

Orhan Pamuk and the Poetics of Fiction

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By

Umer O. Thasneem

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*To my Dad
who is as maverick a journalist as Pamuk's Celâl,
and my Mom who is as unlike Pamuk's Rüya
as two people can ever be.*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE FICTIONAL CHEMISTRY

Orhan Pamuk has been a sensational figure in world literature for more than a decade. Gabriel Garcia Marquez being no more, he is one of the strongest contenders to the title of the writer with the greatest cult-following across the globe. Like Marquez himself, he has been responsible for bringing an element of freshness and exotica into the Euro-saturated novelistic world. Coming as they did when the novel was facing a crisis of sorts in the West—exemplified in such pronouncements as John Barth's "literature of exhaustion" and "replenishment"—these writers infused a fresh energy into the genre. (Barth, 138-47)

Marquez and Pamuk are indeed two widely differing authors, despite the similarities that novels like *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *Museum of Innocence*, with their preoccupation with the theme of love display. However, the appeal they have for the contemporary imagination has been remarkably similar. The element of exotica as well as the unique style of narration—which imbues the mundane and everyday with a sense of mystery, magic and history—distinguishes them from many contemporary Western novelists. In other words, their thickly-layered novels abound in events and incidents that give us the feeling of something happening out there in the real world. This contrasts with the absurdist and orgiastic plots in novels like Easton Ellis's peopled with "zombified dudes sleepwalk[ing] through endless parties." (Bilton, 199)

The volatility of the geographical and historical loci that form the background of their creative expressions contributes to this in no small measure. The turbulence of their nations seeps into their imaginative landscape and animates their prose with a rare energy. Time itself has a different dimension in the Third World experience marked by frequent social upheavals and political turmoil. Fredric Jameson famously explained how "the waning of affect" has had an eviscerating and "flattening out" effect on advanced capitalistic cultures, where even temporality has

“shrunk” into “a mere present.”¹ This is well reflected in all Western artistic products, but most notably in its fiction. Due to this, as Bilton remarks, “A permanent heat-haze hangs over the novel, destroying any sense of perspective and denying any chance of movement.” In this sense, fictions produced in the West perfectly exemplify the mood of a Baudrillardian “post-orgy” world. (Bilton, 199-200)²

On the other hand, there is still something traditional about the societies that created Marquez and Pamuk. According to Walter Benjamin, the birth of the novel in the West almost coincided with the death of the story teller. According to him, the story teller belonged to a time when the “stones in the womb of the earth and the planets at the celestial heights” hadn’t grown so indifferent to the fate of humans (Benjamin, 95). The novel, on the other hand, marked the birth of the solitary individual cut off from his metaphysical moorings and social fabric. In the occident and South America, the situation is still different despite the sweeping impact of globalization. Mary Montagu’s statement that drives home the difference between Oriental and Occidental settings and temperament made centuries back seems more relevant in contemporary context:

The garden is suitable to the house, where arbours, fountains, and walks are thrown together in agreeable confusion. ...’Tis true their magnificence is of a very different taste from ours, and perhaps of a better. I am almost of the opinion that they have a right notion of life. They consume it in music, gardens, wine and delicate eating while we are tormenting our brains with some scheme of politics...we die or grow old and decrepit before we can reap the fruit of our labours. (McNamara and Gray, 253)

While it is an encroachment, and at times a virtual conquest of the ersatz on the real that we witness in western postmodern novels (the works of Don DeLillo, for example), fiction in the worlds that produced Marquez and Pamuk still retains an epical and mythical aura. These two writers, like a host of other writers belonging to Asia, Africa and South America, combine the best elements of their native story telling traditions with the most recent trends available in western avant-garde fiction to chart out novel trajectories for contemporary fiction.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_eM-ySEDjA

² There are indeed many notable exceptions, especially among, though not only, from those belonging to the marginal communities. The obvious names that spring to mind being: Toni Morrison, Paul Auster and Jonathan Safran Foer.

This introduction is not meant to be a comparison of Marquez and Pamuk, although Marquez's name popped up incidentally and might do so again. What I seek to do in this chapter is to explore the chemistry of Pamuk's art by focusing on his craft, themes and symbols. In chapter two, I carry forth the exploration by focussing on *The Black Book*, and in chapter three, I repeat the exercise by turning the attention to *My Name is Red*, two of the books in Pamuk's oeuvre that represent the apogee of his creative achievement.

Well-wrought Stories

Pamuk's thematic and artistic concerns are largely the same across his vast and expanding spectrum. Questions of identity, both at the individual and the collective/national level, East-West dualism, the dialectics of love, the polarities of life and death, the role of art, the dynamics of memory and history, the intricacies of the human mind, the mechanics of evil, the inexorability of time, the tense entanglement of past and present, nostalgia and melancholy, and the elusive nature of reality are his constant themes. His major symbols and motifs revolve around these oppositional themes to form a tapestry of sharply contrasting colors and sensations.

Despite strong postmodern inclinations, his works display an artistic and structural unity; a unity that owes much to his notion of an anchoring centre from out of which all the flux and flow emanate. While discovering the centre in a thorough-going postmodernist work like Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* or William H Gass's *The Tunnel* will be an assiduous task, Pamuk's novels are so constructed that their centre draws the reader into its vortex from the beginning itself. In *Naïve and Sentimental*, he observes:

In well-constructed novels, everything is connected to everything else, and this entire web of relations both forms the atmosphere of the book and point toward its secret center...what sets novels apart from other literary narratives is that they have a secret center. Or, more precisely, they rely on our conviction that there is a center we should search for as we read. (24-5)

Most of Pamuk's stories, like many postmodern works, contain many narrative threads and digressions, with several smaller stories and anecdotes crowding the larger canvas. But all such stories and anecdotes serve to draw us into the magnetic centre whose gravitational pull is felt in all the words and images, including those which at first sight seem to be thrown around at random, like the china dog on top of the television

described no less than ten times in *Museum* and a couple of times in *Black* where it is stationed on top of a radio. The “dog” acts as a Bahktinian chronotope, throwing vital hints about the temporality of the mise en scene, in both instances and in the former assumes a greater role as a fetishistic object cherished by the lovelorn Kemal. In other instances this might be a reference to the color or the floral pattern of the dress worn by a character, the peculiar lilt in his/her voice, or the color of the ink in the pen, or some seemingly unremarkable feature of the sky, or the growl of a stray dog or the tint of the clouds, or even a seemingly desultory description of an item in the showcase. But all of them serve as many quilting points in his works, and lead to the heart of the story, like the labyrinthine routes of an immense structure leading to its epicentre. This is because, despite all the intricacies, Pamuk’s works possess a symmetry and balance, two notions to which he is fully committed. What we see in them is the discerning eye of a fastidious architect particular about every single tile he places in his giant designs.

Probably Pamuk owes this attentiveness to detail to his training as an architect. Like Arundhati Roy—who too has been trained as an architect but doesn’t practice the profession—he uses certain words and phrases recurrently in his works to create a sense of all-round unity and intra-textuality. And when the same themes, motifs, and in some instances characters find their way from one book into another, they contribute to make an intricate narrative arc.

The case with Celâl, the fictional journalist whom Galip presents in *The Black Book* is an example. Pamuk refers to his murder in both *The New Life* and *Museum of Innocence* and uses his imaginary lines as an epigraph to the first section in *Strangeness in My Mind*. This strategy gives the larger than life character presented in *Black* a real-life dimension, besides lending Pamuk with vital quilting points³ to hold together his narrative universe.

Symbols, Images and Motifs

These principles of balance and symmetry are something Pamuk scrupulously observes in his choice of symbols and motifs. There is a clever juxtaposition of light and darkness, black and white, greyness and radiance, and red and green in his works. Together with these sharply

³ The expression ‘quilting point’ is here used more in its conventional sense, as used in upholstery, than in the more nuanced Lacanian sense.

contrasting motifs, he makes use of symbols and images like wells (often dark and bottomless), shadows, stars, sun, moon, gardens, books, pens, ink, stray aimless dogs, snow, and graveyards. Drawing upon both oriental and occidental traditions, from the Quran to Rumi and from Tolstoy to Proust, he invests these images with rich symbolisms and textual allusions.

However, the most significant of all his symbols is the city of Istanbul. For him, Istanbul with its beguiling history, bewitching variety, and nostalgic memories stands for everything that life embodies. It is its eternal flux and flow; its mesmerizing possibilities and glorious uncertainties; its push towards the future and pull towards the past that animate his plot. As Pamuk describes it in *Black*, there is nothing “stranger than life” except for writing, and for him Istanbul symbolizes both life and writing in all their strangeness and variety (78). But for the ghosts of history that this mega-polis incarnates, the chaotic past it plays host to, and the massive human drama it plays out daily, there would not have been any writing for Pamuk.

Almost all his novels have Istanbul as their locale. Even in novels like *Snow* where the action shifts to the border city of Kars, his protagonists like Ka and the author-narrator himself, playing the role of the chorus character, are people who carry within them memories of Istanbul. The city and its geography are invested with multiple and contradictory significances in Pamuk’s works.

In modern terminology, oxymoronic as it sounds, we can describe Pamuk as a pastoralist⁴ of the city. Like Baudelaire who wove a symphony out of his Parisian experiences, Pamuk crafts a harmonious melody out of the immense cacophony of Istanbul. Hardly at all does he seem to be at home in a rural milieu. In *Strangeness*, where the scene alternates between Istanbul and Cennetpinar, the protagonist Mevlut’s native village, the author seems too eager to get back to Istanbul from the village—in geographical terms, an arduous and time-consuming voyage—and the voluminous novel of nearly six hundred pages devotes less than thirty pages to village scenes. Aleksander Hemon’s statement about how the scenes, smells and odours of Sarajevo seeped into his own psyche and became part of his very soul is equally true of Pamuk vis-à-vis Istanbul:

“I collected sensations and faces, smells and sights, fully internalizing Sarajevo’s architecture and its physiognomies. I gradually became aware

⁴ This is an expression used by several contributors to the volume *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, edited by Kevin R. McNamara.

that its interiority was inseparable from my exteriority, that the geography of the city was the geography of my soul.” (Nesci, 82)

This correlation between the inner psychic-scape and the outer city-scape is what Pamuk’s fiction exudes. The sombreness and melancholia with which he invests Istanbul seep into every nerve and sinew of his characters. Though melancholy is the overwhelming feeling that Istanbul betrays, for them, it is also a city which at times radiates a rare energy and optimism; it is one that helps people make or mar their fortunes and careers. At times it devours them like a giant boa constrictor leaving no trace behind, the way it happened with Mevlut’s father Mustafa Karatas in *Strangeness*. At other times it helps people climb up the ladder of financial and professional success the way Hadji Hamit and Mevlut’s cousins could. However, its tantalizing charm is something fatally dangerous and spiritually eviscerating, as many of his characters discover to their own peril.

The ambiguous and conflicting identities that Istanbul incarnates are also symptomatic of the identity crisis that his characters are prone to. Many of his characters, including Hoja, Osman, and Galip, have a problem being themselves. They feel their ontology to be constantly under threat. This is something symptomatic of the city they inhabit. Having been variously named as Byzantine, Constantinople, Istanbul, etc. through the course of history, there is something inherent in the city’s DNA that makes its denizens subject to multiple and polyphonic identity pulls. Consequently, they find themselves caught in several labyrinthine narratives unable to locate the exit points or the destination marks.

Compounding the problem of multiple historical trajectories is the specific geographical location of the city. Situated as it is at the intersection of Europe and Asia, Istanbul for Pamuk, symbolizes the point of confluence and conflict between East and West and their cultural heterogeneities. Pamuk’s art and his characters best exemplify this. Just as Istanbul straddles Asia and Africa, Pamuk’s art straddles two worlds. In many a sense, he is a writer who belongs to an in-between trajectory. It is in recognition of this that Tom Holland described him as a “bridge between our culture” and a “heritage quite as rich” (opening unnumbered page of *Snow*).

However, I think, this in-between status extends beyond his role as a bridge between cultures, to the nature of his craft and his thematic preoccupations. It is the middle ground that seems to be his default

address, vis-à-vis not only his technical choices but the issues he engages with.

A Blender of Traditions and the Occupant of the Middlescape

Though rooted in the Turkish past and its traditions, his indebtedness to European masters is something Pamuk makes no bones about. In *Naive and the Sentimental*, which is a detailed exploration of the novelists' craft, he repeatedly quotes the western writers that influenced him. Among those influences, we have the great figures of European fiction all the way from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to Woolf, Joyce and Faulkner. *Naive* attests to his wide scholarship in the European fictional tradition. For Pamuk, the novel is a "foreign [European] toy," as he calls it in *The New Life* (243). But his uniqueness lies in the peculiar ability to make this alien art form accommodative to his native requirements. His compatriot, the great novelist Yashar Kemal, had succeeded in this to an extent. But Kemal, as evinced by *Memed, My Hawk* his magnum opus, is scrupulous in steering himself clear of Western influences. His fiction has greater kinship with the old tradition of oriental romances than with the novel form familiar to us today. His protagonist Memed, the epical hero who fights against exploitative feudalism is, by all counts, a larger than life figure; the superhuman dimensions he is endowed with make him immune to bullets and fire, fatigue and weariness. It is only such a mythical status that would explain his exploits on the Taurus Mountains and the daredevilry against armed policemen on the streets. His capacity to stick it out in a solitary cave on a precipitous mountain in the company of a pregnant wife and surrogate mother is equally awe-inspiring. His vanishing into thin air at the end of the novel also suggests the stuff of romance rather than the novel.

Unlike Kemal, Pamuk's art shows greater affinity with the European tradition, from the early realistic epistolary forms to the most recent postmodernist ones: while traces of the realist epistolary style are detectable in novels like *My Name is Red* and *Silent House*, with their multiple viewpoints, novels like *The Black Book* and *White Castle* exhibit features of modernist and postmodernist fiction. This does not mean that *Red* and *Silent* are traditional realist texts; on the contrary, they exhibit strong strains of modernism and postmodernism albeit making use of traditional realist strategies. Pamuk's dexterity lies in his ability to blend multiple European traditions with oriental narrative techniques.

This ability to be receptive to multiple traditions makes him a writer who occupies the middle ground between many binaries. In *Naive*, based on Schiller's formulations, he classifies novelists into two kinds, the naive and the sentimental:

Some novelists are unaware of the techniques they are using; they write spontaneously, as if they were carrying out a perfectly natural act, oblivious to the operations and calculations they are performing in their head and the fact that they are using the gears, brakes and knobs that the art of the novel equips them with. Let us use the word "naive" to describe this type of sensibility. And let us use the term "reflective" to describe precisely the opposite sensibility; in other words, the reader and writers who are fascinated by the artificiality of the text and its failure to attain reality. (*N&S* 13)

For Schiller, writers like Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe belong to the first category to whom expression came spontaneously. The reflective writer, on the other hand, (described as "sentimental," derived from the German word *Sentimentalisch*) feels "uneasy" because "he is unsure whether his words will encompass reality, whether they will attain it, whether his utterances will convey the meaning he intends." Schiller considers himself part of the less envied second category. Pamuk describes how, as a youth, he had "oscillated" between the two while contemplating the art of the novel. (*N&V* 15-7) This oscillation has done a world of good to the craftsman he later became. As an artist, he is naive and sentimental. There is a kind of spontaneity detectable in his works as exemplified by his poetic descriptions of the streets and people of Istanbul. In those descriptions, he strikes us as a poet who, besides knowing the "chemistry of streets," is endowed with the ability to create "enchanted texts" (phrases used by Pamuk in *Strangeness* on pages 85 and 41) effortlessly, à la the naive writers described by Schiller.

For Pamuk this spontaneity has a divine quality about it, as Ka, the protagonist of *Snow*, thinks about moments of poetic inspiration. In those moments of radiance and illumination, Ka feels God himself sending him the words he composes. It is the kind of moment that inspires Coleridge to write "Kubla Khan," which is sadly interrupted by the arrival of an unwelcome guest. After the interruption, Coleridge is unable to recall the lines he had in mind. The divine voice which was whispering those lines had vanished, and the poet had to leave his work incomplete. (*Snow* 146) Talking about his decision not to write poems, Pamuk states how a poet is one through whom "God [himself] is speaking." Since he felt that "God was not speaking to me," Pamuk gave up trying his hand at poetry and

instead wrote prose all the while trying to figure out how it would have been if “God were speaking through me.” In the process, he says he ended up working “like a clerk.” (OC 359)

Indeed no clerk works thinking how it would be if God were speaking through him. So, this apparently self-deprecatory remark needs to be considered as a pseudo-statement; nevertheless, it tells us something crucial about Pamuk’s craft. He is a writer whose fiction exists as a cross between poetry and prose or in other words “naïve” and “sentimental.” This is because his notion of “naïve,” equated with spontaneity, naturally allies itself with poetry, whereas “sentimental,” equated with reflectiveness, inclines more toward the axis of prose. In this sense, Pamuk can be considered a poet writing prose, i.e. not as God himself pouring out through poetry but as if He were attempting prose, a language (un)fortunately not his mother tongue. Again this suggests the middle of the middle ground between divine and human or poetry and prose. As he states it in *Naive*:

While reading “On Naive and Sentimental Poetry” thirty years ago, I too—just like Schiller, raging at Goethe—complained of the naive childlike nature of Turkish novelists of the previous generation...Now, after an adventure of thirty five years as a novelist, I would like to continue with my own examples, even as I try to convince myself that I have found an equilibrium between the naive novelist and the sentimental novelist inside me. (18)

This equilibrium that blends the best features of naiveté and sentimentality is visible in the all-round construction of his novels as well as the many individual passages. I shall try to illustrate this using three passages that have a common theme. In these passages drawn from three different novels, the characters grapple with the problem of guilt, having actually or presumably committed the felony of murder:

(Passage 1)

That’s how I stood in front of a store window in the city of Amasya stuck between two mountains, Angel, and I wept, breaking into big sobs. You ask a child why he is crying; he weeps because of a deep wound inside him but he tells you he is crying because he has lost his blue pencil sharpener; that was the kind of grief that overcame me looking at all the stuff in the window. What was the sense in turning into a murderer for naught? To live with that pain in my soul for the rest of my life? I might buy some roasted seeds in the dry-fruit- and-nuts store, or look into the mirror of some grocer to see myself, or believing the life of bliss replete with refrigerators and

stoves, but still the accursed sinister voice inside me, the black wolf, would snarl and accuse me of my guilt. (NL 198)

(Passage 2)

If I do have a style and character, it is not only hidden in my artwork, but in my crime and in my words as well! Yes, try to discover who I am from the colour of my words!

...There was a time when I was terrified not only of the devil, but of the slightest trace of evil within me. Now, however, I have the sense that evil can be endured, and moreover, it is indispensable to an artist. After I killed that miserable excuse of a man, discounting the trembling in my hands which lasted only a few days, I drew better, I made use of brighter and bolder colours, and realized that I could conjure up wonders in my imagination...A city's intellect ought to be measured not by its scholars, libraries, miniaturists, calligraphers and schools, but by the number of crimes insidiously committed on its dark streets over thousands of years. By this logic, doubtless, Istanbul is the world's most intelligent city...I stood in the middle of the snowy street as evening fell and gazed down the dark road which had been abandoned along with meto jinns, fairies, brigands, thieves, to the grief of fathers and children returning home and to the sorrow of snow-covered trees. (MNR 120-123)

(Passage 3)

But was it possible to pretend nothing had happened? Inside my head there was a well where, pickaxe in hand, Master Mahmud was still hacking away at the earth. That must mean he was still alive, or the police had yet to investigate his murder...

...My mother had noticed that the apprenticeship with the well-digger had left some sort of mark on me. I wondered in passing whether she realized somehow that the newfound "maturity" she observed was in fact a black stain on my soul...

...Once, I thought, I'd pick up a new translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* as a birthday gift for my fiancée, but when I saw that the introduction was by Freud, a text on Dostoyevsky and patricide, and touching upon Oedipus the King and Hamlet, I decided after reading the unsettling essay on the spot, to buy her a copy of *The Idiot* instead—at least its protagonist is naive and innocent.

Some nights I saw Master Mahmud in my dreams. He was still digging away, somewhere up in space on a colossal bluish sphere spinning slowly among the stars. That must mean he wasn't dead and that I need not feel so

guilty. But it still hurt if I looked too closely at the planet he stood on.
(*RHW* 118-26)

These passages, that capture almost identical situations in three different novels, exude the spontaneity of the naive poets and the studied grace of the “self-aware artist” guided and “aided” by intellect. In them we detect a happy harmony of the poetic and prose suggestive of the middle-ground. The same principle holds true vis-à-vis techniques, like the stream of consciousness. Pamuk owes his elaborate use of the technique to western masters like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce whom he considers his idols (*N&S* 82-3). However, unlike these writers whose preoccupation is predominantly with the inner world, Pamuk finely balances the inner with the outer. In books like *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Mrs Dalloway*, we have the external world, the timorous Ireland and the teeming London as projections of the inner world of Stephen Daedalus and Mrs Dalloway. But Pamuk’s fiction strikes an equilibrium between the two in such a way that neither is sacrificed for the sake of either. Thus we have in them vivid representations of the inner psychic-scape of the characters and the outer physical landscape that surround them.

Another area where Pamuk occupies the middle ground is the modernist-postmodernist divide. For Brian McHale, the divide between these can be located in the differing thematic dominants of the two groups (McHale, 6-25). Modernists tilted more towards questions of epistemology, while postmodernists grappled more with ontological issues. Admitting the distinction to be hazy, McHale concedes that all epistemological questions pursued too far are bound to tip into ontology (11). The dispute concerning postmodernism as an extreme form of modernism or as something opposed to modernism assumes relevance in this context. McHale illustrates the difference by quoting Dick Higgins:

The Cognitive Questions (asked by most artists of the twentieth century, Platonic or Aristotelian, till around 1958):

“How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?”

The Postcognitive Questions (asked by most artists since then):

“Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?” (McHale, 1)

The questions posed by Pamuk’s characters, on the other hand, are situated on the fine line separating/connecting epistemology and ontology.

The best example for this is Osman who is equally concerned about interpreting the “world which” he is a part of while at the same time doubting the reality of that world. This hero of *The New Life* has read a book titled *The New Life* itself. He suddenly feels himself to be transported into a new world, the radiance of which mesmerizes and mystifies him. From then on, he finds himself caught in a swirl of epistemological and ontological questions. In fact, this is a situation many other Pamuk’s characters like Hoja, Osman, Galip, and Fazil face to a greater or lesser degree. They all have a problem retaining their own selves and end up taking up the roles of their alter-egos. For Pamuk, this situation of being engulfed by multiple selves, which his characters encounter, is emblematic of his country that finds itself caught between many competing narratives. (OC 368)

Pamuk’s recourse to infinite regress and multi-diegetic technique also attests to postmodern influences: McHale cites the example of Burroughs’s story *Exterminator!* to illustrate the postmodern use of infinite regress. In the story, a man in a waiting room reads a magazine story about a man reading a magazine story about a man reading a magazine story, and ends wondering whether he too would “wind up in the story”(114). In *Black*, the cousins read a love story about a boy and a girl who fall in love after reading the same love story about a boy and girl who fall in love after reading a third love story about a boy and a girl who fall in love after reading a fourth love story and thus ad infinitum (BB 369-70). The multi-diegetic narrative strategy employed in *The White Castle* similarly shows the influence of postmodernist authors like Umberto Eco who uses the same technique in *The Name of the Rose*.

The Chinese box model of embedding several smaller stories within the larger narrative frame also suggests postmodern influence. Both *Black* and *Red* contain several such stories within them. For Pamuk, it was Italo Calvino and Borges who acted as liberating influences for him from the staid realist traditions, and inspired him to create a canvas like a “Dadaist collage” for *Black* (OC 367). However, not unlike these writers, it should be said that he is equally influenced by oriental examples like *Arabian Nights*. *Arabian Nights* is the classic example of the Chinese box structure of story-telling in which the Sheherzade and King Shahryar story acts as the frame for other stories. Calvino, in *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, attempts a postmodernist inversion of this traditional story through the figure of the “petroliferous” Sultana whose marital contract includes a provision that she be furnished with an endless supply of stories (125). For Pamuk’s characters, unlike the Sultana, the need to tell stories is an

indispensable element of their ontological need to “be,” as I further elaborate in the next chapter on *Black*.

Another influence here could be Rumi, repeatedly invoked by Pamuk in *Black*. Rumi’s *Mathnawi*, has an uncanny similarity with the books authored by the fictional author Silas Flannery in *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*. Pamuk describes how Rumi begins narrating a story only to slip into a second one and then into a third one and so on ad infinitum without finishing any of the stories (BB 258). This is exactly what Calvino’s Flannery does. Pamuk also slips from one story into another in *Black*, but unlike Rumi and Flannery, he doesn’t leave them incomplete. In this respect, Pamuk is Sheherzade’s brother more than Rumi’s cousin.

The extensive use of intertextuality and metafictional techniques too are features that show postmodernist characteristics; and as McHale remarks, postmodernism is inherently intertextual in orientation (McHale, 65-72). *Black* epitomizes a complex tapestry that includes in its fabric many threads from oriental and occidental narratives and philosophical strains. It is rich with references all the way down from Rumi to Gazzali, and Proust to Lewis Carroll. On the other hand, *Red*, based as it is in the 16th century, confines itself to references to medieval literature and religious scriptures. However, its use of themes and images suggests Pamuk’s deep learning in modern western literature and psychological theory. This is detectable in the subtler and deeper layers of the novel which are rich in intertextual possibilities that range from the Hamletian dislike that the siblings Orhan and Shevket harbour against their stepfather to the repeated references to the Oedipal longings towards their mother.

While the features we examined so far place Pamuk more on the axis of postmodernism, there are others that locate him on modernist terrain. His treatment of geography and temporality is an example. He does not tamper with geography and temporality the way postmodernist writers like Calvino, Pynchon or Walter Abish do (Mc Hale, 43-58). His Istanbul, in this sense, has a greater affinity with Joyce’s modernist Dublin or Woolf’s London than postmodern heterotopias like Pynchon’s post-war Germany in *Gravity’s Rainbow* or the artificial world created by Davenport in “The Haile Selassie Funeral Train,” or Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. These are works that wreak havoc on cartographic realities. While Pynchon’s novel presents the intrusion of the world of hallucinations and comic books upon the instability and anarchy of post-war Germany following the fall of the Third Reich, Davenport’s artificial map links together such non-contiguous regions separated by oceans like Barcelona in Spain and

Atlanta in the United States into a geographical continuum. Calvino's *Invisible Cities* presents a whole array of cities nowhere visible on the globe. In Pamuk, we do not have geographical experiments of this magnitude, and the roads and streets he describes are places locatable on the map of Istanbul. But unlike the descriptions in thoroughgoing realist writers, he invests his landscape with a dreamy surreal quality. A thick blanket of melancholy hangs over his Istanbul. This mood of gloom is in keeping with the mental state of his characters who, despite being natives of the city they live in, feel themselves alienated and cut off. This alienation has a clear modernist ring to it as evinced by *A Strangeness in My Mind*.

Not unlike geography, Pamuk doesn't fiddle with temporality either, another domain of postmodernist experimentation. All his novels can be traced to definite historical phases. Barring *White Castle* (that locates itself in seventeenth-century Turkey) and *My Name is Red* (whose scene is the 16th century) they describe events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In some thoroughgoing postmodernist writers, time has been rendered wholly fluid and malleable. So we see in Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, Columbus discovering America in the late 16th century and Philip II of Spain marrying Elizabeth of England (McHale, 17, 67). Pamuk doesn't engage in this kind of tampering, nor does he present characters like Marquez's gypsy who defies age and death like the Biblical Noah.

In diction and phraseology too, Pamuk is conservative and does not share the postmodernist craze for verbal exuberance. As McHale stated, the objective of the postmodernist text was not to allow a smooth reconstruction of the world; nor did it try to entirely block such a reconstruction. Its attempt was to throw up obstacles to the "reconstruction process" as part of its anti-mimetic strategy (220-22). For this, it relied on strategies from "lexical exhibitionism," to the use of unconventional constructions like the invertebrate syntax. This experiment reaches its apogee in Guy Davenport's story entitled "Sentence," where a single snaking sentence runs from page to page consuming a total of nine whole pages before finally hitting a full-stop. Pamuk nowhere goes to such extremes; his sentences are remarkable for their balance and symmetry. Compared with postmodern writers like Rushdie and John Barth, Pamuk's diction (at least as he is available to us in English) strikes us as conventional. Though his sentences appear spontaneous and effortless, we can detect the presence of a discerning and calculating mind behind them. In this respect, he is like Mevlut, the hero of *Strangeness*. Mevlut was not a deft hand at writing love letters to the girl he fell in love with, but he

knew that each word should be chosen with care to create an “enchanted text.” (*SIM* 41)

On the same note, Pamuk’s treatment of sex differs from thoroughbred postmodernists like Burroughs, Barth and Marquez. Burroughs, for instance, attempts a thorough revision of the traditional physiological hierarchy that privileges the upper-part of the body over the lower. Thus in *Naked Lunch*, we have the picture of a talking anus that goes on to take control of the owner’s body. Joe Orton in his *Head to Toe* in the same vein presents a mountainous penis (McHale, 173). In Pamuk’s world we don’t come across these kinds of postmodern hyper-monstrosity (His novels are not inhabited by characters like Rushdie’s Moors—with horrendously overgrown physique—or Saleem Seenais with perpetually running gargantuan noses). In other words, he does not share the postmodern penchant for grotesque reality. The sexual scenes similarly exhibit temperance and moderation. This is well-exemplified in the conduct of characters like Black, Mevlut, and Osman all of whom exhibit great patience and perseverance in their wait before the eventual consummation. It is difficult in this world to encounter characters like Elif Shafak’s Mustapha who forcibly impregnates his own sister and has a child with her in an orgy of rage.

This temperance contrasts with the characters we come across in Mailer, Roth or Marquez. It perhaps has to do with the Islamic milieu, steeped in sexual taboos that his characters occupy despite their secular western upbringings. Probably, it equally owes much to Pamuk’s love of order and decorum, a characteristic feature of his art:

...if there is a sense of elegance and measure in the book, it is because my characters long for the unity, beauty and purity of an earlier age. (*OC* 269)

This desire for the features that we associate with an earlier age goes beyond the urge for beauty and purity. Like traditional romances and gothic stories, Pamuk relishes creating an aura of mystery and enigma in his stories. While commenting on the extravagance of blood and violence in Cormac McCarthy, Alan Bilton quotes McCarthy’s own line, “the mystery is that there is no mystery,” to be emblematic of his plots (Bilton, 103). Pamuk presents an opposite example. Mystery constitutes the fibre and sinew of his plots.

Creator of “Mystories” and Spectral Landscapes

Since most of Pamuk’s novels enact a kind of mystery, he may be better described as a creator of “mystories” rather than of mere stories. His dexterity at creating plots is most visible in the way he builds up this mystery to its climactic point. In *Red* the mystery surrounds the identity of the murderer, which is revealed only towards the end. In *The New Life*, the same enigmatic aura is sustained through Osman’s quest for the mysterious angel, which at a particular juncture turns out to be a trail in search of his enigmatic sweetheart, Janan. His other heroes, like Kemal, Galip and Ka too undergo agonizing periods of prolonged waiting during the search for their missing beloveds. All this waiting is fraught with mystery and anxiety. In certain instances, Pamuk uses familiar novelistic techniques like withholding information regarding “who done it,” and “what happened next” to sustain this aura of mystery. In *Strangeness* where the element of mystery is minimal, the readers are made to anxiously plough through several pages before learning the identity of the man with whom Samiha elopes (*SIM* 252). In *Museum*, the mild dose of mystery is built around a pair of earrings, which carry in them memories of an earlier thwarted love.

The predominance of the mystery element in *Red* and *Black* is greater as required by the detective cast of this work. *Black*, as it does in other aspects, outstrips others vis-à-vis the mystery element. It conjures up a whole cosmos of mysteries, complete with labyrinthine underground tunnels, underworld dons, submarine secrets, nocturnal streets, shady characters, seedy places, riddling signs and nightmarish scenes peopled by Cyclopes, Deccal and other enigmatic beings, as it sketches Galip’s search for Rüya: a trail that takes him through the dark entrails of Istanbul, and finally to the scene of the inscrutable murder. This murder fulfils the condition that Galip lays out for the kind of detective story that would interest him, i.e. one in which even the author himself “doesn’t know the murderer.” Celâl’s murder appears to be of this sort and Pamuk himself seems clueless about the assassin.

One factor that augments the aura of mystery in Pamuk’s works is the perpetual veil of melancholy that shrouds them. He considers this melancholy-*huzn*-to be very much a national character. The snowy, misty landscape of Istanbul and Kars that his novels sketch, perfectly fits in with the aura of mystery he evokes. This is also in keeping with the spectrality of being, which is a constant theme in his fiction. All his characters are marked by this spectrality which, according to Punter, is one of the

abiding features of many great literary works including *Hamlet*, a play wherein the ghost is an overarching presence (Punter, 259-78). In Ibsen's *Ghosts*, we have a quintessential modern example of this. The main theme of Ibsen's play is our vulnerability to genetically inherited flaws which in effect makes the world nothing but a huge theatre of ghosts and spirits. Genetic determinism is one of the main themes of Pamuk in novels like *Museum* and *Silent House*. Kemal in *Museum* is nothing but a ghost of his father with the same frailties and foibles, his love affair being merely a re-enactment of his father's, and his death due to heart failure a replication of the latter's earlier death. In *Silent House*, Faruk Darvinoğlu incarnates the same disillusionments, ambitions, desires and frustrations as his dead father Selâhattin. In fact, the title *Silent House* is both suggestive and deceptive. Suggestive, in the sense that it implies the silence of the house haunted by the spectral presence of Selâhattin; deceptive because this silence conceals beneath its apparent tranquillity the hushed and threatening voices of several ghostly presences and absences. While the dead Selâhattin and Doğan mark such an absence, the aged Fatma with her storehouse of memories epitomises an eerie presence: in other words, her presence is more that of a living ghost than that of a full-blooded human being.

The interest that Pamuk shows in graveyards, museums and archives is an instance of his preoccupation with the theme of spectrality. In all of Pamuk's novels, we come across characters who feel the weight of history on their back. Faruk is an ambitious writer and hunts the archives in search of stories. Kemal is an eager collector of souvenirs that have anything to do with the memory of Füsün. Osman is an avid reader and collector of old railway magazines; Galip sifts through old writings by Celâl, and Black combs the archives of the miniaturists. As Boulter explains, there are occasions when a subject him/herself becomes an archive, which in Derridean terms simultaneously symbolizes both absence and presence (Boulter, 1-5). In other words, an archive is the institutionalisation of a loss, an attempt to preserve something that belonged to the past against permanent/future loss. Kemal, Osman, Faruk, Ka, Black, and Galip undergo agonising periods marked by loss and separation. These losses and the melancholic world they inhabit qualify them to the status of archival subjects described by Boulter.

As stated earlier, for Pamuk this sense of loss and melancholy is symptomatic of Istanbul. As a city that incarnates the memories of earlier cities like Byzantium and Constantinople, Istanbul is an archive and spectral presence: a locus that is constantly haunted by history. A place so

redolent of history always feels the weight of the past on its shoulders. Pamuk's obsessive concern with time (another feature he shares with Marquez as evinced in stories like the "Sea of Lost Time" and *Hundred Years of Solitude* probably owes much to these historical and geographical concatenations.

Just as the city of Istanbul grapples with its multiple selves, his characters too feel themselves prone to multiple pulls. Almost all his characters have problems in being themselves. They feel themselves to be the doubles of their alter-egos, and at times ghosts of the dead ones that take possession of their souls. This ghostly aura lends his novels a kind of gothic aura.

But despite this spectrality and disembodiedness, Pamuk is keen on providing minute photographic descriptions of his scenes in a realist vein. He is, in this sense, like the ancient miniaturists described in *Red*. These miniaturists were attentive to all miniscule details including the curve of the nostrils of the horses they drew, to the gentle shade of the moon that caressed the still ponds on a star-spangled night. It is this quality that makes Pamuk's works such sumptuous visual treats.

A Magician of spectacles

In *Black*, Celâl describes himself as a "picturesque writer." (BB 40) This is equally true of Celâl's creator. For Pamuk, "Novels are essentially visual literary fictions." (N&S 92) He pays particular attention in creating a visual landscape à la realist writers and fills it with all the necessary details and colors. The fact that at least four of his titles have to do with color attests to his overwhelming interest in visual images:

A novel exerts its influence on us mostly by addressing our visual intelligence—our ability to see things in our mind's eye and to turn words into mental pictures...Writing a novel means visualizing images through someone else's words.

By "painting with words," I mean evoking a very clear and distinct image in the mind of the reader through the use of words. When I am writing a novel, sentence by sentence, word by word,...the first step is always the formation of a picture, an image in my mind...When I write a chapter, a scene, or a small tableau (you see that the vocabulary of painting comes naturally to me!), I first see it in detail in my mind's eye. (N&S 92-3)

Pamuk had initially aspired to be a painter, and his book *Other Colours* contains some of his stray drawings. It was at the age of twenty-two that he gave up on this ambition and turned to writing. (OC 361) But for Pamuk, writing has always been “seeing the world with words.”

All his works testify to his interest in visuality. Entering them is like entering a new landscape, not unlike the experience Osman had upon reading the book “The New Life” in the novel of the same title. Osman felt light suddenly pouring in from the pages of the book and filling his whole being with supernatural radiance. It was a baffling, dazzling experience as he felt himself transported into a new realm. The whole book is saturated with images of light and the surfeit of light triggers a blinding effect on the reader. In *Red* too, light and colors are overriding motifs but they have been ingeniously counterpoised against the melancholic tale that the novel narrates and creates no jarring effect on the reader, unlike *Life*. The novel whose focus is painters and painting marks the apogee of Pamuk’s firm belief in the novel’s visual orientation. The story, based in 16th century Turkey, uses the legend of Husrev and Shirin as its narrative frame. In the legend, Shirin falls in love with Husrev after watching his portrait painted by the legendary artist Shapour. The first meeting of the lovers takes place beside a pond in which Shirin is bathing naked against the background of a sparkling red moon. Countless painters have depicted this scenery, the novel informs us, endowing it with unique personal touches; in all of them light and joy form the most abiding motifs.

Red, which uses this legendary story to narrate Black’s affair with Shekure, is suffused with verbal radiance. The following lines, describing Shekure gazing at Black after his long absence, provides a brilliant example:

[Shekure’s lines]

Having exposed my face to him, I remained for a while there at the window, showered in the crimson hue of the evening sun, and gazed in awe at the garden bathed in reddish-orange light, until I felt the chill of the evening air. (49)

[Black’s lines]

The snow began to fall at a late hour and continued till dawn. I spent the night reading Shekure’s letter again and again. I paced in the empty room of the empty house, occasionally leaning toward the candlestick; in the flickering light of the dim candle, I watched the tense quivering of my beloved’s angry letters, the somersaults they turned trying to deceive me

and their hip-swinging right-to-left progression. Abruptly, those shutters would open before my eyes, and my beloved's face and her sorrowful smile would appear. And when I saw her real face, I forgot all those other faces whose sour-cherry mouths had increasingly matured and ripened in my imagination. (61-2)

These passages attest to Pamuk's ability to conjure up visual scenes. The first passage spoken by Shekure evokes a canvas full of colors suggestive of light and radiance. In Black's speech, the depiction of Shekur's handwriting, in which letters indulge in gentle hip-jerking and handsprings against dim candlelight, captures a scene of romantic realism. It is a minutely attentive mind that is simultaneously "naive" and "sentimental," at work in passages like this. This is also evident in the details Pamuk furnishes on everything including the color and patterns of the clothes he dresses his characters in and the pitch of the dog-barks that form the background chorus of the meticulously choreographed scenes. I have used the phrase "dresses in" deliberately because Pamuk is not a writer who allows his characters to appear on stage wearing whatever costumes they choose. On the choice of the dress in which we meet a stubborn Füsün taking her driving lessons, he observes:

Once when browsing in a second-hand shop, I found a dress in a bright fabric with orange roses and green leaves on it, and I decided it was just right for Füsün, the heroine of my novel. With the dress laid out before me, I proceeded to write the details of a scene in which Füsün is learning to drive while wearing that very dress. (*N&S* 121-22)

A novelist doing shopping for his characters' clothing is something unheard of; but that is vintage Pamuk. The same applies to the coat that Ka wears in *Snow*. The author repeatedly draws our attention to its grey, faded features, accentuating the spectrality of his character. Similarly *Black* describes how Rûya used to wear size seven shoes. These sartorial details are also in keeping with the mood and temper of the scenes. In the last suicidal scene in which Füsün meets with her death, she is no longer dressed in the bright fabric with orange roses. Instead, she is now in a red dress. This red gels well with the red in *My Name is Red*, wherein it is suggestive of death, desire and passion. (Since a detailed discussion of the use of the "red" symbolism appears in the third chapter on *Red*, I shall not elaborate upon it here).

While a harsh ruddiness pervades *Red*, it is white that serves as the anchoring motif in *Snow*. The white in *Snow* suggests death, spectrality, the ennui and inertia that characterize life in the ghostly town Kars, with