering motors, sounds of construction, children's screams, loudspeakers on vendor wagons and on minarets, ship horns, police and ambulance sirens, music cassettes playing everywhere, slamming doors, metal shutters crashing to the ground, telephones, doorbells, traffic altercations on street corners, police whistles, school vans.... Toward evening, just as the sky was darkening, there was the usual lull, something close to silence; looking out into the garden from the back windows of my office, I saw the swarms of madly chirping swallows flying over the cypresses and mulberry trees. From the table where I was sitting, I could see lamps and television screens glowing in neighboring apartments.

TELEVISION. After supper, I could tell from the synthetic colors flashing in their windows that quite a few people kept changing channels just as I did: a bleached-blond chanteuse singing old Turkish songs, a child eating chocolate, a woman prime minister saying everything was going to turn out fine, a football match on an emerald field, a Turkish pop group, journalists arguing about the Kurdish question, American police cars, a child reading the Koran, a helicopter exploding into flames in midair, a gentleman walking onto the stage and doffing his hat as the audience applauds, the same woman prime minister, a housewife telling an inquiring microphone a thing or two as she hangs up her laundry, an audience applauding the woman who has given the right answer in a general knowledge quiz.... At one point I looked out the window and it occurred to me that—except for the travelers on the Bosphorus ships whose lights I could see in the distance—all of Istanbul was watching the same images.

NIGHT. The noise of the city changed, turning into a whisper, a sleepy sigh. At a late hour, as I was walking back to my office, thinking I might be able to write a bit more, I saw a pack of

four dogs roaming the empty streets. In a coffeehouse below street level there were still people playing cards and watching television. I saw a family, and it was obvious they were returning from a visit to relatives—the little boy was asleep on his father's shoulder, the mother was pregnant—they passed me in silence and in haste, as if something had frightened them. In the middle of the night, long after I had sat down at my table, the phone rang and gave me a fright.

FEAR, PARANOIA, AND DREAMS. It was the lunatic who called me every night, never saying a word, echoing my silence with his. I disconnected the phone and worked for a long time, but in some corner of my mind there were premonitions of evil, impending disaster: Perhaps, before long, people would begin again to shoot one another in the streets; perhaps we'd see a civil war; perhaps this summer the severe water shortage they'd been predicting in the newspaper would come to pass; perhaps the great earthquake that had been expected for so many years now would flatten the entire city. After midnight, after all the televisions had been turned off and the lamps in the apartments extinguished, a garbage truck clattered past. As always, there was a man who kept eight or ten paces ahead of the truck, emptying the bins that had been left on the street, hastily combing them for useful bottles, metalware, and packs of paper and putting these into his sack. Later still, a junk dealer, his horse cart creaking under the weight of old newspapers and a washing machine, passed down the empty street where I have lived for forty years. I sat down at my table and took out my calculator.

TOTAL. I did a simple calculation, days multiplied by years. If the figure is correct, I have now lived exactly 15,300 days like this. Before I went to sleep, it occurred to me that I would be a very lucky man if I had an equal number of days ahead of me.

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## Spring Afternoons

*Between 1996 and 1998 I wrote short weekly pieces for a small political humor magazine called Oküz (Ox); I illustrated these lyrical exercises with drawings in keeping with the magazine's mood.*

I don't like spring afternoons: the city's aspect, the way the sun beats down, the crowds, the shop windows, the heat. I long to flee the heat and the light. There is a cool draft wafting through the tall doors of certain stone and concrete apartment buildings. Inside these apartment buildings, it's even cooler and, of course, darker. The darkness and cold of winter have retreated inside.

If only I could walk into one of those apartments, if only I could go back into winter. If only there were a key in my pocket, if only I could open a familiar door, take in the familiar smell of a cool and dark apartment, and slip blithely into the back room, away from the sun and the oppressive crowds.

If there were a bed in that back room, a bedside table, and on it a pile of newspapers and books, my favorite magazines for me to leaf through, and a television. If I could stretch out on that bed fully dressed and rejoice at being alone with my despair, my misery, my wretched life. There is no greater happiness than coming face-to-face with your own squalor and wretchedness. There is no greater happiness than being out of sight.

Yes, all right, I also wish there were this sort of girl: as tender and soft as a mother, as smart as a seasoned businesswoman. Because she knows very well what I need to do, I trust her too.

If she asks me, "What's troubling you?"

If I say, "You already know. It's these spring afternoons."

"You're depressed."

"It's worse than depression. I want to disappear. I don't care if I live or die. Or if the world comes to an end, even. In fact, if it ended right this minute, so much the better. If I have to spend a few years in this cool room, then so be it. I could smoke cigarettes. I could do nothing but smoke cigarettes for years."

But as time passes, I can no longer hear that voice inside me. That is the worst moment. I am alone, abandoned on the busy streets.

I don't know if this happens to other people too, but sometimes on spring afternoons it seems as if the world has become heavier. Everything turns to concrete, dull as concrete, and when soaking in my sweat I am astounded at the way others are able to go about their daily lives.

They wander down the street, peering into shop windows, and they peer at me through bus windows, before the bus spews its exhaust fumes into my face. The fumes? They're hot too. I run about in a panic.

I go into a passage. Inside, it is cool and dark and I calm down. The people in here see

less anxious and easier to understand. But still I sense trouble. As I walk to the cinema, I look into the shops.

In the old days they used to use dog meat in sausage sandwiches—in other words, in the sausages. I don't know if this still happens.

According to the papers, they caught the men who had been making soft drinks in the same vats people washed their feet in.

They live here, they see each other, they fall in love, and then they marry these girls who bleach their hair such an ugly shade of blond.

In our pockets, paper money has turned to dough from the humidity.

Here is the sort of American film that would do me wonders right now: A boy and a girl are running away, heading for another country. Loving each other as dearly as they do, they're always arguing, but these arguments only bring them closer together. I should be sitting in one of the seats at the very front. The film should be so clear that I can see the pores on the girl's skin; she and the film and the cars should seem more real than anything here. When they start killing a huge number of people, I should be there to see it.

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## Dead Tired in the Evening

I come home dead tired in the evenings. Looking straight ahead, at the roads and the pavements. Angry about something, hurt, incensed. Though my imagination is still conjuring up beautiful images, even these pass quickly in the film in my head. Time passes. There's nothing. It's already nighttime. Doom and defeat. What's for supper?

The lamp atop the table is lit; next to it sits a bowl of salad and bread, all in the same basket; the tablecloth is checkered. What else?... A plate and beans. I imagine the beans, but it's not enough. On the table, the same lamp is still burning. Maybe a bit of yogurt? Maybe a bit of life?

What's on television? No, I'm not watching television; it only makes me angry. I'm very angry. I like meatballs too—so where are the meatballs? All of life is here, around this table.

The angels call me to account.

What did you do today, darling?

All my life ... I've worked. In the evenings, I've come home. On television—but I'm not watching television. I answered the phone a few times, got angry at a few people; then I worked, wrote.... I became a man ... and also—yes, much obliged—an animal.

What did you do today, darling?

Can't you see? I've got salad in my mouth. My teeth are crumbling in my jaw. My brain is melting from unhappiness and trickling down my throat. Where's the salt, where's the salt? We're eating our lives away. And a little yogurt too. The brand called Life.

Then I gently reached out my hand, parted the curtains, and in the darkness outside caught sight of the moon. Other worlds are the best consolations. On the moon they were watching television. I finished off with an orange—it was very sweet—and my spirits lifted.

Then I was master of all worlds. You understand what I mean, don't you? I came home in the evening. I came home from all those wars, good, bad, and indifferent; I came home in one piece and walked into a warm house. There was a meal waiting for me, and I filled my stomach; the lights were on; I ate my fruit. I even began to think that everything was going to turn out fine.

Then I pressed the button and watched television. By then, you see, I was feeling just fine.



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