



Meetings of East and West: Orhan Pamuk's Istanbulite Perspective

Aylin Bayrakceken & Don Randall

To cite this article: Aylin Bayrakceken & Don Randall (2005) Meetings of East and West: Orhan Pamuk's Istanbulite Perspective, Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 46:3, 191-204, DOI: [10.3200/CRIT.46.3.191-204](https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.46.3.191-204)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.46.3.191-204>



Published online: 07 Aug 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 338



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Meetings of East and West: Orhan Pamuk's Istanbulite Perspective

AYLIN BAYRAKCEKEN AND DON RANDALL

Star columnist Jelal Salik, a principal character of Pamuk's *Kara Kitap* (1990; *The Black Book* 1993), "never stir[s] outside of Istanbul" (83). Not merely an "urbanite," he is, irremediably, an Istanbulite (in much the same way as the Woody Allen persona of Allen's middle period films—most notably, *Manhattan*—is a Manhattanite), a curious tidal-pool creature, open to the flows of the larger world's influences but always experiencing these in relation to a very specific immediate environment. To suggest Jelal as a Pamuk persona would be a misreading, and yet the character, along with certain others, clearly serves to present an aspect of the authorial personality. Born in Istanbul in 1952, educated there, still living there, Pamuk is very much an Istanbulite and one, like his Jelal, who has made it his business to write his city. In so doing, Pamuk portrays an extremely localized creative consciousness. With respect to the contemporary critical and theoretical concerns of Anglophone scholarship in the humanities, this localization of imagination enables a re-evaluation of the understanding of East-West relations.

Pamuk has emphasized the specific perspectives of his place, noting that his home is on the European side of the Bosphorus, but from his window he looks out, across the narrow band of water, on Asia. Similarly, he has celebrated the view from the middle of Bosphorus Bridge, the bridge between the two continents, noting that it situates the viewer neither in Europe nor Asia, yet connects him with both—a unique perspective that Istanbul brings to Turkish culture (Pamuk, "Turkey"). This envisioning of the Istanbulite's particular experience of contemporary cultural actuality is amply represented in the fictions making up the core of Pamuk's career to date. *Beyaz Kale* (1985; *The White Castle* 1990), which first established Pamuk as a writer of international importance, and the

subsequent novels *The Black Book* and *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (1998; *My Name is Red* 2001) all place Istanbul at the center of their fictive worlds; all three, in their different ways, also stage aspects of the East-West encounter.

Concerning Pamuk's sense of Istanbul as a cultural location disrupting established paradigms of East-West relations, *The White Castle* stands as a thesis text; a clear, economical outlining of the author's position, it takes shape as a series of identity experiments. Pamuk, while gaining ever-increasing reputation and popularity in the English-speaking world, particularly in the United States, has received quite ample consideration as a postmodernist. Indeed, the main thrust of Anglophone-world commentary, and of criticism produced in Turkey, has been the characterization and evaluation of Pamuk's postmodernism. (See Andrews for a lengthy, multifaceted engagement.) The author has also been acknowledged as an examiner of East-West questions; reviewers have noted Pamuk's concern with "the clash and cross-fertilization of East and West" (Schwartz 23) or with "the difference between East and West, between the preservation of a multilayered past and a tear-down, throwaway culture" (Innes 425). With the appearance, in English translation, of *The Black Book* and *My Name is Red*, the central importance of Istanbul in the author's imaginary landscape has also received some attention but no extensive analysis. John Updike, in his high-profile review of *My Name is Red*—a review that, despite its expressed reservations, does much to confirm and consolidate Pamuk's arrival in the Anglophone world—briefly observes that *The Black Book* is "saturated in details of Istanbul" (92). Andrew Finkel observes that, in Pamuk's oeuvre, "there are certain subjects that recur, most notably the city of Istanbul itself" (see also Freely, Mannes-Abbott). What must be emphasized, however, is the close link between Pamuk's particular envisioning of Istanbul and his treatment of East-West questions, a link largely unremarked and undeveloped in critical commentary. Moreover, *The White Castle* has not been examined in detail as an Istanbul-centered text—nor as the text that effectively founds Pamuk's Istanbul-centered writing of East-West encounter.

Significantly, *The White Castle* is a framed narrative and thus a doubled text, one that inscribes at the level of structure and enunciation the duality or doubleness so essential to Pamuk's vision. The novel opens with a disillusioned scholar's discovery of an alluring manuscript in "the dump that even the young governor dared not call an 'archive'" (9). This scholar, also the frame narrator, embodies the problem of contemporary Turkish identity, as is strongly evidenced by his name, Faruk Darvinoglu. Faruk, the very traditional Eastern and Islamic personal name, designates someone "who discriminates between right and wrong"; it originates as a title of distinction "given to the caliph Omar" (*Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary*). It combines rather uneasily with a Western-oriented surname meaning "Darwin's son" ("Darwin Oğlu": Gökner 116). This naming evokes the troubling "evolution" of Turkish identity and culture, an imperative movement away from a deep-seated Ottoman and Islamic past toward the projected modernization-through-Westernization of postrepublican Turkey.

While translating the manuscript from Ottoman into contemporary Turkish, Darvinoglu develops a peculiar and noteworthy work process: “after reading a couple of sentences from the manuscript I kept on one table, I’d go to another table in the other room where I kept my papers and try to narrate in today’s idiom the sense of what remained in my mind” (12). This process is experiential, one may say organic; it is driven by the unconsciously selected siftings of memory and not by disciplined analysis. The novel thus, at the outset, stages identity-forging as translation, translation as identity-forging. By passing through the sieve of an individual consciousness, Eastern and Western influences, past and present, must discover their complex relationships.

In *The White Castle*’s main narrative, set in the seventeenth century, a young Italian scholar is taken prisoner by Turkish pirates while sailing from Venice to Naples. Once in Istanbul the captive, also the tale’s first-person narrator, falls into the custody of Hoja (“the Teacher”), an uncanny double very much in the manner of Poe. In the following years, the slave instructs the master on science and technology, at the same time undergoing an intensive initiation into Ottoman society. However, a more intimate game of mutual self-revelation ensues, and ultimately Hoja and his slave exchange identities. The Turk escapes to Venice, where he reportedly builds a successful late-life career as a scholar and writer; the erstwhile Italian, after concluding a distinguished career as imperial astrologist, retires from Ottoman court politics and lives in relative seclusion in Gebze, a small community near Istanbul. In Gebze, now absorbed by the Istanbul’s twentieth-century expansion, Darvinoglu finds his manuscript.

Even as Gebze has been absorbed, so too has the story it produces. Both are inscribed within the larger context of the city and its diversified history. As Darvinoglu soon learns, the narrative he has discovered, despite its seemingly extraordinary situations, is one of the city’s fairly ordinary products: “A professor friend, returning the manuscript he’d thumbed through at my insistence, said that in the old wooden houses on the back streets of Istanbul there were tens of thousands of manuscripts filled with stories of this kind” (11). The extraordinary, yet ordinary, story that makes up the bulk of Pamuk’s novel is thus to be understood as a representative tale of Pamuk’s city.

As we suggested earlier, a series of identity experiments structures *The White Castle*’s main narrative. These experiments begin as soon as the two main characters, the doubles, meet. Writing provides the first major point of focus. Troubled, though only at this point half-consciously, by his close resemblance to his slave, Hoja institutes double sessions of writing that situate the two writers, Ottoman master and Italian slave, facing each other on two sides of a table. The writing experiments arise from Hoja’s casually posed question, “Why am I what I am?” (58), and the compositions come to bear, despite the anxiety that marks them, the confident title, “Why I Am What I Am” (64, 65). The structure of the writing sessions casts immediate doubt on the confident tone, by demonstrating that the writing of self is not, and cannot be, a reassuringly singular, self-sover-

eign exercise and, perhaps more crucially, by recalling Darvinoglu's troubled attempt to write toward a sense of self in distinct moments and separate spaces. Indeed, Hoja finds himself drawn into his displaced slave's project of self-constitution, which itself exactly parallels that of the disillusioned, late-twentieth-century Turkish scholar. "I recollect my memories," the Italian narrates, "and try to invent a past for myself" (41). One must suspect, then, that if the recollection of the past is a matter of invention, so too is the work of identity formation. Moreover, if identity is an invention, it is susceptible—as the doubles learn—to reinvention.

At the core of the novel is the crisis of plague in Istanbul, which strikes terror throughout the city and notably intensifies the play of identification between Hoja and the Italian slave. With plague fears now providing the main point of orientation for their view of themselves and each other, Turkish master and European slave undergo the first real breakdown of each one's claim to a distinct personal and cultural identity. A dual process of self-discovery and self-reinvention now takes shape as a dual loss of self, provoked for each character by the commanding appeal of the other.

Pamuk's narration of the plague crisis clearly reveals his awareness of the plague's importance in the emergence of modern systems of social organization, modern understandings of "the social body." As Michel Foucault argues in his groundbreaking *Discipline and Punish*, plague, or more precisely the plague-stricken city, serves to instigate the modern rationalization and disciplining of human communities. Stating simply the governing logic, Foucault writes, "Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis" (197). Mixture, of course, particularly the fatal mixture of plague, presents a powerful threat to individualized identity. At first this threat provokes a move toward differentiation, setting Pamuk's characters at odds. The slave advocates rational precautions, "shutting oneself up in one's house and severing relations with the outside"; Hoja asserts, contemptuously, that "disease was God's will, if a man was fated to die he would die" (72). Once Hoja and (indirectly) his slave are called upon to lead the struggle against the plague, the Italian's ideas eventually give rise to the application of various measures associated with the Foucauldian analysis: mapping plague manifestations in the city's districts, daily death counts, and policing social circulation. However, Hoja counters this initiative of analytical measurement and segregation by his on-going, unconstrained social engagement and his increasing will to touch, to press himself on, his unfortunate companion: "saying he'd touched each of the children at [his] school one by one, he stretched out his hands towards me; when he saw me balk, [. . .] he came closer and embraced me with glee" (73). This private version of the public drama of plague reaches its peak of intensity when Hoja, having gradually given in to the fear of death by contagion, discovers a "pustule" on his lower abdomen. Hoja now surrenders entirely to the enchantment of contagion—contagion that binds together, in a shared and irremediable fate, lives and bodies

once distinct. He forces the Italian to give in, physically and psychologically, to intimate contact, to mixture, to the fatal melding of their identities; presenting the pustule, the sign of plague, to the other, Hoja commands, "Touch it, will you! [. . .] Touch me!" (81).

Hoja is the first to give in to the collapsing of identity distinctions that the pressure of plague brings about, asserting, "Now I am like you [. . .]. I know your fear. I have become you!" (83). The Italian holds out, clinging desperately to some sense of separateness but repeatedly noting the weakening of his resolve. Significantly, at the end of the plague terror, with Hoja still triumphantly alive—the pustule, though an effective sign of plague, was not, it seems, its actual manifestation—the Italian's resistance finally gives way. Swallowed up by Istanbul's jubilant crowds, momentarily separated from Hoja but still seeing him, the Italian reflects: "I should be by his side, I was Hoja's very self! I had become separated from my real self and was seeing myself from the outside" (98). Clearly, the lesson of the plague is that the European and the Ottoman, once brought into intimate confrontation, cannot sustain their differences; each finds in the other what he has not been but needs to become.

The larger, public drama of the plague provides an illuminating new perspective on the private drama we have just been considering. First, one must recall that Hoja and his slave maintain distinct approaches to plague management. Neither gives in to the other on this point, but their positions coordinate in uncanny ways. The Italian subscribes to a version of the rational-analytical strategy documented by Foucault; Hoja, although he uses the Italian's findings, takes up the role of fabulist, obtaining the sultan's support by means of fantastic, prophetic (and deliberately mystifying) visions and tales. The plague, in pursuing its course, partially confirms both approaches but favors neither: the plague's evident abatement occurs more quickly than the Italian predicts, more slowly than Hoja optimistically foretells. Pamuk's plague—and here is the crucial point—is characterized most tellingly by randomness. Neither science nor story can account for its developments. This randomness, however, enables Istanbul to emerge as a city of unpredictable mixture. A map of the city is drawn up, and the city's districts seem to come into being as sites of contagion:

The plague was roving the city like an aimless vagabond, not a cunning devil. One day it took forty lives in the district of Aksaray, the next day struck Fatih, appeared suddenly on the other shore, in Tophane, Jihangir, and the following day when we looked again it had barely touched those places and after passing through Zeyrek entered our district overlooking the Golden Horn, taking twenty lives. (92–93)

Ultimately, the only tenable account of plague in Istanbul must locate it in the city's very life: "the plague roved in crowded market-places, in the bazaars where people cheated each other, the coffee-houses where they sat down close to each other and gossiped" (93). Thus, we ultimately understand that the identity drama

played out between Hoja and the Italian is symptomatic of life as it is experienced in their broader social and cultural environment— symptomatic, that is, of life in Istanbul. A site of confluence between Asia and Europe, multilingual, multiracial, and multireligious Istanbul obliges difference to rediscover itself as contingency.

At the center of the plague drama, and thus at the epicenter of the novel, Pamuk presents his version of the self-situating “mirror moment,” which Jacques Lacan’s work on “the mirror phase” has established as central to debates on identity formation. At first, the mirror experience yields quite predictable, conventional effects:

Squeezing the nape of my neck from both sides with his fingers, he pulled me towards him. “Come, let us look in the mirror together.” I looked, and [. . .] saw how much we resembled each other. I recalled how I’d been overwhelmed by this when I’d first seen him [. . .]. At that time I had seen someone I must be; and now I thought he too must be someone like me. The two of us were one person! This now seemed to me an obvious truth. (*The White Castle* 82)

The Italian’s experience turns on his recognition of the image as a representation of the self and his consequent identification with the image. The doubling of self-image does not, at first glance, perturb the Italian’s inclination to identify. Yet Hoja’s intention is to perturb, to unsettle; for this reason the dual encounter with the mirror is constrained—by the fingers at the nape of the neck that fix the gaze. Promptly, anxiety and resistance arise, which Hoja works to augment rather than to dispel:

It was as if I were bound fast, my hands tied, unable to budge. I made a movement to save myself, as if to verify that I was myself. I quickly ran my hands through my hair. But he imitated my gesture and did it perfectly, without disturbing the symmetry of the mirror image at all. He also imitated my look, the attitude of my head, he mimicked my terror that I could not endure to see in the mirror but from which, transfixed by fear, I could not tear my eyes away [. . .]. (82–83)

The mirror, once made to reflect cross-cultural identification, loses its capacity to reassure the viewer of singular, separate identity. Rather than providing a docile image, it obliges the viewer, despite inevitable resistance, to acknowledge the other, the intransigent and uncanny other, as the mainstay of any viable sense of self. Thus Pamuk’s text presses close to the core questions posed by Diana Fuss in *Identification Papers*, her book-length study of the psychic action of identification: “[H]ow is it that only through the other I can be myself, only in the place of the other I can arrive at a sense of self?” (4). Identification, Fuss suggests, entails not so much a consolidation of a secure, individualized sense of self but rather an othering of self. Stating this case more elaborately, Fuss writes that “[i]dentification is a process that keeps identity at a distance, that prevents iden-

tity from ever approximating the status of an ontological given, even as it makes possible the formation of an illusion of identity as immediate, secure, and totalizable"; "Identity," she concludes, "becomes problematic in and through the work of identification" (2). These findings are clearly verified in Pamuk's treatment: the potentially self-consolidating function of the imago, the mirrored image of self, is undone by the duality of the image both mirror-gazers confront. Less useful, however, for the analysis of Pamuk is Fuss's analysis of identification within the framework of postcolonial critique. As Fuss rightly points out, "identification has a history—a colonial history; and [. . .] this colonial history poses serious challenges for contemporary recuperations of a politics of identification" (141). Yet she goes on to invoke "Europe's voracious colonialist appetite" (a somewhat standardized and too-easy maneuver of late-twentieth-century postcolonial scholarship) and to affirm that "[i]dentification [. . .] is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self" (145). In Pamuk, Europe's supposedly defining "appetite" for power over the other is troubled at the level of basic structure: the Ottoman is the master and the European, far from being the empowered outsider-adventurer of much imperial literature, is the slave.

More crucially, Pamuk's scenes of identification are driven, affectively, by curiosity and envy¹ and are marked by repeated failure to dominate and appropriate the other as an identity-support. This failure in turn confirms each character's uneasy sense that he is constantly sliding toward the place, the locus, of the other. The will to depose and assimilate the other, which Fuss delineates, is present at various moments in both Ottoman and European, but neither is able to actualize this will. This particular working out of the identification experiment recalls that Pamuk's imagined situation is not properly speaking a matter of "encounter" but of long-standing contact, intimate engagement. As Sabah Salih observes, in Istanbul "East and West have for centuries engaged one another in prolonged and sustained encounters" (6). It may be productive, therefore, to supplement Fuss's contribution with Mary Louise Pratt's delineation of the "contact zone" and its processes of "transculturation," in and through which cultures and specifically acculturated individuals undergo mutual transformations. Following this lead, one may more clearly appreciate the Bosphorus region, and the city of Istanbul most specifically, as a site of exceptionally intense and long-standing cross-cultural interactions.

Imitation or mimicry is present as an aspect of the doubles' confrontation with the mirror, and mimicry's identity-disrupting power is already in evidence. However, the most important staging of mimicry occurs later in Pamuk's text, in the doubles' unsettling encounter at the Sultan's court with a clown-mimic. The Italian slave recounts:

This man resembled us neither in face nor form, he was short and fat, and his dress completely different, but when he began to speak I was shocked; it

was as if Hoja, not he were talking. Like Hoja, he'd lean towards the sovereign's ear as if whispering a secret, like Hoja he made his voice grow grave with a studied, thoughtful air when he discussed finer points, and suddenly, just like Hoja, he'd be swept up in the excitement of what he was saying, passionately wave his hands and arms in order to persuade his interlocutor and be left breathless [. . .]. When the sovereign asked him to impersonate someone who was half Hoja and half me, I was totally bewitched. Watching the man's movements I felt like saying, just as the sultan had, "This is me, and this is Hoja." (116)

Following its inauguration by Homi Bhabha in the 1980s, mimicry has become a well-established topic of postcolonial studies. In Pamuk's staging, however, mimicry manifests neither the subversive tactics of the dominated nor, more pertinently, the ambivalent, compromised desire of the dominant—the frenetic play, in Bhabha's terms, of "the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia" (91). Clearly, Pamuk acknowledges mimicry as a key feature of identity-forging in situations of cross-cultural encounter, but he puts aside Bhabha's ordering premise, the notion of mimicry's necessary imperfection, "its slippage, its excess, its difference," its production of "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha 86, emphasis in original). In Pamuk, although the clown's body and costume seem incompatible with his proposed roles, his performance is uncannily exact. Pamuk's innovation resides in part in this imagining of a thoroughly efficient mimicry, but more pertinently, more productively, in his staging of mimicry, or what one may call the *mimicking subject*, as a third term. As the above passage clearly shows, mimicry takes shape as a new, partial, yet strangely precise enactment of identity that stands, as it were, equidistant from both participants of cross-cultural encounter. The "mimic-man" is a role pertaining neither to the empowered subject (Hoja) nor to the subordinate (the Italian slave); the role represents a new possibility that arises, performatively, between the two.

Robert Young's contribution to the study of mimicry may therefore be instructive. Although it elaborates on the opposition of colonizer and colonized—which, as we have suggested, does not really capture Pamuk's sense of cross-cultural confrontation—Young's analysis nonetheless foregrounds the importance, in instances of mimicry, of "displaced image" and the distancing of "the familiar." "Thus the familiar," writes Young, "becomes uncannily transformed, the imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented, and the relation of power, if not altogether reversed, certainly begins to vacillate" (147). In Pamuk's scenes, mimicry unsettles power structure by presenting the site of a double transformation: both Hoja and the captive change; the master is no longer unambiguously the master, nor is the slave simply the slave. And if one returns to the scene of Hoja's mirror-mimicry, it is clear that the same understanding of mimicry is in place. The same uncanny exactness characterizes that performance, and the mimic is once again a third term. By mimicking to the mirror, Hoja situates a particular performance of identity in a new site, equidistant from himself and

his slave. The performance thus becomes, literally, a critical *reflection on* identity, and one that undermines any simple assumption of identity's given-ness.

The White Castle's final identity experiment, the campaign of war in Europe, drives home the point that the experiences of Hoja and his European slave are to be seen as individual enactments of larger cultural phenomena. Having ceded to the dissolution of his identity into the Italian other, Hoja, it seems, still feels driven to demonstrate that the experience is exceptional, particular—in short, individual (albeit *à deux*). Having become obsessed with spearheading a conquest of Europe, Hoja uses Western science, absorbed from his scholarly captive, to design and construct a huge, monstrously complex engine of war for the sultan. This new machinery of power, although intended generally to facilitate the conquest of European domains, is principally directed at taking a great white castle, the Doppio, a power center set deep in the heart of the European territories. In sight of the castle the great machine founders in a swamp. The siege and thus the sultan's campaign fail. Hoja and his slave now exchange identities definitively and thus take up the social consequences of what has been, until now, a matter of intense private experience.

The white castle, which the slave-narrator characterizes as “a beautiful and unattainable thing” (143), figuratively represents a unique, secure, autonomous identity, an identity purified of otherness. Clearly, too, its illusory appeal addresses collective rather than merely individual identity; it promises an idealized experience of cultural participation, which is desired, hoped for, and will answer for the individual, the bedeviling question “Why am I what I am?” and explain, in more fully social and symbolic terms, what selfhood is and means. As Keith Hitchins asserts, the white castle “represents the unattainable at all levels of human endeavor, whether an individual's quest for self-understanding or the confrontation between opposing civilizations” (764). Unhappily for the novel's protagonists, the illusory character of the castle's promise is already written in its name: “Doppio,” in Italian, means “double” or (worse still) “copy.”

The white castle's contrasting image within the text is the “black stain” (119), a description that characterizes Hoja's outlandish drawing, his evolving design for the war machine. Jale Parla rightly associates the black stain on white paper with “power, thinking black and white, discrimination” (96).² Yet this dark design, this black stain, is also, Hoja asserts, deeply “connected with the unknown inner landscape of our minds” (119). Thus, the aggressive assertion of cultural identity, manifest in attempted European conquest, needs to be understood as an extension, an outgrowth, of the deeply problematic mysteries of individual identity.

The full meaning of the black stain and the inaccessible white castle is written in the more minutely detailed record of the campaign. Empowered by the sultan, Hoja and his aides interrogate and torture the villagers to find out about their vices, their supposed secret sins. When the accounts of misdeeds prove unsatisfyingly ordinary, as they invariably do, the violence escalates:

The distasteful brutality grew more virulent and senseless with every passing day. In the beginning everything had been simpler; we had been like children playing [. . .]; each hour of interrogation was like a little skit [. . .]; but as time went by they turned into rituals that sapped all our will, our patience, our nerve, but which we somehow could not forgo. I saw villagers stupefied with horror at Hoja's questions and his incomprehensible rage; if they could have understood exactly what was being asked of them, perhaps they would have complied [. . .]. (134)

This passage and others like it are ordered, and often enunciated, in relation to a logic of "they" and "we" (a more precise statement of Parla's "thinking black and white"): Hoja strives "to prove what kind of men 'they,' and furthermore 'we,' were" (133); he repeatedly puts forward "the same old story of us and them" (141). As Edward Said observes in *Culture and Imperialism*, cross-cultural conflicts are typically marked by "the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when 'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best; 'they' were not like 'us,' and for that reason deserved to be ruled" (xi-xii). In Pamuk's novel, however, the violence Said denounces is clearly spurred by anxiety rather than arrogant confidence. What Hoja seeks are hidden instances of rich, radically individualized identity, which would be evidenced (in his understanding) by dark crimes, secret sins, or vices—by any antisocial actions of sufficient extremity to set an individual definitively apart from the norms of community. Success in his endeavor would assure Hoja and his morbidly fascinated slave that their own failures to maintain a sense of distinct, autonomous identity are peculiar to the two of them and not yet a challenge to foundational assumptions of fixed, unalterable cultural differences. The failure of the interrogations reveals, however, that the ultimate force of the campaign's narration is to demonstrate that the we-and-they paradigm is untenable. Stark manifestations of difference, although ruthlessly pursued, are never discovered. Indeed, when the interrogators "perform the same experiment in a Muslim village," they obtain "more or less the same confessions" and "the same stories" as in the Christian villages (135). The Italian slave arrives first at the conclusion to which Hoja, too, must come: "I knew now that many of the things I'd experienced for years as coincidence were inevitable" (143). Identity, thus, is recognized as inescapably contingent; the self is ineluctably susceptible to identification with its others, to the recognition that in otherness is the very stuff of selfhood. One only has an identity in community, and the composition of this community will determine, invariably, the shape of the self.

Crucially, the black stain and its eventual actualization, the war machine, originate and arise within Istanbul; the machine comes into being as "a terrifying apparition which all Istanbul talked about" (120). Life in Istanbul thus appears as having a dangerous potential to produce the most monstrous forms of intercultural aggression. In this, the dark side of the city's intense, diversified life is revealed. The city, whose history entails unceasing negotiations of multicultural

confluences and confrontations, breeds anxiety and potential hostility in its inhabitants precisely to the degree that it challenges myths about stable forms of personal and cultural identity. Yet the deconstructive challenge the city offers to such myths remains, in Pamuk's vision, its most valuable contribution to the contemporary experience and understanding of culture and cultural identity.³

As we initially asserted, *The White Castle* stands, within Pamuk's oeuvre, as a thesis text, one that provides a template for reading the subsequent Istanbul-centered fictions. Indeed, *The Black Book* and *My Name is Red* distinguish themselves mainly by intensifying focus on the Istanbul setting: the entire action of both novels takes place within the city. Yet the ordering principles of Pamuk's vision remain the same.⁴ Thus, it should come as no surprise that *The Black Book* opens with two of its main characters, both just emerging from sleep and dream, cloistered in a private room and yet in confrontation with the city's intrusive bustle: "The first sounds of the winter morning penetrated the room: carts passing by sporadically and old buses, the salep maker, who was in cahoots with the pastry man, banging his copper jugs up and down on the sidewalk, the whistle of the shill at the *dolmuş* stop" (3). The novel proceeds from this starting point to explore Istanbul's "impure, crossbred movements" of social forms (56). It stages the anxious sense of living another's dream; it announces the problem that "no one could ever be himself" (178), then pushes toward its tentative resolution: "the only way to be oneself is by becoming another or by losing one's way in another's tales" (399). If some of the Istanbulites' troubling dreams and stories are admittedly "imported from other countries" (196), others seem to arise directly out of "the enigma of the Bosphorus" (349). *The Black Book's* Istanbul, "a grand place, an incomprehensible place" (360), is unmistakably the site of curious encounters and mixtures, a place where one evaluates Bergson in relation to the Koran, where one measures Andre Gide and "the Arabian poet Abu Nuwas" each against the other (74).

My Name is Red follows *The Black Book* in offering an abundantly detailed account of Istanbul, its topography, its architecture, its everyday life. Like *The White Castle*, however, *My Name is Red* presents an Istanbul recovered from history, in this case from the late sixteenth century. The new novel's interpretation, therefore, requires once again the recognition of Pamuk's sense that Istanbul is not newly a place of mixture and cultural crossbreeding; it has been such a place for centuries. The new novel's main subject, miniaturist painting, is submitted to debate by working artists concerned with the propriety, or impropriety, attached to the various available modes of pictorial representation, both Eastern and Western. The narrative, which has in many aspects the form of a detective fiction, turns on the murder of one artist by another—or more specifically, on the violent erasure of the Western influences evident in the victim-artist's orientation and practice. Stating his case, the as-yet unidentified "murderer" affirms,

this is the Devil's work, not only because the art of perspective removes the painting from God's perspective and lowers it to the level of a street dog, but because your reliance on the methods of the Venetians as well as your min-

gling of our own established traditions with that of the infidels will strip us of our purity and reduce us to being their slaves. (160)

His interlocutor, who now risks becoming the new murder victim, replies, “Nothing is pure” (160). In this exchange, and in others like it, Pamuk acknowledges the commonplace understanding of “East” and “West” as distinct and opposed cultural formations; he acknowledges, also, the power struggle that arises when “East” and “West” become (as in *The White Castle*) a matter of “we” and “they.” The key inscription of Istanbulite perspective, however, comes with the simple assertion that nothing is pure. Miniaturist art, as practiced in Istanbul, includes a working awareness of perspectival practices elaborated by the Venetians or “Frankish masters” (138). Even the Eastern style, moreover, is not pure but represents an evolution, marked by migrations and conquests and variously sited in “Mongol-Chinese painting,” in the “workshops of Akbar Khan in Hindustan” (161), in Persian and Turkmen elaborations, and in master-styles originating in Isfahan, Herat, or Tabriz. The practices of miniaturism and the debates these engender are thus representative of the city’s more general life. These practices and debates recall others, which the novel also stages. To provide just one example, Pamuk’s numerous and avid coffee drinkers frequently discuss, in Istanbul’s sixteenth-century coffeehouses, the possible evils of coffee drinking and the offense it may offer to the tenets of Islam.

We may do well to return, finally, to Pamuk on the Bosphorus Bridge, between Europe and Asia, enjoying a vision that sustains his contact with both. On occasion, Pamuk has spoken critically about contemporary Turkey’s too hasty, often insufficiently critical move toward westernization, notably affirming, “That Turkey has two souls is not a sickness” (qtd. in Finkel). We need to stress that, in this opinion, Pamuk remains true to his view from the bridge. He does not see Turkey as an Eastern nation losing its soul to mistaken West-focused aspiration and identification. His understanding, on the contrary, puts forward an Istanbulite valorization of in-betweenness and East-West mixture. In this, precisely, resides Pamuk’s importance as a critic of Turkish society and as a contributor to debates on the legacies and contemporary meanings of cross-cultural relations. We should note, however, that one rightly finds in Pamuk a skeptical postmodernism (see Andrews) and not a residual or rejuvenated humanism. Pamuk’s potentially heartening understanding of the transformative potential in cross-cultural interactions emerges from darkness. His “individual” is marked by lack—of self-sovereignty, of self-knowledge—and also, with respect to experience and memory, by an unmanageably complex and shadowy richness. His “cultures” are presented as thickly detailed but inadequate formations that cannot provide coherent, foundational support to the individual’s sense of self. Commenting on *The White Castle*, Pamuk acknowledges that the relationship of Ottoman master and European slave is marked by “violence, hatred, and an intense sado-masochistic aspect” (*Öteki Renkler* 135). Their transformative impact on each

other is in no way a matter of good will, nor does it arise from recognition of the validity of the other's sense of self. Pamuk's individual characters, and by extension the cultural constructions he stages, are driven by need, the need to seek completeness and coherence in the field of otherness. Countering Kipling's "East is East, West is West," Pamuk states that "East should not be East and West should not be West" (*Öteki Renkler* 135). He also affirms that literature needs to combine Eastern and Western elements and thus create "a new third voice" (*Öteki Renkler* 338). Curiously, it is on a pessimistic—or perhaps we should say, potentially discouraging—footing that Pamuk sustains his Istanbulite view from the bridge, his ultimately encouraging belief that cultural formations, and the individuals inhabiting them, can and do interact and transform each other.

BILKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA, TURKEY

NOTES

1. The dynamic of curiosity and envy is slightly obscured in the novel's English translation, which speaks, for example, of Hoja as a "curious man" who looks upon his double with "probing eyes" (29). Pamuk's Turkish text delineates a "meraklı adam" (curious man) with "kıskanç gözler" (envious eyes) (29).

2. Here and in subsequent citations of Turkish-language sources, the translation is ours. Page numbers refer to the original Turkish text.

3. The color-coding of Pamuk's organizing contrast—between a *black* stain and a *white* castle—suggests the possibility of a deconstructive writing of race ideology. We have not explored this possibility because such an interpretation is not supported by other developments elsewhere in the novel. Indeed, one may criticize Pamuk for failing to engage with the history of racialized encodings of East-West relations. However, it should be noted that the generative core of his narrative resides in the notion of an Italian and an Ottoman Turk who look exactly, or almost exactly, alike. The story is designed to explore differences as matters of individual psychology and acculturation, and it shows, moreover, that even these differences are difficult to sustain in the face of prolonged, intimate interaction.

4. Given that our writing orders itself in part on a sense that Pamuk has produced three novels making up a kind of Istanbul cycle, we should briefly note that the latest novel, *Kar* (2002; *Snow* 2004), does not represent an addition to the cycle. *Kar* treats Istanbul only briefly, setting most of its narrative in Frankfurt and in Kars, a small city in eastern Turkey.

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Woody, dir. and perf. *Manhattan*. MGM/United Artists, 1979.
- Andrews, Walter G. "The Black Book and Black Boxes: Orhan Pamuk's *Kara Kitap*." *Edebiyat: Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 11.1 (May 2000): 105–29.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Finkel, Andrew. "Orhan Pamuk." "Time.com" 154.10 (13 Sept. 1999). <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/intl/article/0,9171,1107990913-31005,00.html>>.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Freely, Maureen. "My Name is Red." Rev. of *My Name is Red*, by Orhan Pamuk. *New Statesman* 130.4552 (27 August 2001): 41–43.
- Fuss, Diana. *Identification Papers*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995.

- Gökna, Erdag. "Beyaz Kale'de Özdeşleşme Politikası." *Orhan Pamuk'u Anlamak*. Ed. Kılıç Engin. İstanbul: İletişim 1999. 115-31. ["Identification Politics in *The White Castle*." *Understanding Orhan Pamuk*.]
- Hitchins, Keith. "World Literature in Review: Turkish." Rev. of *The White Castle*, by Orhan Pamuk. *World Literature Today* 65.4 (Autumn 1991): 764.
- Innes, Charlotte. "İstanbul Expressed." Rev. of *The Black Book*, by Orhan Pamuk. *Nation* 260.12 (27 Mar. 1995): 425-28.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Mannes-Abbott, Guy. "Ancient and Modern: *The Black Book*." Rev. of *The Black Book*, by Orhan Pamuk. *New Statesman and Society* 8.360 (7 July 1995): 41.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *Benim Adım Kırmızı*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1998.
- . *Beyaz Kale*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1985.
- . *The Black Book*. Trans. Guneli Gun. 1990. New York, London: Harcourt, 1996.
- . *Kara Kitap*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1990.
- . *My Name is Red*. Trans. Erdağ M. Gökna. New York: Knopf, 2001.
- . *Öteki Renkler*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1999. [*Other Colors*.]
- . *Snow*. Trans. Maureen Freely. New York: Knopf, 2004.
- . "Turkey." <http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/Culture/Exhibitions/Writing_Frontiers/turkey.asp>.
- . *The White Castle*. Trans. Victoria Holbrook. 1990. New York: Vintage, 1998.
- Parla, Jale. "Roman ve Kimlik: *Beyaz Kale*." *Orhan Pamuk'u Anlamak*. Ed. Kılıç Engin. İstanbul: İletişim, 1999. 85-89. ["Novel and Identity: *The White Castle*." *Understanding Orhan Pamuk*.]
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary*. İstanbul: Sev Matbaacılık ve Yayıncılık A. Ş., 1998.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto, 1993.
- Salih, Sabah A. "East, West: Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*." *Notes-on-Contemporary-Literature* 31.5 (Nov. 2001): 6-7.
- Schwartz, Lynne Sharon. Review. "In the Beginning was the Book." *New Leader* 84.5 (Sept./Oct. 2001): 23-25.
- Udike, John. "Murder in Miniature." Rev. of *My Name is Red*, by Orhan Pamuk. *The New Yorker* (3 Sept. 2001): 92-95.
- Young, Robert. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.