



A Mind at Peace

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar

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A Mind at Peace, originally published in 1949, is a magnum opus, a Turkish *Ulysses* and a lyrical homage to Istanbul. With an innate awareness of how dueling cultural mentalities can lead to the distress of divided selves, Tanpinar gauges this moment in history by masterfully portraying its register on the layered psyches of his Istanbulite characters. Set on the eve of World War II in the “city of two continents,” this literary feat is a narrative of duality: a historical novel and a love story (of the senses and the mind), language and music, tradition and modernity, East and West—and of the vital juncture where one young man must attempt to bridge all of these worlds at once.

Surviving the childhood trauma of his parents’ untimely deaths in the early skirmishes of World War I, Mümtaz is raised and mentored in Istanbul by his cousin Ihsan and his cosmopolitan family of intellectuals. Having lived through the tumultuous cultural revolutions following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the early Turkish Republic, each is challenged by the difficulties brought about by such rapid social change.

The promise of modernization and progress has given way to crippling anxiety rather than hope for the future. Fragmentation and destabilization seem the only certainties within the new world where they now find themselves. Mümtaz takes refuge in the fading past, immersing himself in literature and music, but when he falls in love with Nuran, a complex woman with demanding relatives, he is forced to confront the challenges of the World at large. Can their love save them from the turbulent times and protect them from disaster, or will inner obsessions, along with powerful social forces seemingly set against them, tear the couple apart?

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