NOTES ON CHARACTERS

(Alphabetical)

**Blue.** Called “the Master” by his admirers, “infamous Islamist terrorist” by secularists such as Serdar Bey, there are rumors about Blue in Kars, in the Turkish media, even in the Frankfurt press, most of which turn out to be unsubstantiated. The narrator, Orhan, notes that Blue, by staying in hiding, “wasn’t just hiding from the police; he stayed off the streets as a way of maintaining his legend” (71). Ka describes him as a “an extraordinarily handsome man,” brown-haired and beardless, with “midnight blue” eyes and “breathtakingly pale skin,” in whose “manner, expression and appearance there was nothing of the truculent, bearded, provincial fundamentalist whom the secularist press had depicted with a gun in one hand and a string of prayer beads in the other” (72). He becomes famous after threatening to kill an “effeminate” Istanbul TV personality after the latter had “uttered an inappropriate remark about the Prophet Muhammad;” the TV personality is then killed. But Blue has an alibi, and Necip claims Blue hasn’t killed anyone. He is Kadife’s lover.

**Director of the Institute of Education.** Director of the equivalent to a college in Kars. Though a “religious man” (38), he identified with the “secular political camp,” and refused to admit young women wearing headscarves (such as Teslime, Khadife) into the Institute. Ka and Ipek witness his assassination at the end of Ch 4 (p. 36-7). The narrator of Snow reproduces a tape-recorded transcript of his conversation with his assassin in Ch 5 (38-49).

**Fazil,** teenage student at the religious high school, friends with Necip. In love with Teslime. Even though he didn’t “know her personally,” he knew her “as a soulmate” (84).

**Funda Eser,** actress, Sunay Zaim’s wife.

**Ipek** (in Turkish, “Ipek” means Silk), daughter of Turgut Bey, estranged wife of Muhtar, Ka’s love interest. Childless (35).

**Ka,** the protagonist. Poet, from a middle class family, grew up in wealthy, Europeanized areas of Istanbul. Has been living in Frankfurt, Germany, since the 1980 coup in Turkey forced the exile or arrest of writers, leftists, and pretty much anyone in between. Has returned to Turkey and traveled to Kars ostensibly to write an article about the “suicide girls” of Kars, but really to see Ipek and convince her to return with him to Germany.
Kasim Bey, assistant chief of police. Spies on Muhtar and the activities of the Prosperity Party.

Kadife, Ipek’s sister, Blue’s lover, Necip’s fantasy “Hicran.” Used to go to university in Istanbul but failed her exams and transferred to the Institute of Education in Kars to live with her father and sister. Originally an atheist, like her father and sister, she starts wearing the veil, gets arrested, and has now become devout. (See p. 113-4).

Mersut, friend of Necip and Fazil. One of the students at the religious high school. Aggressively questions Ka about his beliefs, and is more fundamentalist in his views than either Fazil or Necip. Is in love with Hande.

Muhtar Bey. Ipek’s estranged husband, a friend of Ka’s from Istanbul. Used to write poetry and belonged to leftist political groups. Went to prison after the military coup of 1980 (“the military took over and we all went to prison,” p. 53). Returned to Kars with Ipek, took over his father’s “Arcelik and Aygaz appliance distributorship” (35), and refers to his early experience of Kars as “everyone [in Kars] wanted to die or leave. But I had nowhere to go. It was as if I’d been erased from history, banished from civilization” (53). Meets Saadettin Efendi, a Kurdish sheikh, and becomes a devout Muslim. Is now running for Mayor of Kars on the Prosperity Party ticket. Ethnically Kurdish. Like Ipek, Muhtar is from Kars (35).

Necip. “A teenage boy with large green eyes and a childish good-natured face” (65). Attends the religious high school, is best friends with Fazil, takes Ka to see Blue for the first time and is in love with Kadife. What he wants in life is to “marry Kadife, live in Istanbul, and become the world’s first Islamist science fiction writer” (134-5). Has a vision of landscape where God does not exist that Ka turns into a poem (142-3). Is shot in the eye at the “theater coup.”

Serdar Bey, owner of the Border City Gazette. Republicanist/secularist; believes “we were all brothers” (25) under the Ottomans and that the Prosperity Party and their adherents want to turn Turkey into “another Iran” (27) Prints the news before it has happened (29)

Sunay Zaim, actor and would-be Atatürk. Married to Funda Eser. His greatest roles were as political figures, and he has now transformed that past into a reality by staging an actual coup in Kars during a snow-storm. More of his acting career and how it falters after he becomes known as the “failed Atatürk” (193) can be found on pgs. 190-3.

Turgut Bey, owner of the Hotel Asia, widower, father of Ipek and Kadife, used to be a teacher before being fired and thrown in jail for his political beliefs, where he was tortured. Though a secularist, he’s proud and supportive of his daughter, Kadife, for wearing her headscarf and thereby finding “a new form of rebellion” and means of defying the state (114).
Sheikh Saadettin Cevher. A powerful religious leader in Kars ("sheikh" is an honorific title for elder, Islamic scholar, or someone who seeks wisdom through Islam). Everyone visits the sheikh, even secularists, army people, soldiers. As Ipek tells Ka, “he’s on the side of the state...when a man this powerful invites you over, you don’t turn him down” (90). He is Muhtar’s religious advisor.

Zahide. Kurdish maid at the Snow Palace Hotel owned by Turgut Bey and his daughters.

Z. Demirkol. Alias of a “writer and old Communist” who first appears as the curtain draws on Sunay Zaim’s “theater coup,” and then rushes into the night shouting “Long Live the Republic.” Becomes responsible for multiple mysterious deaths and assassinations that occur in Kars after the coup. More of Z Demirkol’s bio can be found on p. 162.

Groups and Organizations

Kurds. An ethnicity. The majority of the population of Kars are Kurds. After the coup, the police round up Kurdish nationalists, left-wing terrorists, and anyone suspected of having “aided or abetted the Kurdish guerillas” (104). For more on the politics of Kurds in Kars, see p. 269. For more information on Kurds in Turkey, review the 1999 Washington Post piece, “Who are the Kurds?” along with the more recently updated Al-Jazeera English timeline:

• “Who Are the Kurds?” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/feb99/kurdprofile.htm Dated but usefully brief summary, with map. Try to locate Kars on that map.

Kurdish Marxists. Originally, the PKK, the Kurdish group led by Abdullah Öcalan that has since the 1980s been fighting the Turkish state for an independent Kurdistan, was called the Kurdistan Workers’ Party; Öcalan espoused a radical Marxist ideology coupled with Kurdish nationalism, that he has since abandoned.

Socialists, Marxists, Communists, Left-wing militants. As in many countries around the world in the years following WWII to the fall of the Berlin Wall, these were popular political ideologies, with a rise of left-wing militancy around the world particularly noticeable during the 1970s (ex., the Bahder Meinhof group in Germany, the Weather Underground in the US). Left-wing groups were violently suppressed in Turkey after the 1980 coup and people (like Turgut Bey) were imprisoned for their political beliefs. As Pamuk notes, tongue-in-cheek, in Snow: “Socialist militancy had once cast a long shadow over Kars, but now it was spent; these days no socialist would dare set an
ambush, kill a policeman, or start a mail-bomb campaign without first seeking the support of the Kurdish guerillas” (269).

**M İ T**, the national intelligence agency, Kars branch. “In the old days, MIT kept files on leftists and democrats, but now they’re mostly interested in Islamists” (114). They spy on Muhtar and the Prosperity Party, raid Muhtar’s office, and beat him up for no particular reason; they do not beat up Ka. The pictures they show Ka of the Director’s would-be assassin are of “doleful youths staring miserably into the police camera...most of them young Kurds” (64).

**The Prosperity Party**, also referred to as the “Party of God.” The party of political Islam in the novel. Muhtar is their candidate for mayor.