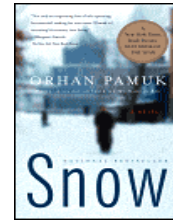




The  
American  
Turkish  
Society  
*Since 1949*

## THE ATS BOOK CLUB

### SNOW *Orhan Pamuk*



#### About the Book (Knopf/Vintage International, 2004)

After twelve years of political exile in Germany, the Turkish poet Ka returns to his native Istanbul for his mother's funeral. There he is asked by a friend at a newspaper to travel to the remote Anatolian town of Kars to report on the municipal elections, as well as on a disturbing series of suicides by women who have been forbidden by the secular government to wear their head scarves at school. He arrives in Kars in the midst of a snowstorm that lasts for three days, cutting the town off from the greater world, and is quickly drawn into an intricate set of circumstances. He meets his beautiful friend Ipek, who has recently separated from her husband, and quickly falls in love with her. He witnesses an assassination, finds himself discussing the possible existence of God with an idealistic student from the Islamic high school, is taken to a meeting with a reputed Islamic terrorist and, after four years without writing a single poem, is visited with a series of poems that arrive fully formed in his mind. While the reason for the women's suicides remains a mystery, Ka is caught up in a theatrically staged military coup intended to punish the political Islamists whose power is on the rise in Kars.

Balancing empathy and wit, irony and pathos, **Snow** illuminates the profound difficulties and contradictions of life in lands like Turkey, where western-style democracy and Islamic fundamentalism are dangerously at odds. **Snow** is a riveting and important work by one of contemporary fiction's most brilliant practitioners.

#### About the Author



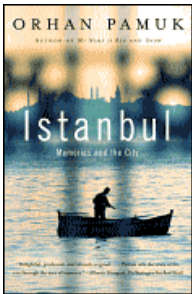
**Orhan Pamuk** was born in Istanbul in 1952 and grew up in a large family similar to those which he describes in his novels *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* and *The Black Book*, in the wealthy westernised district of Nisantasi. As he writes in his autobiographical book *Istanbul*, from his childhood until the age of 22 he devoted himself largely to painting and dreamed of becoming an artist. After graduating from the secular American Robert College in Istanbul, he studied architecture at Istanbul Technical University for three years, but abandoned the course when he gave up his ambition to become an architect and artist. He went on to graduate in journalism from Istanbul University, but never worked as a journalist. At the age of 23 Pamuk decided to become a novelist, and giving up everything else retreated into his flat and began to write.

His first novel *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* was published seven years later in 1982. The novel is the story of three generations of a wealthy Istanbul family living in Nisantasi, Pamuk's own home district. The novel was awarded both the Orhan Kemal and Milliyet literary prizes. The following year Pamuk published his novel *The Silent House*, which in French translation won the 1991 Prix de la découverte européenne. *The White Castle* (1985) about the frictions and friendship between a Venetian slave and an Ottoman scholar was published in English and many other languages from 1990 onwards, bringing Pamuk his first international fame. The same year Pamuk went to America, where he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University in New York from 1985 to 1988. It was there that he wrote most of his novel *The Black Book*, in which the streets, past, chemistry and texture of Istanbul are described through the story of a lawyer seeking his missing wife. This novel was published in Turkey in 1990, and in French translation won the Prix France Culture. *The Black Book* enlarged Pamuk's fame both in Turkey and internationally as an author at once popular and experimental, and able to write about past and present with the same intensity. In 1991 Pamuk's daughter Rüya was born. That year saw the



production of a film *Hidden Face*, whose script by Pamuk was based on a one-page story in *The Black Book*.

His novel *The New Life*, about young university students influenced by a mysterious book, was published in Turkey in 1994 and became one of the most widely read books in Turkish literature. **My Name Is Red**, about Ottoman and Persian artists and their ways of seeing and portraying the non-western world, told through a love story and family story, was published in 1998. This novel won the French Prix Du Meilleur Livre Etranger, the Italian Grinzane Cavour (2002) and the International IMPAC Dublin literary award (2003). From the mid-1990s Pamuk took a critical stance towards the Turkish state in articles about human rights and freedom of thought, although he took little interest in politics. *Snow*, which he describes as 'my first and last political novel,' was published in 2002. In this book set in the small city of Kars in northeastern Turkey he experimented with a new type of 'political novel,' telling the story of violence and tension between political Islamists, soldiers, secularists, and Kurdish and Turkish nationalists. In 1999 a selection of his articles on literature and culture written for newspapers and magazines in Turkey and abroad, together with a selection of writings from his private notebooks, was published under the title *Other Colours*.



Pamuk's most recent book, **Istanbul**, is a poetical work that is hard to classify, combining the author's early memoirs up to the age of 22, and an essay about the city of Istanbul, illustrated with photographs from his own album, and pictures by western painters and Turkish photographers.

Apart from three years in New York, Orhan Pamuk has spent all his life in the same streets and district of Istanbul, and he now lives in the building where he was raised. Pamuk has been writing novels for 30 years and never done any other job except writing. His books have been translated into more than 40 languages.

To read more about Pamuk: "[Occidental Hero](#)", The Guardian, May 8, 2004

### About the Translator



**Maureen Freely** was born in Neptune, New Jersey, and grew up in Istanbul, Turkey. Since graduating from Harvard in 1974, she has lived mostly in England. She is the author of five novels — *Mother's Helper*, *The Life of the Party*, *The Stork Club*, *Under the Vulcania*, and *The Other Rebecca* — and three works of non-fiction. She is currently at work on a sixth novel, her second to be set in Istanbul. Her translation of Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* was published by Faber in May 2004. She is a senior lecturer in the Warwick Writing Programme in the Department of English at the University of Warwick. She is also a regular contributor to the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Independent*, the *New Statesman* and several Turkish magazines.

### Reviews

Cornucopia asked the novelist Maureen Freely to review the newly published KAR (SNOW) in the original Turkish edition. So taken by the book was she that she set to work on translating it. The new English edition published by Faber and Faber is her translation. To read more: "[Snow Business](#)" *Cornucopia* 26, 2002, *Maureen Freely*.

"This seventh novel from the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk is not only an engrossing feat of tale-spinning, but essential reading for our times....He deserves to be better known in North America, and no doubt he will be, as his fictions turn on the conflict between the forces of 'Westernization' and those of the Islamists... Like Pamuk's other novels, SNOW is an in-depth tour of the divided, hopeful,

desolate, mystifying Turkish soul." To read more: ["Headscarves to Die For"](#) The New York Times Book Review, August 15, 2004, *Margaret Atwood*.

"A major work . . . conscience-ridden and carefully wrought, tonic in its scope, candor, and humor . . . with suspense at every dimpled vortex . . . Pamuk [is Turkey's] most likely candidate for the Nobel Prize." To read more: ["Anatolian Arabesques"](#), The New Yorker, August 30, 2004, *John Updike*.

## Interviews with Orhan Pamuk

### The Paris Review, Issue 175, Fall/Winter 2005

"I sometimes feel nervous because I give stupid answers to certain pointless questions. It happens in Turkish as much as in English..." To read more: ["The Art of Fiction No.187"](#)

### The News Hour with James Lehrer, November 20, 2002

Elizabeth Farnsworth talks with Turkish author Orhan Pamuk about his most recent novel to be published in English, *My Name is Red*, as well as the challenges in bridging the cultures of East and West. To read more: ["Bridging Two Worlds"](#)

You can find additional interviews, speeches, and profiles on Orhan Pamuk's website:

<http://www.orhanpamuk.net/interviews.htm>

## Related Articles and Essays

### The New York Review of Books, November 15, 2001

["The Anger of the Damned"](#) by *Orhan Pamuk*

### The New York Times, August 13, 2006

["Writers on Trial"](#) by *Maureen Freely*

### International Herald Tribune, July 12, 2006

["Virgin Suicides" save Turks' "Honor"](#) by *Dan Bilefsky*

## About the Setting

Kars, standing at an altitude of 1750 meters in Eastern Anatolia, has played an important role in Turkish history and was at the center of the Turkish-Russian War. Kars is particularly known for its distinctive kilims and carpets, and it retains a strong heritage of folk dancing. On the mountain pastures, villagers produce excellent Kasar cheese (yellow cheese) and delicious honey.

Sarikamis (53 km southwest of Kars) is a ski center with resort hotels, setting of a scenic pine forest.



Forty-two kilometers east of the city on the ancient Silk Road, the medieval city of Ani (Ocakli) lies mostly in ruins of numerous churches, mosques and caravanserais. Ani was listed in 1996 and 1998 as one of the 100 most endangered sites of the world by World Monuments Fund.

### The New York Times, October 8, 2000

["A Hidden Empire in Turkey"](#) by *Stephen Kinzer*

### The New York Times, June 7, 2000

["Kars Journal: Ad War Wanes, Tourists Return to Turkey's East"](#) by *Stephen Kinzer*

## Related Resources

### MOVIE:

#### Gizli Yuz (1991)



Orhan Pamuk wrote the screenplay for the movie *Gizli Yüz* (*Secret Face*), based on *Kara Kitap* (The Black Book) and directed by a prominent Turkish director, [Ömer Kavur](#). The film approaches the unconscious mind through the process of Middle Eastern mysticism. The movie's central character is a young Turkish man who decides to leave his home and move to Istanbul. While in Istanbul he forms a friendship and then falls in love with a mysterious woman who suddenly disappears. He embarks on frantic search for the woman and in the process is lead on a metaphorical journey that leads into his own unconscious mind. To read more, see review of *Gizli Yuz* in [The New York Times](#).

### BOOKS:

#### [Crescent & Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds](#)

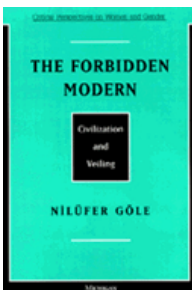
Stephen Kinzer, 2002



Veteran foreign correspondent Stephen Kinzer takes a look at the enigma that is modern Turkey – poised between Europe and Asia, caught between the glories of its Ottoman past and its hopes for a democratic future, between the dominance of its army and the needs of its civilian citizens, between its secular expectations and its Muslim traditions. Looking behind the myths, he shows how this now-modern state has progressed from its former status as part of the Ottoman Empire to its current embrace of democracy. Kinzer, who has spent years living and working in Turkey, is the perfect tour guide for this look at a country striving to become "the most audaciously successful nation of the twenty-first century."

#### [The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling](#)

Nilüfer Göle, 1997



This book by prominent Turkish scholar Nilüfer Göle examines the complex relationships among modernity, religion, and gender relations in the Middle East. Her focus is on the factors that influence young women pursuing university educations in Turkey to adopt seemingly fundamentalist Islamist traditions, such as veiling, and the complex web of meanings attributed to these gender-separating practices. The book was originally published as *Modern Mahrem* by the Turkish publisher Metis and has been translated into French, German, and Spanish. Göle is Professor of Sociology, Bogaziçi University. To read more: [PBS Frontline interview with Nilufer Gole about Muslim identity](#)

### Reader's Guide (Random House)

1) Ka's mood at the beginning of the story is dreamlike and nostalgic: "As slowly and silently as the snow in a dream, the traveler fell into a long-desired, long-awaited reverie; cleansed by memories of innocence and childhood, he succumbed to optimism and dared to believe himself at home in this world" [p. 4]. Does Ka remain in this state of optimism and seeming innocence throughout his stay in Kars? As an exile, he is moved by a sense of returning home; does he make a mistake by believing himself at home enough to become involved in the affairs of Kars?

- 2) While Ka and Ipek are having coffee in the New Life Pastry Shop, they witness the murder of the director of the Institute of Education. Discuss the conversation between the Institute director and the young man who has been sent to assassinate him [pp. 38–48]. What are the elements that make the scene so effective?
- 3) Ka's conversations with Muhtar, Blue, the boys from the religious high school, Sheikh Efendi, and Kadife explore the gap between traditional Islam and Western secularism. How do these conversations affect Ka's sense of his spiritual condition? How strongly does he need to identify himself as a secular intellectual, and why is the possibility of his own belief in God, which he admits to, so unsettling to him?
- 4) At least three different perspectives are given on the suicide girls. The deputy governor tells Ka, "What is certain is that these girls were driven to suicide because they were extremely unhappy. . . . But if unhappiness were a genuine reason for suicide, half the women in Turkey would be killing themselves" [p. 14]; Ipek says, "The men give themselves to religion, and the women kill themselves" [p. 35]. Kadife argues that women commit suicide to save their pride [p. 112]. Does the novel provide an answer to the mystery of why women are killing themselves?
- 5) Speaking with Muhtar, Ka says, "If I were an author and Ka were a character in a book, I'd say, 'Snow reminds Ka of God!' But I'm not sure it would be accurate. What brings me close to God is the silence of snow" [p. 60]. Why does the snow make Ka think of God? How do Ka's thoughts about his own religious beliefs change throughout the novel?
- 6) Does the epigraph from Dostoevsky—"Well then, eliminate the people, curtail them, force them to be silent. Because the European enlightenment is more important than people"—sum up the West's arrogant approach to fundamentalist political movements? How is it relevant to the events in Kars?
- 7) Does Ipek love Ka, or does she still love Blue? Does she betray Ka by not going to Frankfurt with him [pp. 388–90]? In an unsent letter, Ka wrote to Ipek, "I carry the scars of my unbearable suffering on every inch of my body. Sometimes I think it's not just you I've lost, but that I've lost everything in the world" [p. 260]. Was it foolish of Ka to think that he would be able to have the happiness that love provides? Why does Ipek decide not to go to Germany with him?
- 8) How is Kadife different from her sister Ipek? What motivates her to go onstage and bare her head in Sunay's play? Is she a devout Muslim, or is wearing the headscarf simply a costume necessary for her love affair with Blue?
- 9) Reexamine Necip's story [pp. 104–7] once you've reached the end of the novel. Has Necip's tale foreseen the revelations about the narrator and his love for Ipek, as well as Fazil's marriage to Kadife? How does Necip live on after his death? How does Ka?
- 10) Has reading this novel changed your perspective on Islam or the West? If so, in what ways?

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