



Title of the Book: **Snow.**

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Author: **Orhan Pamuk.**

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Orhan Pamuk author of contemporary masterpieces such as *My Name is Red* and *The Museum of Innocence* and *Snow* has been since 1980s the representative of modern Turkish literature both at Turkey and abroad. His works have been translated into more than fifty languages including almost all rich languages of the world. His genius was internationally recognized when he was declared the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006. In 1998, the Turkish government

offered him “State Artist” award but he out rightly rejected it, for he stated, that if he had accepted the award he could not have look(ed) in the face of people (he cared) about. An Outspoken advocate of liberty and the most controversial novelist in contemporary Turkey, Orhan Pamuk touched upon forbidden topics in Turkey like the Armenian genocide and the massacre of Kurdish separatists. He is one of the few Turkish authors who openly question the deeds of the nations (Turkey’s) founding fathers. In *Snow* Orhan Pamuk through his superb imaginative craftsmanship critiques the Turkish state particularly the secularists and Islamists. It directly or indirectly deals with the following questions: Is Turkey a democratic nation? Or is it military state? Are Turkish citizens satisfied with the constitution of Turkey? Are minorities protected under the Turkish law? Why freedom of speech and expression is a perplexing question in contemporary Turkey? How modernization within Turkey widened the relationship between East and West, secularists and Islamists and Ottoman tradition and Western modernity? Moreover, are democratic values followed and respected in Turkey? These questions are very essential for comprehending Turkey as a state in the cotemporary world.

In 2002, Pamuk published what he says, ‘his first and last political novel’—*Snow*, which Margaret Atwood called ‘essential reading for our times’. The novel was essentially published in Turkish in 2002 as *Kar*. It was translated in 2004 by Maureen Freely into English. The novel deals with a whirl of labyrinthian themes: orient versus occident, Islam versus secularism, traditionalism versus modernism etc. In *Snow*, Pamuk candidly denounces the Turkish state—for the lack of freedom of opinion, women rights, human rights and democracy—as well as its approaches on the Kurdish separatist issue and Armenian genocide. Throughout the novel the author relentlessly and uncompromisingly critiques nationalism, censorship, partisanship, political dishonesty, authority and religious dogmatism. The main protagonist of this book Ka keeps a troubled eye over the development of his country (Turkey).

It is indisputable that the media plays an essential role in the age of ours. We all know that reporting is one of the fundamental branches of literature and one should have the right to report independently. But, what most readers or audience yearn for is that the contemporary events

must be reported realistically. As we know, music, art and painting could never succeed if one is not allowed the freedom of thought. If a journalist is not allowed to pen-down whatever incident, he wanted to be reported, the language he uses become rigid. The result is that a journalist is reduced to a mere official who gets dictation from his superiors and who is not allowed to add even a word from his side. When truth is suppressed, it becomes difficult to know what is happening in one or another region of the world. Even the most important facts can become doubtful. In *Snow*, what is actually presented is that the media in Turkey is under the control of the state. This is clearly mentioned in the words of the editor of The Border City Gazette (most influential newspaper) in the region of Kars. The editor claims that ninety percent of what they publish is received from various state agencies like Police and the office of the Governor. As Serdar Bey (editor of The Border City Gazette) tells Ka: “Ninety percent of the news we print comes from the office of the governor and the Kars police headquarters” (*Snow*, p.25). During the conversation between Ka and Serdar Bey, the reader comes to know that the newspapers in Kars publish its news items on the instructions of police. The editor further claims that his newspaper is solely published for the government offices which he never likes. He tells Ka that no journalist would like to publish his/her news only in the interest of state. His dissatisfaction with state’s intervention in media is reflected in these words: “The Border City Gazette...the paper’s circulation was 320, a fact that inspired not a little pride in Serdar Bey. Of these, 240 went to government offices...Serdar Bey was often obliged to report on their achievements” (*Snow*, p.25). Moreover, the editor mentions whatever they publish is half-truth for police doesn’t allow them to publish the facts realistically. He reckons, this is major blot on journalism in Turkey, i.e., the journalists in Turkey don not enjoy the freedom of press. It is through the voice of editor of The Border City Gazette Pamuk censures the Turkish state for censorship. The editor remarks:

All over the world, even in America, newspapers tailor the news to their readers’ desires. If your readers want nothing but lies from you, who in the world is going to sell papers that tell the truth? If the truth could raise my paper’s circulation, why wouldn’t I write the truth? Anyway, the police don’t let me print the truth either. (*Snow*, p308)

The above mentioned lines clearly shows how security agencies, particularly police in Turkey are trying to silence the voices of journalists in the name of national interest. Reporting against the state injustice is not a crime. Reporting against the criminals and corrupted politicians/bureaucrats is not a criminal act either. Highlighting the human rights violations is not an anti-national activity. It is unfortunate that in Turkey journalists have been detained, attacked and even killed if they write on these issues. The newspapers in Turkey are shut down by Turkish authorities if they refuse to take dictation from security forces. Turkey is a democratic country but sadly there is no vibrant media. In fact several journalists have been facing treason charges/cases just because they are posing some relevant questions to the powerful people in power. They are posing those questions which the authorities/military officers find difficult to answer them. In Turkey, media and its publications/broadcasts are closely monitored by the state agencies. It is not only media which remains under the surveillance of police and other state security agencies like MIT but the whole population of Kars—“They have surveillance everywhere” (*Snow*, p.53). These words remind us the famous novel of George Orwell *Nineteen Eighty Four* and especially it’s Big Brother. The Big Brother in this novel is one who sees and knows one and all in his country. He is at the center of repressive regime that controls and surveillances everything be it media or the other works of population— “Big Brother is watching you” (*Nineteen Eighty Four*, part1). Big Brother is portrayed as a totalitarian character under whom media functions and freedom and privacy breaches. The Turkish police and other state agencies are similar to Orwell’s Big Brother. For example, again in *Snow* the reader is apprised that “after all, they (MIT state intelligence agency) had the files on everyone in the whole city and employed a tenth of the population as informers” (*Snow*, p.201). If they (state agencies) find any material/news against them which they later on claim are anti-national, the journalists are rounded up. The similar case happened to Sadullah Bey in *Snow*. He was a respected journalist in the city of Kars. He was a popular journalist for reporting incidents objectively. Lately, the curfew is announced in Kars. Sadullah Bey like all citizens of Kars knew that days ahead of curfew would be harsher—life confined to four walls. But, he was a journalist; his job was to cover and report the curfew days. Normally journalists are allowed to report whatever situation

remains outside. As Sadullah went out, he is shot dead by army. His voice is silenced forever by Z Demirkol, who is head of special operations and known for killing Islamists and Kurdish nationalists. This heart-wrenching scene of military coup in Kars and subsequently murder of Sadullah is depicted by Pamuk this way in *Snow*: “Sadullah Bey...a journalist held in the highest esteem by the Kurds of Kars ... military takeovers, so the moment he heard of the curfew, he began to prepare for the days in prison he knew lay ahead... seeing no one, he stepped out into the street... as he stood there, someone pumped two bullets into his head and his chest, killing him on the spot... the ‘unknown perpetrators’ of these murders were Z Demirkol and his friends” (*Snow*, p.175). The freedom of speech and expression is not enjoyed in Turkey. People are arrested for their political, for instance, Kadif in *Snow* tells us how his father Turget Bey was arrested merely for a political thought—“Her father, having spent many years in prison for his political beliefs” (*Snow*, p.278). Pamuk here expresses his resentment/criticism towards the Turkish state through the lack of freedom of expression in Turkey and human rights violations in Kars.

In *Snow* Orhan Pamuk censures the Turkish state for human rights violations in the city of Kars, especially among Kurds. He highlights how Turkish army and police make nocturnal raids, crackdowns, curfews, arrests in order to harass the common Kurds. He vehemently condemns the Turkish state for murdering/disappearing the ordinary Kurds (who are not even related to Kurdish guerrilla). He also puts forth the failure of judiciary as far as the disappearance cases of Kurds are concerned. He asserts that the judiciary works in collaboration with the state government. The judiciary he believes works partially especially in the crimes committed by the state or its agencies. Had that not been the case, the mother of a disappeared young Kurd and brother of a taxi driver would not have been annoyed with the judicial verdict. Their demand is simple; arrest those who have disappeared their loved ones and punish the guilty. But, alas! this could not happen because military holds the sway in Turkey. Their cases are not given undue importance in courts for they were fighting against the state police. Their petitions are rejected by the court instead of providing justice. Their pathetic condition is described by the narrator in these words:

The mother of one boy, a cleaner at the hospital, later submitted a petition alleging that unidentified armed agents had rung the doorbell and taken her son away, and the taxi driver's older brother filed his own charge to the effect that his brother was no nationalist, not even a Kurd. Both petitions, however, were ignored. (*Snow*, p.174)

Regarding the disappearances and indifferent attitude of police and courts (interestingly, both are law abiding agencies which provide sense of security to all citizens but in Turkey they are humiliating, torturing, disappearing and killing their own people.), the narrator sarcastically remarks:

According to later reports, his older brother, a political activist, had been carted off to the police station for questioning, never to return...He'd petitioned the state a year after his brother's disappearance, but the police, the secret services, the public prosecutor's office, and the army garrison all gave him the brush-off". (*Snow*, p.281)

The complex issue Pamuk touches upon in *Snow* is that characters are caught between whether to go with the Western ideas, to hang around with native/Turkish tradition, or to assimilate both. It is a face-off between tradition and modernity, foreign culture and native culture and upper middle classes and lower middle classes in Turkey and other such binary notions that often-times describe East-West collision. Traditional Turkish beliefs and resources on the one side, modern ideas and attitudes on the other and the subject of harmony/disharmony between East and West, tradition and modernity has invariably assumed a vital importance for the Turkish novelists and Pamuk has deftly addressed this theme in *Snow*. In *Snow* we have two kinds of characters—one following the western lifestyle and the other rebelling against it; one representing the ruling group—westernized Istanbul bourgeoisie and the other Islamic fundamentalists. The former represents those who are called secularists in Turkey for they uphold and adhere to Ataturk's secularization project. They believe that in order to modernize a nation must look towards the West. They are for the adoption of western culture. They at times consider religion is an irrelevant unit in the functioning of the state. They are all western ideologues in Turkey. Ka, Sunay Zaim, Ipek, Turgut Bay, Funda Eser belong to this group. The latter is comprised of those

who want to stick to their tradition, culture and religion come what may. They don't favor Ataturk's modernization project in Turkey. They assert that this project deprived them of their glorious past. They lament over the lost glory of the rich Ottoman tradition. They are against the any sort of change. This is why they are called either hardliners or fundamentalists. In *Snow* they are labeled as Islamic fundamentalists or hardcore Islamists. The characters such as Blue, Kadif, Fazil, Muhtar unnamed Kurdish boys belong to this category.

Snow is a novel about society/Turkey where government controls everything—media, religion, culture and change historical facts and other important social or public issues. They try to control everything. The citizens aren't allowed to have anything that is not sanctioned by the government. It describes a scary world where privacy and individuality don't exist. Pamuk's vision is like that of totalitarian world; where history is to be created rather than learned; where the media has become the monopoly of the rich; where the wealthy persons have full control over the television and films. A totalitarian state is considered infallible. It, however, becomes inevitable that past events are arranged in such a way as may show that this or that mistake was not made, or that imaginary triumph actually happened. Totalitarianism demands the continuous alteration of the past and perhaps demands denial of the existing objective truth. This fact is clearly evident in the novel in the form of a museum. Pamuk points here towards the histories which were all but erased by the century secular-reforms. *Snow* critiques the Turkish nation for not allowing its citizens the freedom of expression. What Orhan Pamuk advocates in this novel is that freedom of speech is troubled in Turkey. It vividly denounces human-rights abuses in Turkey. It speaks against militarism and fundamentalism of any kind. And, more importantly, it vehemently ostracizes the implications of the forced westernization project in Turkey. The novel exposes how the dignity of the individual, rights of minorities, rights of women and journalistic writings are not respected in author's nation—Turkey. It poignantly describes Turkey is one those nations, where equality, religious freedom, freedom of expression and democracy are given least or secondary importance. Last but not the least this is a must read book for all and especially for English literature students in order to know Orhan Pamuk as a postmodern novelist.