



Disquiet

Zülfü Livaneli

Brendan Freely, Translator

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Subcultures clash with tragic results in Zülfü Livaneli's impactful novel *Disquiet*.

Ibrahim lives and works as a newspaper reporter in Istanbul, a contemporary metropolis where the East mixes with the West. But he is drawn back to Mardin, the traditional village on the Syrian-Turkish border where he was born and raised, when a gruesome photograph of his childhood friend Hussein comes across his newsroom desk.

While investigating his friend's murder, Ibrahim becomes obsessed with tracking down a refugee, Meleknaz. Hussein, a Muslim, had broken his engagement for this mysterious woman from the ancient Yezidi sect, who are believed to worship Satan.

Precise, folkloric details enliven the story, as of the addition of myrrh to coffee, a grandmother's chest tattoo of a gazelle, Meleknaz's fear of romaine lettuce, and an explanation of the concept of *harese*. Elsewhere, Ibrahim compares the self-destructive behavior brought on by the traditional beliefs of his people to camels who persist in eating thistles because they enjoy the taste of blood mixed with the harmful plants.

The narrative comes in form of dialogues between Ibrahim and those he interviews, including Hussein's brother and his former fiancée. They function as reports, gathering information from their various sources. The result is a nonlinear accumulation of events and details. Some facts are confirmed by others in the course of the book; the narrative loops back on itself in places, and jumps forward at other times. It reads like a fairy tale, albeit a bloody one, though the appearance of Angelina Jolie, who's seen on a United Nations mission to a refugee camp, results in verisimilitude that brings the story into the present day.

Disquiet is a slender, fascinating novel about a man caught between cultures.

SUZANNE KAMATA (July / August 2021)

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