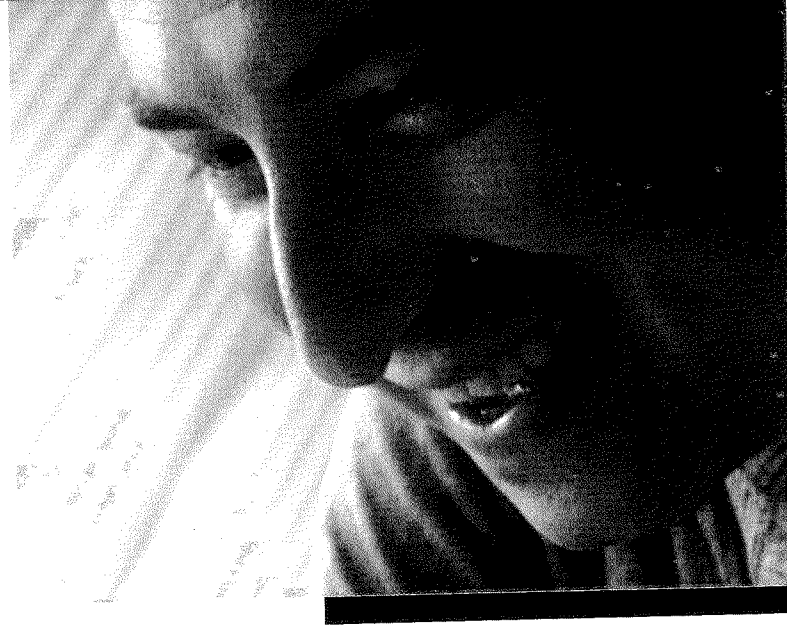


A story writer:

Özen Yula



*Comedy makes the world endurable. It's a kind of antidote.
In every play I write, I use it as far as possible.*

Özen Yula

YKY

The Publisher

Özen Yula was born in Eskişehir and completed his secondary education in Oregon in the United States. He studied economics at Hacettepe University and took a masters degree in drama at Ankara University. He lived in New York for a few years.

His plays have been translated into English, German, French, Bulgarian, Finnish, Polish and Japanese, and staged on tour in countries including Germany, Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, Japan and Egypt. His play *Ay Tedirginliği* was staged at the Bonn Biennial in 2002 and he represented Turkey as a writer at the kontext: Europa Festival in Vienna. His *Gayri Resmi Hurrem* has been staged in Berlin by the Tiyatrom Company, and performed as a reading in Bulgaria. *Aşk Evlerden Uzak* has been translated into Polish and published in *Dialog* magazine. A comparative translation of *Sahibinden Kiralık* was carried out at Sorbonne University. One of his stories has been translated into English and published in the special issue devoted to Turkey of the *Canadian Descant* magazine.

Presently he lives in Istanbul and Ankara, working as a freelance writer and theatre director.

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Collected Plays (Four volumes)

A Panther*

It was a panther, slinking slowly down the avenue. With a syncopated stride it prowled through the night. Three-thirty in the morning. All was very quiet. An atmosphere of prayer beads and the smoldering ash of hookahs mingled with burnt wood. There were none who understood why their sweethearts were asleep far from them at this hour. There were many men with broken hearts—and many women, but no one died of a broken heart. They all suffered together. There were many loves estranged from one another. The panther didn't realize this. No panther can converse in words. Wild, black and beautiful, it can rend the night asunder.

This panther's life in the jungle was long gone. Too far away for refuge, much too distant to reach. Those old days were like this city. As the animal had never been downtown before, it didn't know its way. All doors were locked at night in this new city. Bitter victuals, grime, and a sanctified garden full of stench was what the panther knew here. It had viewed this world only from its hiding-place behind a tree. Monotonous people would come to stop and stare long and hard at the animal. Those human beings fond of speaking to one another inside doorways when they visited one another, fond of gossip and always hesitant to say their good-byes. The panther stared backed at them without sympathy or understanding. Understanding, after all, might present a hindrance with its doing them in. This failure in comprehension was what was best for a panther. The animal would observe these people and when one caught his fancy, would make a sudden leap. Sometimes it would hurt its head, banging hard against the intervening iron bars. Then those outside the cage would retreat in horror. That is to say, not just stepping back, but outright fleeing—sometimes not even bothering to look behind them. They loved such panic. That way they'd have something to tell their neighbors about—and later their grandchildren. They wouldn't let their children go up close. They were well aware that a close encounter would immediately mature a child; the child would cease to be a child. To squelch their fright, the children would suddenly grow up. Such children no longer loved their parents. What people fear the most is the loss of their children's love. For in their old age, they'd have no one to take care of them.

* "Pars", *Tanrı Kimseyi Duymuyor* (2005). Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları.

Right now night was falling—upon the sea, the ferries, the bridges and the streets all covered with snow. At night a panther's teeth gleam. Like a poem roams the panther through the night.

Dragging one hind leg, the panther trusts its instinct and proceeds as quickly as possible, still agile—if not as much as before.

Over the snow, one poor soul spies a huge object swiftly heading straight towards him. Gigantic and pitch black in the predawn of a snowy white morn. His last glimpse is that of sharp claws and teeth piercing his flesh and his eyes. His last sensation, that of a weight painfully crashing onto his chest. In place of his last breath only a whisper escapes his lips. Only with difficulty can the poor man gasp one last breath through his nose. This breath is lost wandering deep inside as the panther snatches a huge mouthful of his face. Left starving for three days. The food the animal devoured a short while ago had hardly begun to fill his belly.

The living beings who'd arrived at the garden uninvited three days ago had sorely tested the panther's patience. They'd screamed constantly. It was one of the sunniest days of the whole winter. The garden was overrun with children. Before the end of the term someone had decided to bring the students to the Zoological Garden. Of course there'd been some parents not overly pleased about this, but their objections were feeble. Two days later, there were the children shouting and shrieking as they looked at the animals in the Zoological Garden. All the children were excited. Children can be cruel and they can be naively innocent. These were of an age where cruelty predominated.

They were yelling at the top of their lungs. One quiet puny boy held back from the crowd and gazed constantly at the panther's cage. He displayed an independence from the jostling mass, and bore an unusual poise of "belonging anywhere and everywhere." His day would come, sometime in his life, that day he'd have to go, that he would go—perversely without so much as a backward glance. In his wake he'd leave some crying, perhaps some longing for his return. Without any heed, he'd go. Understanding that the world was indeed a rather small sphere, every explanation naught but a tall tale, the boy would go. Like a poem, like a quatrain, like a proud but weary stray bitch on the street.

Not understanding this of course, the panther looked on. Deadly as a violent passion. The children were screaming and jostling, their teachers paying no attention. Life was quiet, voices were loud, the children were nasty. Whoever's idea

it was, they'd never quite be able remember once they'd grown up—because it's only human nature to share blame and fault, living more comfortably by always interpreting what another or others have done as worse than one's own deeds, tending to see, to find, to analyze it thus—someone among them gave a signal to the others. All of them ran—as spiritedly, joyously and happily as if watching a cartoon—and lifted the boy to heave him up into the air straight toward the panther's cage. His puny frame teetered once or twice atop the bars before he plunged down on the other side.

The boy uttered no sound. Leaping upon him at lightening speed, the panther sank its teeth into his throat and the boy breathed his last. Neither a tear nor a scream. The children stared at their friend instantaneously turned to blood and flesh. One or two nervous giggles broke an all-encompassing silence. Then a little girl's shriek rent the air; the teachers began to throw up and the children ran away. With great appetite, its front legs planted upon the child, the panther began to tear huge chunks off the boy's frame. By the time the keeper arrived, it had devoured nearly two thirds of the child.

Immediately they beat the panther and as further punishment left it hungry for the next three days. Every now and then the keeper would enter the cage, a long iron staff in hand, to land a firm blow somewhere upon the panther's body. This hurt the panther very much. As the animal roared and leapt at the keeper, the man would instantly disappear through out the hole by which he'd entered. With all its strength, the panther would then throw itself against the door. With its coat of black satin rippling over its taught muscles, the panther took on one stance after another. One new stature after another filled its skin. Its frame was overflowing with panthers. An urge for revenge was swelling inside. It nurtured a terrible anger in its eyes. Some things a panther cannot hide. Cannot hide even should it want to. It was satiated with the urge to kill. Sensing this urge from the animal's behavior, the keeper remained on the alert for an attack and with his years of experience each time easily succeeded in retreating safely. With blows not quite hard enough to break its bones, he struck powerfully. He kept a good balance. Certainly they didn't want to lose the panther. It brought good money to the Zoological Garden. The monkeys, the snakes, the alligators, and then the panther. The number of paying visitors reflected such a preference.

Because the boy who died came from a poor family, no ruckus was raised.

There was no need to put the panther to sleep. The veterinarian decided it would be better to take it off its food for a while and teach it a lesson. The news made one or two papers and appeared five or six times over on television, to whet people's appetites and to dull their memory of the tax-evasion lawsuit pending against the zoo managers. Within two or three days, however, the managers had been cleared of the charges by their friends and accomplices in parliament; the television then played down the event and played up the completely new tack of what a wonderful and outstanding management was running the zoo, serving their country cleanly and honestly. Thus a frosted glass was drawn across the images of the impoverished child and his tearful family and the pieces of flesh left behind; like faded pictures, these had been relegated to the recycle bins in the memories of the country's citizens.

Life would have continued peacefully in the Zoological Garden. Only, last night the keeper made a mistake. His eyes didn't focus as well as they used to. He pushed the door partway open and slipped into the panther's cage. The florescent lamp in the garden was hardly enough to light the cage well. The man proceeded slowly towards the panther's lair. He pointed the iron rod in his hands towards the mouth of the lair. The iron rod was ready and waiting for the panther to emerge. Crouched in another corner of the cage, the panther squinted its eyes, assessing the situation. The darkest corner of the cage was now blacker than black. By the time the keeper sensed the sudden motion behind him, it was much too late. Screams echoed through the darkness of the night. As the keeper breathed his last, the panther was taking out on the dry stringy meat of the keeper all its wrath at having being starved for days on end. The blood draining from the man reached the edge of the cage and began to drip out into the garden. The soil was imbibing his blood. Consuming first the neck, then the kidneys and part of the man's back, the panther had allayed its hunger somewhat. Now it was time for action.

With one forepaw it pushed the door wide open and with a finesse hardly to be expected from that huge body, it flowed through the doorframe like water. By the laws of nature the panther was a killer. Nature was founded on killing. Animals and people killed one another, sometimes even themselves. God, then, killed them all. According to the concept of the age, people were also doing away with God. At night on the television screens they would gaze at the Iraqis killed by the American mercenary soldiers. God, with each dying child, was dying once

again with the conscience of the age. That night a panther escaped from the cage in which it had been for long years held hostage.

Coal-black upon the white snow, shimmering black satin in the blackness of the night. It climbed onto a rise overlooking the spiky iron pickets of the garden fence. It placed its forefeet on the pedestal of the metal statue there. Braced by its strong hind legs it hurled itself upward, and the metal lady of the statue sprang as well into the falling snow.

The panther hung motionless for an instant, arched in the air like a billow of velvet. If anyone had been there to witness it, that person could have testified to it. Time froze like a single frame in a paused film.

As its front paws landed on the snow-covered, stone-paved road outside the garden, its entire body was wrenched. The snow had somewhat broken the fall. With the blow of its hind legs striking the ground, the panther was stunned for a moment and sank to the ground. Snow clung to the fur on its body. Worse than the cold, though, was the shock from the impact. The panther could sense the need to quickly move on from where it was. It made one or two attempts to get to its feet. It couldn't yet stand up. It would have to wait for a while. Being unable to rise when it wanted frustrated the panther. Certain animals and certain people should die before they grow old. Before their bodies fail them, before they lose the ability to moving about just when they want and how they want. The panther didn't know this. There was only a strange stiffness in its body. Something it had never known, never felt before. A little later the panther would move on, but there was a terrific pain in one back leg. It hurt badly.

In the forest, indeed anywhere in life, a crippled panther had scant chances of survival. More than chance was needed now.

It had been snowing all day, and Istanbul had turned into a pure white sculpture. All the dirt, all the filth, all the evil was blanketed; a city worth living in had sprung up. Nearly everyone was at home. Ferryboat service connecting the two shores had long since shut down. At one point the fog crept in, and when it rose it left a city masterfully wrapped in a snow-white cloak.

(...)

Translation: Jean Carpenter Efe