Chapter–III

Torn between Two Worlds: A Critique on the Traits of Ambivalence in Pamuk’s Characters

From Aristotle to Orhan Pamuk, a wide range of scholars, including philosophers, theorists, literary critics, and fiction writers, have registered their views regarding fictional entities. However, contemporary academic critics usually resist the urge to analyse the characters in fiction because they can’t succumb to the illusion that a character in a work of fiction is a person. They fear that treating characters as if they were real would lead to subjective readings. Therefore, there is really a scarcity of theories on fictional characters. Eminent narrative theorist Mieke Bal quite aptly puts it over in her renowned work Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. She says: “That no one has yet succeeded in constructing a complete and coherent theory of character is probably precisely because of this human aspect. The character is not a human being, but it resembles one” (80).

All existing theoretical perspectives on fictional characters can be broadly classified into two groups: theories that view characters as mimetic or representational and theories that regard characters as non-mimetic. Uri Margolin says:

All theoretical models of character divide into mimetic or representational (first formulated by Aristotle), treating characters as a human or human-like entity, and non-mimetic (e. g., Roland Barthes’s
model), reducing it to a text–grammatical, lexical, thematic or compositional unit. (52)

Of course, Aristotle is the first to formulate a mimetic model. In his Poetics, he articulates certain rules that could be effectively used to construct appealing heroes in tragedies and comedies, and his theoretical formulas express his mimetic bend because, according to him, the heroes of tragedies should emulate men better than average and the heroes of comedies should imitate men worse than average. However, in his Poetics, Aristotle places action above character. He says:

. . . tragedy is mimesis not of persons but of action and life; and happiness and unhappiness consist in action, and the goal is a certain kind of action, not a qualitative sate: it is in virtue of character that people have certain qualities, but through their actions that they are happy or reverse. (51)

Thus, for Aristotle, characters are primarily important as performers of actions and are subordinate to action itself.

In his well-known work Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster states that Aristotle’s concept of the character as subordinate to action is unacceptable to him. However E. M. Forster’s perspective regarding fictional characters is also essentially mimetic. He devotes two entire chapters in Aspects of the Novel for the fictional-world entities and, exposing his mimetic bend, he titles those chapters as “People.” He
says: “Since the actors in a story are usually human, it seemed convenient to entitle this aspect People” (33). “Homo Fictus” (41) is the species name that he provides to the fictional entities and he even lists the distinguishing features of Homo Fictus, which separate them from their allied species, Homo Sapiens. Even though the readers could know more about the fictional characters than about their own fellow creatures, the members of Homo Fictus are usually more elusive. They need little food and sleep, and are determined to be constantly engaged with human relationships.

In his second section on characters, E. M. Forster classifies fictional characters into two groups—flat and round. In spite of its limitations, his classification of characters is very popular. He says:

We may divide characters into flat and round.

Flat characters were called ‘humours’ in the sixteenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed around a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. (48)

Thus, a flat or static character is devoid of depth and life and can often be reduced to a type or even caricature capable of producing comic effect. Flat characters do not develop during the course of the action and they are characterized by a very limited
range of speech and action patterns. Absence of development and the restricted conferring of attributes upon them turn flat characters simple and this simplicity makes them memorable. A round or dynamic character is a complex multi-dimensional figure. Round characters hold within them many, often conflicting, traits and they develop during the course of the action. Undoubtedly, this classification is highly reductive and cannot encapsulate the wide range of characters in fiction.

Jonathan Culler, in his work *Structuralist Poetics*, articulates the general attitude of the structuralists towards fictional characters. Structuralists challenged the conventional notion that the most successful and enduring fictional characters are richly portrayed autonomous wholes with distinguishing physical and psychological characteristics. They argued that this prevalent conception of character is nothing but a myth. In structuralism, the prime emphasis is on interpersonal and conventional systems and therefore the structuralists were not ready to define characters in terms of psychological essences. Through various hypotheses, the proponents of structuralism had always attempted to establish the character as a “participant” and not as a “being.” Instead of spending their energy on the analysis of the conventional models of character used in different novels, the structuralists were primarily concerned to polish and enrich Vladimir Propp’s theory of the roles or functions that characters may assume. In his *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp identifies and lists seven roles put on by characters in the folktales: the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought for person and her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero. Propp never claimed
that this set of roles is universal. But, from Propp’s model, Greimas came to the conclusion that a limited number of actantial terms would suffice to account for the organization of a micro-universe and then he isolated a set of six universal roles or actants: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper and opponent. But Jonathan Culler is of the opinion that this model is completely inadequate because it is better to observe what a character does than fitting the characters into one of the finite number of prefigured slots, and Culler concludes that the structuralists can’t claim success in their treatment of characters as they paid least attention to this major aspect of the novel (Culler 269-278).

In *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction*, Jakob Lothe says that fiction is a linguistic construct and characters are a part of it. According to Lothe, the drawing of fictional characters is based more on the conventions of fiction writing than on real people. However, he doesn’t negate the possibility of having any connection between the fictional entities and historical people. His argument is that literature’s demand to dramatize, concentrate and intensify plot presentation, make fictional characters essentially different from real people. Therefore, the readers can’t expect from fictional beings what they expect from historical people (76).

William H. Gass is of the opinion that characters are the principal substances in a fiction, which hold everything together. Conferring undeniable primacy upon characters, Gass says:

Great character is the most obvious single mark of great
literature. . . A great character has an endless interest; its fascination never wanes. Indeed it is a commonplace to say so. Hamlet. Ahab. Julien Sorel. Madame Bovary. There is no end to their tragedy. Great literature is great because its characters are great, and characters are great when they are memorable. A simple formula. (269)

Explicitly rejecting Aristotle’s mimesis, Gass asserts that character is neither a mirror nor a window onto life. Characters are creations of language and they differ from real people as they are devoid of existence (268-276).

For the eminent theorist Seymour Chatman, the question concerning the priority of character/action in a narrative is meaningless. He says: “Stories only exist where both events and existents occur” (Story and Discourse 113). Unlike the formalists and structuralists, Chatman doesn’t like to see characters merely as parts of the textual design. He says: “A viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions” (Story and Discourse 119). According to him, characters can be reconstructed from the text by linking them to certain traits because characters are paradigms of traits. He says:

I argue . . . for a conception of character as a paradigm of traits; “trait” in the sense of “relatively stable or abiding personal quality,” recognizing that it may either unfold, that is, emerge earlier or later in the course of the story, or that may disappear and be replaced by another. (Story and Discourse 126)
Thus, a set of relatively stable qualities determines a character in a narrative fiction.

Hence, there are numerous conflicting views regarding the characters in fiction and therefore the concept of character in narrative fiction is highly problematic. As mentioned, mimetic theories liken characters to people whereas non-mimetic theories view characters as linguistic constructs confined to the textual realm. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in her *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* attempts to reconcile these diametrically opposite views as she likes to see characters as both persons and inextricable parts of an intricate textual design. She justifies her stance:

> I think it is, provided one realizes that the two extreme positions can be thought of as relating to different aspects of narrative fiction. In the text characters are nodes in the verbal design; in the story they are—by definition—non (or pre-) verbal abstractions, constructs. Although these constructs are by no means human beings in the literal sense of the word, they are partly modelled on the reader’s conception of people and in this they are person-like. (33)

Then she registers her opinion concerning the debate over the hierarchy between action and character in fiction. She says that action and character are interdependent and it is impossible to confer a fixed superiority upon either of them as their significance in fiction is relative to the types of narrative. Following Todorov, she says that in psychological narratives character predominates, whereas in apsychological narratives action takes the superior stand. She adds that the
domination of action/character in a narrative is also relative to the various and varying interests of the readers. She says:

Depending on the element on which the reader focuses his attention, he may at various points subsume the available information under different hierarchies. Thus characters may be subordinated to action when action is the centre of attention, but action can become subordinate to character as soon as the reader’s interest shifts to the latter. Different hierarchies may be established in different readings of the same text but also at different points within the same reading. (36)

Thus, both character and action are essential to narratives and the primacy that one may gain over the other depends upon the genre that the authors select and the taste of the readers.

Ferit Orhan Pamuk is the creator of innumerable unforgettable dynamic characters. The attempt in the chapter is to analyse and explicate the role played by the characters of the select novels—*The White Castle, The Black Book, The New Life, My Name Is Red* and *Snow*—in unravelling the Turkish cultural ambivalence. In the study, the characters are treated not like human beings but like human-like beings. Carrying an uncertain and ambiguous identity, Turkey exists in the geographical and cultural border between Asia and Europe and shows an ambivalent attitude towards the extreme fundamentalism of the East and the blasphemous radicalism of the West. Because of this disputable identity, Turkey has always remained the centre of the
East-West conflict. Orhan Pamuk’s novels explore the dilemmas of the inhabitants of his native country that is torn between the East and the West/tradition and modernity/the Ottoman Islamic past and the secular Republican present. The focus of the study is on a single character trait that almost all major characters of the select novels bear and that trait is ambivalence. The ambivalence of the characters, either explicitly or implicitly, points to the Turkish cultural ambivalence.

_The White Castle_, set in the second half of the seventeenth century in Ottoman Istanbul, is a doppelgänger fiction that portrays the relation between a master and his slave. As the novel is set in Ottoman Istanbul it can be presumed very easily that the master is an Easterner. To narrate the East-West conflict in Turkey and to expose its absurdity, the implied author deliberately selects a Western slave for his Eastern master and it can’t be far from truth in that context because during that time Turkish pirates used to conquer a lot of Western fleets to plunder them and to turn the travellers into slaves. Pamuk speaks about the conceptual evolution of _The White Castle_:

Later, I decided that my soothsayer would acquire his science from a “Westerner.” The slaves that came in shiploads from distant countries would serve my purposes perfectly. . . . I thought my master and an Italian slave would have a great deal to tell and teach each other; to give them time to talk, I put them together in a room in a city bathed in darkness. The affinity and the tension between this pair at once became
the book’s imaginative center. I discovered that master and slave looked much alike. Perhaps it was my analytical side taking over, but this was how I happened onto the idea of their being identical. (*Other Colours* 249)

The confrontation of the identical Eastern master and the Western slave is actually the confrontation of two cultures; two ways of thinking. When they meet first, they are similar only in appearance. But slowly the imaginary border between them disappears and the master and slave become complementary. Finally, they even switch over their identities.

As the study attempts to analyse the cultural ambivalence of the Turks, the Italian will remain outside its scope. The Eastern master is named after his grandfather. But he doesn’t like being called by that name. Therefore, everybody calls him Hoja. The word *hoja* in Turkish means “master” and this name suits him in two different senses—he is a master in a school and he is the master of the Italian slave. Due to the playful narration of the novel, it is impossible to ascertain the identity of the narrator. The narrator can be either the Turkish master or the Italian slave. Orhan Pamuk says: “I am still not sure if it was the Italian slave or the Ottoman master who wrote the manuscript of *The White Castle*” (*Other Colours* 250). However, the focalizer is the Italian slave because the story is told from his perspective. Therefore, the readers lack the inner thoughts and conflicts of Hoja. Nevertheless, the readers get a fair idea about Hoja and his ambivalent attitude to the Italian/the West from the
story told from the perspective of the Italian. Hoja’s intense affection and aversion to the Italian quite aptly represent the Turkish dilemma.

When the Italian sees Hoja first, it is hard for him to believe his eyes. He feels that someone is playing a trick on him because the similarity between them is so much striking and shocking. But Hoja seems unconcerned about this similarity until the mirror scene. Hoja’s initial reluctance to acknowledge his similarity with the Italian may have been generated from his knowledge that they are different in essence. Michael McGaha says in his text *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk: The Writer in His Novels*:

> What intrigues the master about his slave is not their supposed identity but rather what he perceives as a profound psychological difference between them—the key to the slave’s “westernness.” The master appears to be more intelligent than the slave, yet he always suspects that the slave is hiding some important secret from him. He desperately wants to understand the secret of the slave’s identity as a Westerner. He is convinced that “they” are somehow fundamentally different from “us,” but he just can’t manage to pin down the nature of that difference. (95)

What beguiles the Westerner is his external similarity with Hoja, whereas Hoja feels engrossed by the difference of the Italian that makes him distinct from the Turks.
When the Easterner and the Westerner meet first, the latter is one of the several slaves of Sadik pasha. Sadik pasha knows that the Italian has knowledge in several disciplines. Therefore, he commands the Italian to assist Hoja in the preparation of a marvellous firework to make a wedding ceremony unparalleled. During their stay together for the firework, the Italian is under the continuous scrutiny of Hoja. Hoja wants to learn about the Italian and the Western ways. But he remains hesitant to express his curiosity.

Later, Sadik pasha offers the Italian to Hoja as his slave. Then Hoja, the master, feels more confident and he commands the Italian to teach him everything that he knows. Even while learning from the Italian, he shows no respect to the Italian. The narrator who talks from the perspective of the Italian says:

So, like two dutiful students who work faithfully at their lessons even when the grown-ups are not at home listening through a cracked door, like two obedient brothers, we sat down to work. In the beginning I felt like the solicitous elder who agrees to review his old lessons so as to help his lazy little brother catch up; and Hoja behaved like a clever boy who tries to prove that the things his big brother knows are really not all that much. (*The White Castle* 23)

They are not just two individuals, but the representatives of two entirely different cultures. Hoja wants Western knowledge. But it is hard for him to bend his head before a Westerner to acquire it.
On many occasions in the novel, Hoja embodies the ambivalent spirit of his nation and feels both attraction and repulsion to the Venetian. For instance, the East-West conflict in Hoja comes to the forefront when both the master and the slave engage in finding out why are they what they are. The Italian thinks that he can find it out only by writing his own stories and he resorts to that method. When the Italian writes exaggerated versions of his own transgressions, Hoja behaves confused. The frankness with which the Italian writes about his past enchants and annoys Hoja. When the slave writes about the evil sides of his character, the master reads it with extreme curiosity and punishes his slave for being so evil. But later Hoja too attempts to write about his transgressions and behaves highly ambivalent: “During the next few hours I watched him slowly unravel: he’d write something critical about himself then tear it up without showing it to me, each time losing more of self-confidence and self-respect, but then he’d begin again, hoping to recover what he’d lost” (The White Castle 58). Hoja’s attempts remind the readers of the postcolonial concept called “mimicry.” He tries to mimic the Venetian but desperately fails. However, this mimicry is different from the usual postcolonial sense of the term, because here it is the master who attempts to mimic his slave. The mirror scene is also very important from this perspective. In the mirror scene, Hoja’s deliberate mimicry of the Italian is not far from mockery and it disturbs the Italian. This mimicry and mockery together expose the Turkish ambivalence towards Western culture.
When Hoja’s initial efforts to write like the Italian fail, he dismisses the Italian’s way of writing as an infidel’s disgusting game. However, later he again attempts to write like his slave. When the plague spreads in the city, they start writing again. The narrator who speaks from the perspective of the slave says: “And it was he who insisted we must sit down at the two ends of the table and write together. Now was the time to write why we were what we were” (The White Castle 63). Throughout the novel, an ambiguous mixture of deep attachment and detachment characterizes the relationship between the Eastern master and the Western slave.

When plague breaks out in the city, the Italian shares his scientific knowledge about the plague with his master. It is visible from the very beginning that Hoja is fond of Western knowledge. However, the plague reveals the fact that the Easterner in Hoja is still strong because he sticks to his own traditional belief that the plague is God’s will. In spite of the Italian’s innumerable warnings about the contagious nature of the disease, Hoja remains unwilling to adopt precautions. He goes to school even on the days of plague and exhibits his fearlessness before his slave. The Italian says:

Hoja had come back from the school, I sensed he was pleased when he saw how I was. I noticed that my fear increased his self-confidence and this made me uneasy. I wanted him to be rid of this vain pride in his fearlessness. Trying to check my agitation, I poured out all my medical and literary knowledge; I described what I remembered from the scenes of plague in Hippocrates, Thucydides and Boccacio, said it was believed
the disease was contagious, but this only made him more contemptuous—he didn’t fear the plague; disease was God’s will, if a man was fated to die he would die; for this reason it was useless to talk cowardly nonsense as I did about shutting oneself up in one’s house and severing relations with the outside or trying to escape from Istanbul. If it was written, so it would come to pass, death would find us. (*The White Castle* 61)

Here, Hoja sounds traditional. He speaks like a fatalist. Even while adoring Western knowledge, he shows reluctance to discard his cultural beliefs.

When Hoja persists with his traditional beliefs about the plague and death, his slave escapes from their abode to Heybeli Island. Meanwhile, the Sultan orders Hoja to make predictions about the plague. Then Hoja recognizes that he is ignorant about the plague and he becomes ready to accept the views of the Italian. He goes to the island and brings the Italian back. Together they devise a plan to overcome the plague and their plan becomes a success. Due to this success, the Sultan appoints Hoja as the Imperial Astrologer. After the withdrawal of the plague from the city, the Sultan goes to the Hagia Sophia Mosque for the Friday prayers. The entire city gathers to celebrate the end of the plague. The Imperial Astrologer, Hoja, is accompanying the Sultan. When the Italian, who stands within the crowd, looks at Hoja, he sees himself. He says: “. . . 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, just as in the nightmares I
often had” (*The White Castle* 86). Hoja succeeds in attaining his goal. He becomes the man of his dreams. From this moment onwards, most of the time, Hoja ignores the Italian because he, quite correctly, feels that he is a better Westerner than his slave. Finally, he exchanges his identity with that of his slave and goes to Italy.

The relationship between the Ottoman master and the Italian slave can be read as an allegorical portrayal of the conflicts between the two selves that most of the Turks carry within them—the Eastern and the Western selves. McGaha says: “The novel occasionally even hints that the narrator may in fact be Hoja, and that the slave double was just a figment of his imagination . . .” (92). In this respect, the novel can be compared with Dostoevsky’s *The Double* in which the protagonist Mr. Golyadkin often feels the presence of his double/other. Actually, Mr. Golyadkin’s double is a manifestation of his own troubled psyche. In the unique cultural context of Turkey, the theme of doubles has a special significance. In an interview, Pamuk says:

“Then when I was doing interviews, thinking about the book in an international context, I realised that doubles are Turkey’s subject: 95% of Turks carry two spirits in themselves. International observers think there are the good guys—seculars, democrats, liberals—and the bad guys—nationalists, political Islamists, conservatives, pro-statists. No. In the average Turk, these two tendencies live together all the time. Every person is fighting within himself or herself, in a way. Or maybe, very
naively, carrying self-contradictory ideas.” (Interview by Aida Edemariam n.pag.)

Thus, the Eastern master and the Western slave can be considered the manifestations of the two selves of a Turk.

In order to write *The White Castle*, Pamuk read several books. One of the books that he read was Arthur Koestler’s *Sleepwalkers: A History of Man’s Changing Vision of the Universe* in which the author gives information about the relationship between Kepler and his confederate, Tycho Brahe. They were different in every respect and when they worked together there were frequent quarrels and half-hearted negotiations. The relationship between these great intellectuals may have influenced Pamuk while portraying his master and slave. More than that, Hoja carries another similarity with Kepler. Kepler was a famous scientific astronomer who looked down on Astrology. However, his employers forced him to produce astrological predictions and some of his initial predictions came true. In *The White Castle*, one of the major passions of Hoja is Astronomy and he presents his knowledge in Astronomy before the child Sultan. But the Sultan is too much a child to distinguish between Astronomy and Astrology and he expects forecasts from Hoja. Hoja’s opinion about Astrology is “prediction is buffoonery, but it can be well used to influence fools” (*The White Castle* 78). So he makes predictions to influence the Sultan and his successful predictions lead him to the prestigious chair of the Imperial Astrologer. Thus, adding
to the ambiguity in his character, he practises both science and pseudoscience simultaneously. Just like his nation, he too carries two conflicting selves within him.

Sadik pasha was the first master of the Italian. There were numerous slaves under the pasha. With his varied skills the Italian acquires the attention of the pasha. However, the pasha’s attitude towards the Italian is ambivalent. He has respect and affection for the Italian. But at the same time, it is impossible for him to look at an infidel without suspicion. When he feels shortness of breath, he secretly seeks the help of the Italian because he doesn’t want to offend his usual Ottoman doctors. This secret invitation to treat the pasha indicates pasha’s faith in Western knowledge. But when the Italian gives mint-flavoured green troches and cough-syrup to the pasha, he is afraid of being poisoned. Then the Italian swallows one of the troches along with the cough-syrup. The pasha takes the medicine only after that. This strange mixture of trust and mistrust towards the Westerner is a Turkish trait.

Later, Sadik pasha asks the Italian to assist Hoja in the preparation of a marvellous firework for a wedding celebration and Istanbul witnesses a firework of unprecedented excellence. From then onwards, the pasha persuades the Italian to adopt Islam. In spite of the several attempts of the pasha, the Italian remains adamant on his decision to pursue his own faith. Then the pasha stages an execution drama to threaten the Italian. But the Italian survives even that and the pasha behaves ambivalent to the Italian:
After letting me kiss the hem of his skirt, the pasha treated me gently; he said he loved me for not abandoning my faith to save my life, but a moment later he started to rant and rave, saying I was being stubborn for nothing, Islam was a superior religion, and so on. The more he chastised me the angrier he became; he had decided to punish me. He began to explain he’d made a promise to someone, I understood that this promise spared me sufferings I would otherwise have endured, and finally realized that the man to whom the promise had been made, an odd man judging from what he said, was Hoja. Then the pasha said abruptly that he had given me to Hoja as a present. I looked at him blankly; the pasha explained that I was now Hoja’s slave, he’d given Hoja a document, the power to make me freedman or not was now his, he would do whatever he liked with me from now on. The pasha left the room. (The White Castle 22)

It is a love-hate relationship. In the novel, the Italian is not just an individual. He is an embodiment of the Western culture; a representative of the whole Western intellectuals. Therefore, the pasha’s attitude towards the Italian can be read as his attitude towards the West.

The Sultan’s approach to the Westerner is also equally uncertain. During the four years, when Hoja engages himself completely in the weapon making, the Italian goes to the palace to fulfil the duties of Hoja. Throughout these years, the Sultan
keeps good rapport with the Italian. After the pathetic failure of the huge weapon, Hoja exchanges his identity with that of the Italian and goes to Venice. Later, whenever the Italian visits the Sultan as Hoja, the intelligent Sultan speaks about the Italian. The Sultan behaves as if he can’t forget the Italian. But it seems that, the Sultan knows very well that they have exchanged their identities. The Sultan’s discourses on the Italian are filled with ambivalence. He often asks “Hoja” to tell stories about the Italian, because he becomes happy hearing those tales. The narrator says:

Then the sovereign, pleased with my stories and the play of our memories which blossomed like flowers opening in the garden, would feel closer to me and speak of Him as though recalling an old friend who had betrayed us: he said it was good He had run away, for although he found Him amusing, he’d often lost patience with His impertinence and thought of having Him killed. He revealed some things that frightened me because I couldn’t quite tell which of us he was talking about, but he spoke with love, not with violence: there had been days when, unable to tolerate His self-ignorance, he feared he would have Him killed in anger–on that last night he had been on the point of calling the executioners! (The White Castle 135)
An odd combination of love and hatred makes the Sultan’s attitude to the Italian typically Turkish. Thus, all major characters in the novel show an ambivalent attitude towards the Italian/the West.

After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish Republic, Turkmen were relentlessly striving to establish a national identity for them. Orhan Pamuk’s *The Black Book* is an indirect exploration of the struggle for national identity that Turkey had endured through the twentieth century. Kürşad Ertuğrul, in his article “A Reading of the Turkish Novel: Three Ways of Constituting the “Turkish Modern,”” says:

The novel is a “black” depiction of Turkish society in the microcosm (or macrocosm) of Istanbul. It is a society encapsulated by a “national sadness.” People are overwhelmed by defeat, misery, loss of memory, and hopeless efforts to imitate “someone else.” (Pamuk suggests the impact of recent Turkish history, from a collapsed empire to a republic aiming to erase the memory of the past and establish a new, Westernized society.) However, they are caught at a standstill. They are not themselves and imitating “someone else.” Yet, they cannot become whom they emulate. They are trapped in repetitive acts of imitation.

(649)

In fact, none of the characters in the novel is content with his/her situation. Everybody wants to become someone else, but, at the same time, hates the idea of losing
himself/herself. This paradox is what all the major characters in the novel embody. Galip, the protagonist of the novel is not an exception.

From the very beginning of *The Black Book*, it can be perceived that Galip is totally under the influence of his cousin Celâl, a mysterious columnist. Like a Sufi who wants to become one with God, Galip wishes to become one with Celâl. When Galip’s wife abruptly disappears from his home, he guesses that she may have eloped with Celâl because Celâl is also missing. The missing of Rüya, Galip’s soul mate, can aptly be described as an unavoidable consequence of the missing of the soul itself, because Galip’s soul has always been with Celâl. Galip sets out on a long and arduous search for his wife Rüya. However, his tiresome wanderings through the streets of Istanbul apparently reveal the truth that his prime concern is not Rüya but Celâl—not his lost soul mate but his lost soul. Eventually, Galip moves into Celâl’s apartment and wears both Celâl’s clothes and identity. He sleeps in Celâl’s bed and answers phone calls meant for Celâl. He reads the narratives in Celâl’s room and recognizes that he is transforming into the hero of his dreams. Surprisingly, instead of feeling pleasure, he feels uneasiness. The narrator says: “By now, he felt so much like someone else that he was beginning to wish he didn’t (*The Black Book* 345). The longing for a new identity along with the fear of losing the existing identity is an inherent trait in all sensitive Turkmen.

In the novel, there is another ardent reader of Celâl who introduces himself as Mahir İkinci. He is more ambivalent than Galip. He has read all the columns of Celâl
and he remembers everything that Celâl has written. His soul mate too leaves him for Celâl and he wants to kill Celâl because he thinks that Celâl never allowed him to remain himself. He wants to end up the disturbing influence of Celâl. What makes him annoyed is the realization that Celâl is not “original”. He can’t tolerate the truth that what Celâl does is nothing but plagiarism. He feels himself a copy of someone who copies several others. He laments that it is the plight of all Turkmen. He says to Galip who is in the guise of Celâl:

... here’s what I think it is, just as you yourself have written, without knowing or understanding what it means: No one in this country can never be himself. To live in an oppressed, defeated country is to be someone else. I am someone else, therefore I am! But what if this person I want to become is himself someone else? This is the crux, the heart of the deception! (The Black Book 390)

From his words, it is discernible that Mahir İkinci can’t resist the “pull” of the writings of Celâl. But, at the same time, he hates being influenced by Celâl. As he is more baffled and troubled than Galip, he is not ready for any other negotiation than Celâl’s death. Mahir İkinci has some parallels with the hero of a column in the novel entitled “The Story of the Crown Prince” who destroys everything that prevents him from being himself. Of course, İkinci’s ambivalence is an allegorical portrayal of Turkey’s cultural ambivalence.
Belkis is another character in the novel who holds contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion towards someone whom she has always tried to imitate. During his search for Rüya and Celâl, Galip meets with a woman antique dealer, Belkis. Even though she was his classmate, he fails to recognize her and then she introduces herself as his classmate in middle school. Then she proceeds to relate how desperately she has desired to become Rüya throughout her life. Always, in her imagination, she has taken over the position of Rüya solely to become the object of Galip’s love and care. She says to Galip:

“... you were sitting at your desk pretending to read a book, I would pretend it wasn’t Rüya but me you were watching. On winter mornings, I’d see that happy girl next to you, who could cross the street without checking for traffic because you were there to do so for her, and I’d pretend it was me, not Rüya. Sometimes, on Saturday afternoons, I’d see you walking towards the Taksim dolmuş stop with some uncle who was making you laugh, and I’d imagine that you were taking me to Beyoğlu with you.” *(The Black Book 200)*

In this pursuit, Belkis looses herself and becomes an imitation of Rüya. Then Belkis confesses to Galip that while imitating Rüya she has always suffered shame and guilt, and hated herself intensely. She says: “My life was not real life but an imitation, and like all imitations I thought of myself as a wretched and pitiful creature, doomed to be forgotten” *(The Black Book 203)*. Even though Belkis fervently wants to become
Rüya, she is intelligent enough to know that imitating someone is like declaring herself inferior. Belkis’ attitude towards Rüya resembles the Turkish frame of mind towards the West.

The fear of losing oneself and becoming someone else is intense in the context of globalisation. The all engulfing mouth of Westernization gobbles and finishes local cultures. But in Turkey, this fear was there even before the advent of globalisation as this nation exists in between the East and the West, carrying an Eastern soul along with Western aspirations. This in-between position of Turkey has always generated anxieties of influence in Turkish people. Even though Turkey mostly exists in Asia, it is impossible to remain inert to the influence of Europe. The fear of getting influenced and becoming someone else is a recurring trait in Orhan Pamuk’s characters. The characters in The Black Book well-express this anxiety; especially, the prince in the column “The Story of the Crown Prince”. This column written by Galip in the guise of Celâl is an interesting exposition of the vulnerability of individual and national identity. The protagonist of the story, a prince called Osman Celâlettin Efendi, after thirty years of “childish” and “foolish” normal princely life, undergoes a striking revelation that the most important thing in life is being oneself. In order to keep away from the disturbing influences that prevent him from becoming himself, he leaves behind his palace, wife and children and resides in his hunting lodge. There he adopts different methods to silence the innumerable, eloquent and alien voices within him.
He philosophically asserts that if one fails to remain himself, he will cease to exist:

The Prince would tell him stories about kingdoms that had failed to be themselves and so vanished into nothingness, about whole races that had imitated others so assiduously they’d ceased to exist, about distant lands where people had forgotten who they were and had, as a consequence, been forgotten by all others too. He spoke of the Illyrians, who after struggling for two centuries to find a king strong enough to teach them to be themselves, had abandoned the world’s stage. . . . The nomads of Lapitia had, he said, been on the verge of setting down roots when they fell under the spell of the Aitipal people, with whom they traded; so completely did they emulate the Aitipal, that they themselves had soon ceased to exist. As Tabari’s *History* made abundantly clear, the Sassanids had suffered a similar fate because their last three rulers (Hormizd, Khosru, and Yazgard) had been so fascinated by the civilizations of the Byzantines, the Arabs, and the Hebrews that they had failed to be themselves for a single day. . . . *They all disappeared because they were unable to be themselves.* (*The Black Book* 435)

If all the people belonging to an ethnic group leave their traditional culture back to embrace another culture, along with their traditional culture, they will cease to exist, because after accepting another culture, they will never remain themselves. The Prince in “The Story of the Crown Prince” knows this fierce truth and until his death
struggles persistently to remain himself without ever completely becoming himself. The Prince’s pursuits connote the conservative Turks’ clamouring for cultural isolation which is, literally, quite impossible.

Another column in *The Black Book* entitled “I Must Be Myself” explores Celâl’s fear of being influenced and becoming someone else. This column begins with an epigraph from Patricia Highsmith’s *The Talented Mr. Repley*: “If you wanted to be cheerful, or melancholic, or wistful, or thoughtful, or courteous, you simply had to act those things with every gesture” (*The Black Book* 178). But when one acts, he/she becomes someone else. In this column, Celâl Bey, the writer of the column describes an event in which one of his readers visits him to ask some serious questions that disturb the reader. Instead of clarifying his doubts, Celâl Bey behaves rude to the reader. He doesn’t appreciate his reader’s questions. Hiding his real views regarding his reader’s questions, Celâl tells some clever jokes with double entendres to amuse his wing of juniors. But later, in this column, Celâl says that one of the questions of the reader is of great contemporary relevance. The question is: “Is there a way a man can be only himself?” (*The Black Book* 179). Actually, being himself was a prime concern for Celâl from his childhood. He always intensely wished to remain himself and even instructed himself for that. He says:

*I must be myself*, I said over and over. I must forget these people buzzing inside my head, I must forget their voices, their smells, their demands, their love, their hate, and be myself, *I must be myself*, I told
myself, as I gazed down at the legs resting so happily on the stool, and I
told myself again as I looked up to watch the smoke I’d blown up to the
ceiling; I must be myself, because if I failed to be myself, I became the
person they wanted me to be, and I can’t bear the person they want me
to be; if I had to be that insufferable person, I’d rather be nothing at all.

(The Black Book 181)

The vehemence with which he asserts his intention to remain himself indicates his
anxiety of influence along with the fear of becoming someone else. But in reality, in
spite of all his attempts to remain himself, he fails to do so most of the time. He
mentions several instances in which he pretended like someone else. Finally, to the
readers’ surprise, he confesses one more secret that Celâl Bey, the columnist is only
an artificial face of the real Celâl Bey. While cutting his hair in a barbershop, he says:

Oh, how I hated this columnist who thought he knew everything, who
knew even when and what he didn’t know, who had learned to turn even
his defects and shortcomings into clever little jokes! How I hated this
barber whose every question made me more like “Celâl Bey the
columnist”! (The Black Book 183)

Celâl Bey’s columns are highly intertextual. He imitates and even copies numerous
Eastern and Western writers. Thus, in The Black Book, the major characters exhibit
the trait of ambivalence by simultaneously wishing and hating the idea of becoming
someone else. The novel also focuses on the anxiety of influence which is inherent in Turks due to the in-between position of their country.

As in *The White Castle* and *The Black Book*, there are only few major characters in *The New Life*: three students—Osman, Janan and Mehmet—and a retired lawyer, Dr. Fine. The protagonist of the novel, Osman, is a twenty-two year old civil engineering university student in Istanbul. He reads a mysterious banned text and finds himself alienated from his family and society. The name of this text within the text, which offers a Utopian world and a new life for its readers, is also *The New Life*. Osman reads this text after seeing it in the hands of another student, the beautiful Janan. The word *janan* in Turkish means “soul mate”. Throughout the novel, the text that transforms the life of its readers remains mysterious because the implied author of the novel never offers a glimpse of it. The readers of Pamuk’s novel are expected to infer the content of the text within the text by analysing the influence that it exerts on the readers within the novel. As Erdağ Göknar says in his text *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel*, the text within the text is both material and mystical (170). It is clear from the words of Osman. He says:

> The book lay on my table reflecting its light on my face, yet it seemed similar to the other familiar objects in the room. While I accepted with joy and wonder the possibility of a new life in the new world that lay before me, I was aware that the book which had changed my life so intensely was in fact something quite ordinary. (*The New Life* 4)
Hence, according to Osman, the book that emits light is quite mundane. Hinting the secular nature of the book, Osman says: “If the contents of the book were true, if life was indeed like what I read in the book, if such a world was possible, then it was impossible to understand why people needed to go to prayer . . .” (*The New Life* 14). However, adding to the confusion, it is discernible from the novel that the text within the text mentions about an angel who could guide people into the new world that it envisions. Thus, the text within the text is both secular and sacred and therefore bears an ambiguous identity.

When Osman reads the mysterious text that envisions and offers a new life, he feels that the text is too much powerful enough to change his whole life. 1970s was a period of social and political unrest in Turkey and during that period most of the Turks were dreaming of a new life and Osman wasn’t an exception. However, his initial attitude towards the text is highly ambivalent. He tells his narratees:

I sat at the table, turning the pages, my mind barely aware that I was reading, and my whole life was changing as I read the new words on each new page. I felt so unprepared for everything that was to befall me, and so helpless, that after a while I moved my face away instinctively as if to protect myself from the power that surged from the pages. It was with dread that I became aware of the complete transformation of the world around me, and I was overtaken by a feeling of loneliness I had never before experienced–as if I had been stranded in a country where I
knew neither the lay of the land nor the language and the customs. (*The New Life* 3-4)

If one wants a new life, he should be ready to discard his “old” life. Osman’s attempt to protect himself from the mystic light emitting from the text is obviously an attempt to hold back to his “old” life. Later, he also confesses that he feels guilty for reading a text that has separated him from his mother and the world in which she lives. Of course, he feels torn between his “old” life and the “new” life that the text offers. In the context of the Republic of Turkey, the “old” and the “new” can be read allegorically as traditional and modern/Islamic and secular/Eastern and Western.

Under the influence of the text, Janan leaves her life in search of the ideal world that the text envisages. A few days after her disappearance, Osman too sets out in search of Janan and the alluring new life that the text promises. Hence, Osman’s quest is both material and metaphysical, both profane and mystic, both Western and Eastern. Nevertheless, most of the time Janan evades the material stature to attain metaphysical heights because she is as elusive as Rüya in *The Black Book*. Moreover, she often gets the sacred hues of an angel.

When Osman sets out on his quest, he loses his “old” life before achieving the uncertain yet charming new life visualized by the text. Therefore, he goes through a state filled with existential angst, which can aptly be termed “neither here nor there.” This state or this quest is a threshold—a threshold between the old life and the new life. Another threshold frequently mentioned in the novel is accident spot. There are
numerous accident scenes in the novel as Osman enjoys watching accidents because he believes that accidents could offer him victims in between life and death (at the threshold), who could convey him some transcendental secrets. This threshold imagery is very significant in the Turkish context as it can metaphorically remind the readers of the in-between position of Turkey—in between the East and the West; in between tradition and modernity; in between Islam and secularism.

At an accident spot, Osman re-unites with Janan. The same accident brings another twist into the lives of Osman and Janan. It acts as a threshold into a new life. A dying couple at the accident scene, who have read the text, request Osman and Janan to assume their identity to attend a secret merchant convention, to be held at Güdül, organized by Dr. Fine. Earlier the husband and wife were ardent followers of the text. But, during his quest for the new life offered by the text, the husband recognizes that the new world that the text offers doesn’t exist. Then, he takes it his duty to avenge the text that has led his life astray. Therefore, the couple decide to attend the convention at Güdül as the convention is against the forces that attempt to derail the Turks. But the accident takes away their lives. Osman and Janan accept the final request of the couple and decide to attend the convention. Thus, Osman becomes Ali Kara and Janan becomes Efsun Kara.

As mentioned earlier, the chief organizer of the convention is Dr. Fine. During Osman’s and Janan’s stay at Dr. Fine’s home, they recognize that Mehmet, Janan’s boyfriend, is Dr. Fine’s son and his real name is Nahit. He was a medical student and
then somehow he read the mysterious text and left his life and family in search of the ideal life offered by the text. Due to a treacherous plan contrived and executed by Nahit during his quest, everybody thinks that Nahit is no more and he uses this opportunity to embrace another identity. He becomes Mehmet. Dr. Fine decides to avenge the text that has derailed the life of his son. He appoints some spies to gather information about the text and its readers, and the spies submit regular reports of their investigations. Osman reads those reports and recognizes that Janan and Nahit-Mehmet deliberately trapped him to the spell of the text. It is a shocking revelation for Osman and his approach to the text becomes more ambivalent. He wants to kill Nahit-Mehmet for leading his life astray. Moreover, Nahit-Mehmet is Osman’s rival for Janan’s affection. Osman uses the same reports to trace out his rival. But when he sees his opponent in front of him, he feels ambivalence. Osman says: “He threw his arms around me and kissed me on the cheeks. How delighted he had been to see me! How I hated him! Well, no, I liked him. But why should I like him? I meant to kill him” (The New Life 218). Osman feels both love and hatred to the one who has deflected him from the calm yet monotonous path of his “old” life. He feels confused and indecisive. He says:

I felt irritated with Janan for bringing herself to love him. But just glancing at his pensive and vulnerable shadow in the distance was enough to know Janan was right. How indecisive was this Osman, the protagonist of the book you are reading! And how pitiful! He knew in
the depths of his being that the man he wanted to hate was “right.” He also knew he couldn’t quite bring himself to kill him yet. I sat moping for a couple of hours on the dilapidated café chair, swinging my legs. . . . (The New Life 218-219)

Hence, Osman finds himself torn between love and hatred. He hates Nahit for cheating him with the illusory vision of a Utopian world and, at the same time, he loves Nahit for providing him at least with the hope of a new life for which he yearns for a long time. Finally, desperate Osman’s hatred triumphs and he kills Nahit inside an almost empty theatre. Thus, Osman was once an ardent lover of the text, who wished to pursue the text until the very end. But, later, he becomes a part of the conspiracy against the text and kills one of the ardent followers of the text.

After completing his mission, Osman comes back to Dr. Fine’s abode to find that Janan has left him. He returns to Istanbul, but never re-unites with Janan. When his pursuits to find out Janan fail, he pursues his studies, does his military service, marries and becomes a father. Two months after completing his military service, he reads the text again. To his surprise, the text doesn’t create any astounding impact on him. But, adding to the ambivalence in his character, thirteen years after his initial set of journeys in search of the new life promised by the text, Osman once again sets out on a series of journeys. However, his latter set of journeys is not in search of a new life, but in search of the manufacturer of the New Life caramels. The caramels are no longer available in Turkey. But Osman gets seven New Life brand caramels from the
widow of the author of the mysterious text. The trade mark of the New Life brand caramels is an angel and it is what intrigues Osman to start his second series of journeys. Eventually, Osman finds out Süreyya, the owner of the factory that made the New Life brand caramels. Nevertheless, he receives no information that he expects and wishes for. Erdağ Göknar says in his study *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel*: “In its final manifestation as an object, a sweet candy that quickly dissolves, the New Life becomes a metaphor for demystification” (180). The demystification makes Osman sad but also free. He says: “Now that I had no more hope and desire to attain the meaning and the unified reality of the world, the book, and my life, I found myself among fancy-free appearances that neither signified nor implied anything” (*The New Life* 287). Osman becomes ready to accept his life and he feels an intense longing for his home, wife and daughter. But, ironically, on his way back home, the bus he travels collides with two trucks to transport him instantly into a new world that he no longer wishes. The novel bears some traits of the bildungsroman. However, unlike classical bildungsroman novels, *The New Life* ends in a pessimistic note because the novel is set in a period of political and social dissatisfaction in Turkey. Really, the protagonist of the novel, Osman shares the predicament of his nation. Throughout the novel, just like his country, he is torn between two worlds—the real and the textual/the material and the metaphysical/the secular and the sacred.
Janan is the central female character in the novel. She bears some resemblances with Rüya, the major character of *The Black Book*. McGaha says: “Canan (Janan), like Rüya, is a vague, ethereal character” (126). Like the text within the text, Janan is a paradoxical combination of irreconcilables. She is physical and metaphysical; profane and sacred; real and illusory. As she is a combination of diametrically opposite traits, she is capable of producing confusion in the readers. But it is quite obvious that she herself is totally confused. She is as ambivalent as Osman. She leaves her family (symbolically her tradition) in search of the new life offered by the text. However, during her quest, she frequently telephones her home. Like her nation, it is impossible for her to forget the past in order to achieve an “ideal” future. Therefore, her quest becomes fruitless.

Another important character in *The New Life* is so complex that it is hard for the readers to specify him with a single signifier. In his “old” life, when he read the text for the first time, he was Nahit, a medical student. But the book drives him to the road in search of the all alluring realm envisaged within the pages of the book. During one of his innumerable bus trips an accident happens and his fellow traveller Mehmet dies. Mehmet’s body is so burned that it is impossible to identify it. Then Nahit takes Mehmet’s identity card and slips Nahit’s identity card into Mehmet’s pocket. Nahit becomes Mehmet. Later, when Nahit-Mehmet spreads the controversial text, one of the hired killers of Dr. Fine shoots at him. The bullet wounds him in the shoulder and
he disappears from Istanbul to live in the charming town of Viran Bağ as Osman. Therefore, it is hard for the readers to match him with a single name.

During his quest to attain the ideal realm portrayed within the mysterious text, Nahit recognizes that Uncle Rifki is the author of the text. Then, he interviews Uncle Rifki and becomes desperate, because the author imparts the shocking truth that the Utopian world that the text envisions exists only within the textual realm. At once, the frustrated reader shouts at the author. But slowly he comes to terms with the reality. He accepts the text as fiction and later even warns Osman never to search for the world depicted within the pages of the text. However, this character comes out a highly ambivalent and ambiguous figure when he lives at Viran Bağ as Osman. Even after recognizing that the text is pure fiction and that it has derailed the lives of many people, he copies the banned text word by word into notebooks and sells them. He justifies this act as his means of living. But his extreme devotion to the text is discernible from his words and deeds. He says what he does is not simple duplication, but re-writing of the text. He believes that he has devoted himself to a sacred cause and leads a disciplined life at Viran Bağ. But, dramatizing the “death of the author” concept, the original Osman kills the duplicate. In his text Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel, Erdağ Göknar says:

Osman and Mehmet, as reader and scribe/writer, are facets of each other. Their doubleness is emphasized by the fact that they assume each other’s identities in the plot (harkening back to a tactic Pamuk first used
in *The White Castle*). When Osman (the “reader”) assassinates Mehmet (the “scribe”), who is also a rival for Canan’s (Janan’s) affections, the “death of the author” trope is once again dramatized in the plot (as it is in *The Black Book* and *Snow*). (172)

Throughout the novel, Nahit is torn between reality and fiction as Turkey is torn between the East and the West. The three different phases in his life as Nahit, Mehmet and Osman remind the readers of the three major periods in Turkish history—the pre-Islamic, the Islamic and the secular.

Dr. Fine, Nahit’s father, is an unforgettable character. He is a retired lawyer and a businessman who lives in central Anatolia. The novel is set in the context of increasing globalization; a period of socio-cultural and economic transitions in Turkey. But the changes that Turkey witnesses are intolerable for conventional Dr. Fine. When Turkey begins to embrace Western ways of life and Western products, Dr. Fine blames the West for these changes and believes that everything that happens in Turkey is the result of a Great Conspiracy. In her essay entitled “On the Road or between the Pages: Seeking Life’s Answers,” Fran Hassencahl says:

Dr. Fine, the father of one of the students who left home in search of the new life promised in Uncle Rifki’s book, represents those who feel excluded and believe their world is changing because of uncontrolled external forces. These reactions can be attributed to the model of East
meets West or tradition meets modernity or postmodernity and globalization. (95)

As Dr. Fine wants to preserve Turkish culture, he is against Western cultural and commercial invasions into Turkey. Therefore, he keeps all Western products away from his shop. Initially, the readers will get the impression that Dr. Fine is a hard core traditionalist because he speaks like that. But, later, it becomes apparent that he too is not free from Turkish cultural ambivalence.

Dr. Fine believes that the text that derailed the lives of many young Turks is the product of a Great Conspiracy. Therefore, he organizes a counter-conspiracy against the book and its ideals. He appoints some secret agents to keep vigil on the readers of the text. In order to keep their identities confidential, Dr. Fine gives them code names. To the readers’ surprise, the code names that he confers upon his spies are the brand names of popular Western watches–Zenith, Movado, Omega, Serkisof and Seiko. These code names eloquently speak the truth that even Dr. Fine is not completely free from the influence of the West. Even though he hates West and Western products, he likes Western watches and pistols. He has a good collection of Western pistols at his home and he presents a German made Walther to Osman. Dr. Fine shoots a lot of reasons to justify his self-contradictory crush on Western watches and pistols. But his justifications are not strong enough to leave his ambivalence covered.
Uncle Rifki Ray is the author of the controversial text within the text. He was a co-worker of Osman’s father in the state railway. In Turkish his name means “Path of Goodness.” But, ironically, his text derails the lives of its readers. He had written several children’s books like *Peter and Pertev* and *Kamar Visits America*. His illustrated stories for children, published in the railway magazines, resemble American comic books such as *Tom Mix* and *The Lone Ranger*. The text within the text or Uncle Rifki Ray’s *The New Life* is an intertext of more than thirty-three books written by renowned Eastern and Western writers. So, his books promote cultural hybridity and he, like Orhan Pamuk, carries within him both an Easterner and a Westerner. Thus, the novel allegorically dramatizes the Republic’s intense desire to embrace a westernized new life and its inability to escape from the clutches of the old Ottoman Islamic life. Really, the characters in the novel are torn between the irresistible “new life” and the indomitable “old life”.

The original and exciting narrative strategies that Orhan Pamuk adopted in *My Name Is Red* contributed much to the world-wide acclaim and popularity of the novel. Both narration and focalization in *My Name Is Red* are multi-layered. In the first level, there is only one narrator and focalizer and that is Orhan. Both as narrator and focalizer Orhan is completely covert. Therefore, the second level is much more significant than the first and this level incorporates the voices of twenty narrators and the perspectives of twenty one focalizers. At the third level, there are much more narrators and focalizers. According to Mieke Bal: “If the focalizer coincides with the
character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The
readers watch with the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the
vision presented by that character” (“Focalization” 118-119). Thus, if a character gets
an opportunity to register his/her perspectives, that character is privileged. In My
Name Is Red all major characters get this opportunity and are privileged. However,
most of them attempt to use this opportunity for their personal benefits and thereby
become unreliable. Each character, along with his/her own traits, tries to expose the
traits of other characters and by that means participates in explicit auto and altero
characterizations. As the novel progresses through various perspectives and voices,
each character in this novel is developed through numerous perspectives and voices.
But these voices and perspectives are highly subjective with different ideological
orientations. Therefore, from different narrator-character focalizers the readers receive
entirely different views regarding each of the characters. Thus, the characterization in
My Name Is Red is highly complex. Nevertheless, all major characters in the novel,
except Master Osman, are similar in one respect. They are torn between the two
cultures that all Istanbulites are destined to confront.

Hüzün stricken Black is the protagonist of My Name Is Red. The novel begins
in the winter of 1591, when Black comes back to Istanbul after twelve years of self-
imposed exile. He is back in Istanbul on Uncle Enishte’s request as Uncle needs his
help to complete a “blasphemous” illuminated book that attempts to combine
incompatible Eastern and Western painting methods. During that time Western
Renaissance painting was having its heydays and it exerted its influence upon Ottoman artists. However, that was a period of extreme fundamentalism and Renaissance painting, especially portraiture, was against the ideologies of Islam. Therefore, when Uncle Enishte starts his project with the help of the four most talented master miniaturists in the Sultan’s workshop, rumours spread in Istanbul regarding the sacrilegious nature of the book and the master miniaturists become ambivalent. Suddenly, one of the master miniaturists disappears from the scene. This is the situation in which Uncle Enishte requests Black to return to Istanbul in the hope that he will help his Uncle to complete the book. Black is no more the impoverished immature youth who left Istanbul twelve years before. He is the only reliable narrator in the novel whom the readers can trust. Like Orhan Pamuk, he can accept both Eastern and Western ways. Orhan Pamuk says about Black/Kara in *Other Colours*:

> In every novel—no matter how much I resist it—there is a character whose thoughts, constitution and temperament are close to my own and who carries a number of my sorrows and uncertainties. Galip, the hero of *The Black Book*, is in this sense much like Kara in this novel. Kara is the character in *My Name Is Red* to whom I feel closest. I’d like to move beyond using such characters, but I can’t see the world without their lighting the way for me. They are the ones who make me feel as if I inhabit their world. Kara has bits of me in him. While other characters do too, Kara is more inclined to follow events from a distance. (268)
Really, Black is not much subjective and he can look at the events from a distance. Even though Black is free from prejudices, he too behaves ambivalent as he wants to support both Master Osman, the conventionalist, and Uncle Enishte, the proponent of Western Renaissance painting methods.

When Uncle Enishte vivaciously speaks about Western portraiture, Black feels attracted to it. He had endured the pain of not seeing his beloved Shekure for last twelve years. Therefore, he thinks: “Had I taken Shekure’s portrait with me, rendered in the style of the Venetian masters, I wouldn’t have felt such loss during my long travels . . .” (My Name Is Red 37). Then, he promises to support Uncle Enishte. But, later, he spends a lot of time with the Head Illuminator, Master Osman, inside the Sultan’s treasury. Then he comes to know about the passion with which Master Osman adores the art of miniature illustration and perceives Osman’s admiration towards the old masters of painting, especially Bizhad. Then he rebukes the master miniaturists–Butterfly, Stork and Olive–for deflecting from the traditional path of Islamic painting that their great master taught them to follow. He feels that Osman’s dearest disciples cheated their master for few extra gold coins. However, his attitude towards Master Osman is confusing. Osman’s unparalleled dedication to the art of miniature painting invokes admiration in Black. But, at the same time, he hates Osman for being an unjust master to his disciples. While talking with Black, the three master miniaturists easily perceive Black’s ambivalent attitude towards their master. Olive, the murderer, speaks about Butterfly and Stork: “They were terrified both of
Black’s closeness to Master Osman and his insolence toward him” (*My Name Is Red* 475).

Black blinds the murderer for leading Master Osman’s workshop into degradation. He says:

“After Master Osman understood that our Sultan wanted to have His own portrait made in the style of the European masters and that you all, whom he loved more than his own children, had betrayed him, he struck this needle into each of his eyes last night in the Treasury—in imitation of Bizhad. Now, if I were to blind you, the accursed man responsible for bringing to ruin the workshop Master Osman established at the expense of his entire life, what of it?” (*My Name Is Red* 474)

But, after some time, mounting the trait of ambivalence in his character, Black tells:

“Everybody also desires to have his portrait made, just as our Sultan did” (*My Name Is Red* 483). Thus, Black feels torn and confused between Uncle Enishte and Master Osman. He can neither resist the charms and possibilities of Western portraiture nor forget the conventional religion bound painting tradition of the miniaturists.

The major suspects in this murder mystery are the three master miniaturists in the Sultan’s workshop. All of them have very apt nicknames—Stork, Butterfly and Olive. Stork pays attention to every minute detail and his power of observation makes his name suitable. Unlike other miniaturists, he incorporates his individual
observations to his illustrations. In order to illustrate the *Book of Victories*, Stork participates in a real war and he eagerly observes enemy fortresses, canon, armies, bleeding wounds of horses, corpses and injured soldiers rolling in blood and pain. The only intention behind all these efforts is painting. Butterfly is attractive like an enchanting butterfly. The nickname of the villain is quite ironical. Olive is actually the emblem of peace. But the restless Olive in *My Name Is Red* is devoid of peace of mind and he never tries to extend an olive branch to keep the peace. Instead, he commits brutal murders.

A talented miniaturist does not possess an individual style, because according to the norms of miniature painting, individual style is nothing but a flaw or a deviation from perfection. But a workshop as a whole maintains a style. Echoing this principle, the master miniaturists narrate their portions following a unanimous style. This strategy adds to the curiosity of the reader as *My Name Is Red* is a murder mystery. McGaha says:

One of Pamuk’s most original techniques in *My Name Is Red*, however, was to portray the three miniaturists “Butterfly,” “Stork,” and “Olive”–who are the prime suspects in the murders of Elegant and Enişte–as practically indistinguishable from each other, just as miniature painters had given their subjects almost identical features. (153)

Therefore, reading this novel remains an exciting experience until the very end.
Greed for money and passion for painting and fame lead the master miniaturists to the unconventional painting endeavour of Uncle Enishte. They know that their art is on wane with the rise of the Western Renaissance painting. Hence, they fear that they will be forgotten soon along with their art. But it is tough for these skilled artists to resist the desire for immortality and so they participate in the painting “adventure” of Uncle Enishte in the hope that Uncle Enishte’s book will become a masterpiece to provide them with immortality. But their attempt to transcend the imminent fall into decline and oblivion becomes futile. Enishte’s project evokes harsh comments from the fundamentalists. Moreover, the master miniaturists suffer from pangs of conscience as they feel that they have cheated both their art and master. The presence of the extreme fundamentalist Nusret Hoja of Erzurum makes the situation worse. All these social and personal undercurrents pull these miniaturists into the pit of ambivalence.

The implied author of *My Name Is Red* expresses the ambivalence of these miniaturists through the portrayal of the disparity between their words and deeds. During his initial visit to the homes of these three master miniaturists, Black asks them certain questions regarding miniature painting. He questions Butterfly, Stork and Olive about “style and signature,” “painting and time” and “blindness and memory” respectively. Each of them replies him with three parables to illustrate the strictly traditional views that they present before Black. Really, Black’s conversations with
these master illustrators give an in depth insight into the ideologies and aesthetics of Islamic painting. Esra Almas says:

The discussions between Black and the miniaturists refer to parables and stories from the mosaic that constitutes the Islamic world: Turkish, Turkmen, Mongol, Arab, Indian, Chinese, and Persian thought, philosophy and art. In each conversation, characters recount stories from Islamic lore, legends, even fables to illustrate their point. Through these dialogues, we are introduced to a different way of seeing, to a world of masterpieces where meaning precedes form, word precedes image, and where style is considered a flaw. (81)

Even though these master miniaturists speak in terms with the traditional norms of Islamic painting, the readers can recognize that they are not what they speak because by contributing to the painting project of Uncle Enishte they have challenged all the ideologies of their art. Moreover, in his initial narrative, Butterfly tells his narratees in an aside that he speaks not what he thinks or believes, but what others expect him to speak.

Towards the end of the novel, when Black, Butterfly, Olive and Stork are together, they openly reveal some of their unconventional ideas. According to the norms of their art, miniaturists possess no right to illustrate the Holy Koran. But the master miniaturists express their intense desire to illustrate their favourite segments in the Koran. For instance, Stork says: “I’d want to paint Judgment Day”. . . . “The
resurrection of the dead, and the separation of the guilty from the innocent. Why is that we cannot depict the Sacred Word of our faith?” (My Name Is Red 463). It is indeed an extremely painful task for these talented artists to chain their skill with the fetters of some ideologies. Butterfly, who earlier identified individual style with imperfection, finally reveals his personal opinion. He says: “‘An artist should never succumb to hubris of any kind’ . . . “he should simply paint the way he sees fit rather than troubling over East or West” (My Name Is Red 488). Thus, these three master miniaturists are ambivalent as they find themselves torn between the clashing ideologies of Master Osman and Uncle Enishte/art and religion/the East and the West.

Out of the three master miniaturists, Olive is the most troubled figure. In the novel, he owns two narrative voices—the voice of Olive, the artist and the voice of Olive, the murderer. Olive, the murderer is the most ambivalent character in the novel. Most of the time, he speaks self-contradictory. After the brutal murder of his colleague, Elegant Efendi, whom he knows for the last twenty five years, Olive feels a divided self. He himself acknowledges it: “Now I am completely divided, just like those figures whose head and hands are drawn and painted by one master while their bodies and clothes are depicted by another” (My Name Is Red 119). Initially, the murderer tells his narratees that he feels no remorse for killing Elegant Efendi because Elegant deserves nothing less than death. Elegant was on the point of informing Nusret Hoja of Erzurum about the project of Uncle Enishte and that treachery might have taken the lives of many miniaturists. Thus, the murder of
Elegant saved the lives of many people and therefore the murderer asserts that he feels no remorse. But his behaviour speaks the other way round. After the murder, he becomes too restless to sit inside his home. At night, he wanders through the streets of Istanbul. On many occasions, his behaviour reminds the readers of Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov.

Olive’s attitude to Uncle Enishte is ambiguous because he loves and hates Enishte. He knows that the art of miniature painting is very much destined to decline. He loves Enishte because he thinks that his future as an artist is vested upon Uncle Enishte. Simultaneously, he can’t help hating Enishte for separating him from both the venerated Islamic painting tradition and the loving master. In his second narrative, Uncle Enishte tells that Olive is the one who shows a lot of faith in Enishte’s painting endeavour. But exposing the brutal face of ambivalence, the same Olive kills Uncle Enishte. Olive’s attitude towards his conventional master is equally uncertain. Olive tells that Uncle Enishte once forced Master Osman to imitate a Venetian painter called Sebastiano and that is the prime reason that has tempted him to kill Enishte. This confession displays his attachment to his master and this attachment makes him a more ambivalent figure since he himself has betrayed Master Osman by secretly painting for Uncle Enishte. Throughout the novel, Olive expresses discrepant views regarding Enishte’s book. For example, in his last narrative, Olive says:

“If you ask me, there was nothing damaging or sacrilegious in the book we were preparing . . . Since he [Uncle Enishte] was well aware of this,
he pretended that he was preparing a forbidden book and this gave him great satisfaction . . . Being involved in such a dangerous venture with the Sultan’s personal permission was as important to him as the pictures of the Frankish Masters. True, if we’d made a painting with the intent of exhibiting it, that would’ve been sacrilege. Yet in none of those pieces could I sense anything contrary to religion, any faithlessness, impiety or even the vaguest illicitness. . . .” (*My Name Is Red* 479)

These words imply that the master miniaturists haven’t committed any blasphemy by painting for Enishte’s book. But, after few minutes, contradicting his own arguments, Olive says to his colleagues: “Oh my brothers, we’ve made a grave mistake by betraying him [Master Osman]” (*My Name Is Red* 483).

During his last conversation with Uncle Enishte, the murderer curiously questions Enishte about the last picture because he has heard some rumours that the picture commits multiple transgressions. The picture adopts Western perspectival method. Therefore, it elevates human perspective and rejects the dispassionate point of view of Allah. The picture depicts the Sultan, the Caliph of Islam, in the same size in which a dog has been depicted. It also portrays Satan in a favourable light. However, the most important transgression is the incorporation of the Sultan’s portraiture at the centre of the picture with his face in all its details. The picture attempts to idolize Sultan’s image, which is strictly against Islam. The murderer tries to pretend before Uncle Enishte that he is not worried of these rumours. But all his
attempts to hide his anxiety fail as his words and deeds eloquently convey the fact that he is worried. After killing Enishte, the murderer finds out the last picture from Enishte’s home and leaves the scene. When he sees that the portrait of the Sultan is not yet made at the centre of the picture, he attempts to draw his own portrait there. When Black, Butterfly and Stork recognize that Olive is the murderer, Olive displays the final picture before them. He says:

In the centre of this world, where Our Sultan should’ve been, was my own portrait, which I briefly observed with pride. I was somewhat unsatisfied with it because after laboring in vain for days, looking into a mirror and erasing and reworking, I was unable to achieve a good resemblance; still, I felt unbridled elation because the picture not only situated me at the centre of a vast world, but for some unaccountable and diabolic reason, it made me appear more profound, complicated and mysterious than I actually was. I wanted only that my artist brethren recognize, understand and share in my exuberance. I was both the centre of everything, like a sultan or a king, and, at the same time, myself. (My Name Is Red 485)

Evidently, these words exhibit the murderer’s sense of pride for being at the centre of the picture. But, like a schizophrenic, he soon says: “I feel like the Devil not because I’ve murdered two men, but because my portrait has been made in this fashion . . .” (My Name Is Red 486). Thus the murderer is a strange mixture of fundamentalism and
subversiveness. Erdağ Göknar says in his article “Orhan Pamuk and the “Ottoman” Theme”: “The murderer has two victims: he kills one for being overly bound to Eastern tradition and one for being too slavish to Western innovation. Much like Pamuk himself, he tries to juxtapose, synthesize, or transcend both” (38). But, unlike Orhan Pamuk, Olive fails to attain a fine balance between the conflicting perspectives of the East and the West.

Elegant Effendi, the master gilder in the Sultan’s workshop, also participated in the “adventurous” painting project of Uncle Enishte. But, when the novel begins, he has been murdered. However, in the very first chapter itself, his corpse speaks to the narratees. Readers get more information about Elegant from the narratives of other characters; especially from the narratives of the murderer. Beyond doubt, Elegant was a gilder with unrivalled proficiency in painting and embellishing books. Even though he was ugly in appearance, his master called him “Elegant” because of the awe inspiring elegance of his gilding work. He was an earnest disciple of the brutal fundamentalist Nusret Hoja of Erzurum. When he recognized about the unorthodox nature of Enishte’s book, he felt himself guilty and was about to confess everything to the preacher, Hoja. Olive sensed the possibility of betrayal and gave Elegant a fake promise that he would give Elegant seventy-five Venetian gold coins to keep the information about the book a secret. Then, Olive led Elegant to a deserted place near a well and told a lie that twelve steps away, buried under the earth, he had kept seventy five gold coins inside a ceramic pickle jar. Olive says: “My old companion
apprentice, who’d grown greedier with each passing year, had already started excitemently counting off the twelve steps in the direction I indicated” (My Name Is Red 25). If Elegant was a firm believer, both in his religion and traditions, how could he compromise his beliefs for a few gold coins? Of course, this question brings out the trait of ambivalence in Elegant.

Uncle Enishte is one of the important characters in My Name Is Red. He is in charge of the secret book that integrates the conflicting painting strategies of the East and the West. As he has visited Venice as Sultan’s ambassador, he is familiar with Western portraits. When he sees an individual’s portrait in Venice for the first time, he becomes dumbfounded. He says to Black:

“I never forgot the painting that bewildered me so. I left the palazzo, returned to the house where I was staying as a guest and pondered the picture the entire night. I, too, wanted to be portrayed in this manner. But, no, that wasn’t appropriate, it was Our Sultan who ought to be thus portrayed! Our Sultan ought to be rendered along with everything He owned, with the things that represented and constituted His realm. I settled on the notion that a manuscript could be illustrated according to this idea.” (My Name Is Red 31)

Uncle Enishte’s attraction to and repulsion from the West are discernible from these words. When he sees the Venetian portrait, he wishes for a portrait of his own, but soon he categorizes the wish as “inappropriate” and suppresses it. Then, to settle the
dilemma, he presumes that the portrait of the Sultan can be made in the Western fashion. After his return to Istanbul, he acquires permission and finance from the Sultan to prepare a book that will combine Eastern and Western painting methods.

Until his death, Uncle Enishte never expresses any guilty feeling for engaging in the “blasphemous” painting endeavour. Whenever he speaks about Western Renaissance paintings, he conveys his warm approval and admiration. But, unexpectedly, Uncle Enishte narrates a chapter after his death. He recounts his experiences in heaven. When he reaches before the almighty, he feels remorse for adopting the Western ways of painting. He relates:

> My mounting joy and flowing tears were abruptly poisoned by a nagging doubt. Guilt-ridden and impatient in my uncertainty, I asked Him:

> “Over the last twenty years of my life, I have been influenced by the infidel illustrations that I saw in Venice. There was even a time when I wanted my own portrait painted in that method and style, but I was afraid. Instead, I later had Your World, Your Subjects and Our Sultan, Your Shadow on Earth, depicted in the manner of the infidel Franks.”

*(My Name Is Red 279)*

Thus, even while admiring Western portraits, there is a doubtful Easterner within Uncle Enishte.
Master Osman, the Head Illuminator of the Sultan’s atelier, has no ambivalence as he is a traditionalist who shows unwavering loyalty to the Islamic ways of painting. He thinks that the painting methods of the infidels are highly blasphemous. It is a tough task for him to witness the growing influence of Western Renaissance painting in his workshop. When he comes to know that all his favourite disciples and the Sultan have turned against their tradition, he blinds himself using the same plume needle that the most venerated miniaturist, Bizhad used to blind himself.

Sultan Murat III is also a character in the novel. Uncle Enishte asks for the Sultan’s permission to prepare a portrait of the Sultan. Then the Sultan behaves ambivalent. He knows that Islam is against portraiture as it may lead to idolatry. He too is strictly against idol worship. But he can’t resist Uncle Enishte’s stories about the all alluring Venetian portraits. So he takes a decision to satisfy both the Easterner and the Westerner within him. He grants permission to prepare his portrait in the Frankish style, but commands never to display it to avoid idolatry.

Of course, Shekure is the most memorable female character born out of Orhan Pamuk’s pen. McGaha says: “... Şeküre is the most vivid female character Orhan Pamuk has created” (151). However, her prime concern is not the East-West debate that goes on in the novel. Her active interest is in finding out a suitable father for her children. But after her father’s death, she takes it her duty to take initiative to complete the book and therefore she prompts Black, in vain, to finish the project. Like Black, she too can accept both Eastern and Western painting methods. At the end of
the novel, she confesses to her narratees that throughout her life she has secretly wished for two paintings. The first one is her own portrait. But she knows that the miniaturists in the Sultan’s workshop will never succeed in portraying her as she is. The second one is a picture of bliss, which portrays her along with her two children. She speaks about the picture of bliss:

I know quite well how this painting ought to be made. Imagine the picture of a mother with her two children; the younger one, whom she cradles in her arms, nursing him as she smiles, suckles happily at her bountiful breast, smiling as well. The eyes of the slightly jealous older brother and those of the mother should be locked. I’d like to be the mother in that picture. I’d want the bird in the sky to be depicted as if flying, and at the same time, happily and eternally suspended there, in the style of the old masters of Herat who were able to stop time. I know it’s not easy. *(My Name Is Red 503)*

From her description it is clear that the picture of bliss in her imagination could be made only by the fusion of Eastern and Western painting methods. Thus, she has two selves—an Eastern and a Western—within her to be satisfied.

One of the most significant characters in *My Name Is Red* is a storyteller who gives voice to an array of biotic and abiotic characters in front of the audience in a coffeehouse. The characters who come into life through his voice contribute a lot to the re-creation of the cultural ambience of the late sixteenth century Istanbul.
Moreover, they participate in the East-West debate within the novel. For instance, the narratives of the Horse and the Tree help to bring out the ideological clash between Eastern and Western painting methods. The Tree is an advocate of Eastern, Islamic painting tradition. It doesn’t want to become a unique tree. It only wants to convey its meaning. On the other hand, the Horse favours Frankish painting methods and therefore intensely wishes to become unique. It tells: “All horses are in fact distinct, and the miniaturist, above all, ought to know this” (My Name Is Red 264). Thus, like Orhan Pamuk, the Storyteller Effendi gives voice to both fundamentalists and rebels and thereby unveils the cultural dilemmas of the Istanbulites.

The narratives of the Storyteller are filled with sarcasm against social evils and irrational beliefs. He uses his commendable talent in storytelling as a weapon against the brutal fundamentalist, Nusret Hoja of Erzurum. Finally, the religious bigots under Nusret Hoja kill the Storyteller to silence his narrative revolt and, symbolically, pull his tongue out. Orhan Pamuk says in Other Colours:

The real hero of My Name Is Red is the storyteller: Every night he goes to a coffeehouse to stand next to a picture and tell a story. The saddest part of the book is his sorry end. I know how this storyteller feels—the constant pressure. Don’t write this, don’t write that; if you’re going to write that then put it this way; your mother will be angry, your father will be angry, the state will be angry, the publishers will be angry, the newspaper will be angry, everyone will be angry; they’ll cluck their
tongues and wag their fingers; whatever you do, they interfere. . . . In a cobbled-together demi-democracy like ours, in this society so riddled with prohibitions, writing novels puts me in a position not altogether different from my traditional storyteller’s; and whatever the explicit political prohibitions might be, a writer will also find himself hemmed in by taboos, family relations, religious injunctions, the state, and much else. (263)

Thus, the tragic plight of the Storyteller indirectly reveals some of the personal sorrows of the writer, Orhan Pamuk and, of course, most of the characters in the novel embody the Turkish dilemma as they can neither resist the blasphemous Western Renaissance painting nor forget the restraints of the religion bound Islamic miniature painting.

Orhan Pamuk’s Snow portrays the cultural ambivalence of contemporary Turkey, a nation torn between extreme fundamentalism and secularism. Most of the characters in the novel are too much complicated to be categorized as either theists or atheists. The dilemmas of these ambivalent characters eloquently speak about the predicament of their nation as well. Esra Mirze Santesso says:

In his portrayal of the relationship between Islamists and secularists, Pamuk is diligent about not depicting either camp in a monolithic way; rather, characters reveal complex subject positions, subscribing to various, even contradictory, tenets. . . . This nuanced portrayal of
characters allows the reader, to recognize that the political “binary” is something of an illusion, and that more radical members of each side seek to silence the dissonant voices within in order to simulate unanimity. (126)

Thus, most of the characters in the novel go beyond the bounds of binary division.

The protagonist of the novel, a forty-two years old, tall, brown haired bachelor of pallid complexion, Kerim Alakuşoğlu, known by his initials as Ka, is a Turkish poet. When the novel begins, he reaches Kars, a poverty-stricken Turkish border city that ambivalently bears the marks of its Russian, Armenian, Ottoman and Turkish pasts, on a journalistic assignment from the secularist newspaper, *The Republican*. He had spent last twelve years in Frankfurt, Germany as a political exile because he had been forced to leave Istanbul in the wake of the military coup of 1980 owing to a political article that he had not even written. He is a westernized leftist and in Kars he often claims himself an atheist. However, on several occasions during his stay at Kars, the theist in him pops up to reveal his inherent Turkish ambivalence. While talking with Muhtar, the mayor candidate of the political Islamists, Ka tells him that the snow reminds him of God. Later he repeats the same before a Kurdish religious leader, His Excellency Sheikh Saadettin Efendi. He says: “The snow reminded me of God,’ . . . . ‘The snow reminded me of the beauty and mystery of creation, the essential joy that is life” (*Snow* 98). It is quite impossible to explain how an atheist could remember God while seeing snow. In the presence of the Sheikh, not only his words but also his
deeds are ambivalent. He mocks and respects the Sheikh at the same time. When Ka kisses at the hands of the Sheikh, the Westerner within him despises him. Then he speaks in length about God:

‘I felt guilty about having refused all my life to believe in the same God as the uneducated, as the aunties with their heads wrapped in scarves, as the Uncles with prayer beads in their hands. There’s a lot of pride involved in my refusal to believe in God. But now I want to believe in that God who is making this beautiful snow fall from the sky. There is a God who pays careful attention to the world’s hidden symmetry, a God who will make us all more civilized and refined.’ (Snow 99)

Of course, these words are from a confused and guilt-ridden atheist who wants to become a theist. But soon, adding to his ambivalence, he says: “I want to believe in the God you believe in and be like you, but because there’s a Westerner inside me, my mind is confused” (Snow 100). It is a truth that he was totally drunk when he visited the Sheikh. But his utterances before the Sheikh can’t be read as the absurd words of a drunkard because throughout the novel this trait of ambivalence is there with him. For example, when Hande asks him about the source of poetic inspiration, he tells her that it is God who sends him poems. Again, during one of his conversations with Necip, he tells: “I’d prefer to be a Westerner and a believer...” (Snow 145). This longing to blend the East and the West within him makes Ka a typical Turk.
The readers of the novel can make another confusing observation about the character of Ka. As an educated, Westernized Istanbulite who spent twelve years in Germany, Ka suffers a kind of social and cultural isolation in Kars. But the shocking fact is that even though he prefers Western ways of thinking, Ka was suffering a more intense and, up to a certain extent, self-inflicted socio-cultural isolation in Germany too. The extent of the isolation is discernible from the confession that Ka makes to İpek. He says: “‘The thing that saved me was not learning German’ . . . ‘My body rejected the language, and that was how I was able to preserve my purity and my soul!’” (Snow 33). German language is a key to the private socio-cultural space of the Germans. Ka rejected German language to preserve his Turkish cultural “purity”. But in Germany, he didn’t attempt to maintain a warm relation even with the Turks there. This makes Ka a more ambiguous character. During his stay at Kars, Ka openly says to Necip: “‘. . . in Germany I’m a worthless nobody. I was falling apart there’” (Snow 105). Mounting up the ambiguity in his character, he wishes to go back to Germany with İpek. Thus, Ka holds an ambiguous ideological subject position that oscillates between the poles of the East and the West/tradition and modernity/faith and secularism. Erdağ Göknar in his text Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel says:

Snow is the only Pamuk novel in which the protagonist is openly drawn to religion and tempted by faith (din) in a consistent manner. This reveals part the cultural logic of Turkish society in the 1990s in which
the opposition of Muslimhood and modernity was being questioned. . . .

As a character who wavers between secularism and faith . . . Ka is vulnerable; he is marked for sacrifice and is later murdered in a political assassination by the forces of militarized Islam represented by the followers of Blue. Thus, Ka suffers a fate similar to Celâl in *The Black Book*, Mehmet in *The New Life*, and to the meddah in *My Name Is Red*.

(193)

İpek Hanim, a highly westernized and educated woman, is the central female character of the novel. Her love relations with Blue and Ka can be read allegorically. Blue is an extreme fundamentalist who sticks to Eastern tradition, whereas Ka is a westernized atheist who was in Frankfurt, Germany for the last twelve years. Thus, from an allegorical perspective, if İpek represents Turkey, Blue stands for the East and Ka for the West. As Turkey is torn between the East and the West, İpek Hanim has affinities to both Blue and Ka. İpek always admits that Ka is handsome and attractive. But she is not ready to trust him completely and this mistrust can be read as an Easterner’s suspicion of the Western ways and values of life. However, she accepts Ka’s marriage proposal and decides to leave Kars with Ka to Frankfurt. Later, when Ka comes to know about her illicit relationship with Blue, she consoles him saying that it was all in the past. Now her sister Kadife is in love with Blue and therefore she has withdrawn herself from that relation. But whenever she speaks about Blue, she is
all praise and it seems that she trusts him a lot. İpek says:

‘Blue is very compassionate, very thoughtful and generous.’ Her voice was warm with love. ‘He doesn’t want anyone to suffer. He cried all night once, just because two little puppies had lost their mother. Believe me, he’s not like anyone else.’

‘Isn’t he a murderer?’ asked Ka hopelessly.

‘Even someone who knows only a tenth of what I know about him will tell you what stupid nonsense that is. He couldn’t kill anyone. He’s a child. Like a child, he enjoys playing games and getting lost in his day-dreams and mimicking people. He loves telling stories from the Shehname and Mesnevi. . . ’ (Snow 371)

When İpek hears the news of Blue’s death at the hands of Z Demirkol and his group, she immediately infers Ka’s role in it and at the very moment she decides not to leave Kars with Ka. Ka might have thought that Blue’s death will free İpek from her past. Instead, it binds her more to her past. She is not ready to completely forget her “Eastern past” to embrace the “Western future”.

Kadife, İpek’s sister, is a highly ambivalent character in Snow. She is the leader of the headscarf girls. But her relation to religion is ambivalent. She is an atheist turned theist. When Ka sees Kadife for the first time, the narrator describes her: “She was wearing a purple raincoat; her eyes were hidden behind futuristic dark
glasses; and on her head was one of those nondescript headscarves Ka had seen thousands of women wearing since childhood and which were now the symbol of political Islam” (Snow 112). Really, futuristic dark glasses and headscarf is an odd combination. Her dark glasses are the remnant of her “old” westernized self, whereas the headscarf stands for her new political self. Sometimes she speaks as if she has deep faith in what she does and sometimes as if she has been trapped.

Indeed, Kadife’s transformation from a westernized atheist to the leader of the headscarf girls was quite accidental. She reached Kars from Istanbul to join the Institute of Education in Kars and there she became the classmate of the headscarf girls. Suddenly, one day the state banned headscarf from educational institutions. Those girls were wearing headscarves from their childhood, following the religious instructions that they have received during their early education and it was not easy for them to bare their head according to the decree of the insensitive state. Kadife easily recognized their dilemma and to support them one day she put on a headscarf, not with any political intention, but for one day’s “revolution”. However, that one day was eventful enough to transform her into an inevitable figure in the politics of Kars. She says:

I’m certain that I intended it to last for one day: it was one of those “revolutionary gestures” that you laugh about years later, when you’re remembering the good old days when you were political. But the state, the police and the local press came down on me so hard that I could
scarcely think of it as a joke any more—and also I had painted myself into a corner and I couldn’t get out. They arrested us—the excuse was that we had staged a demonstration without a permit. But when they released us the next day, if I had said, “Forget the veil! I never really meant it anyway!” the whole of Kars would have spat in my face. (*Snow* 116)

Thus, it is not she who made her what she is. The political Islamist self that she now bears on her head is nothing but an accident. For her the headscarf is both a burden and a means of defiance against the state. It is a burden because, instead of making her an ordinary Muslim girl, the headscarf, the long-standing Islamic tradition, paradoxically makes her an exceptional revolutionary figure. It is defiance against the state because the state always acts tyrannical, not democratic. By wearing a headscarf, she achieves one more goal. Ezra Mirze Santesso says: “Her ambivalence towards the ban compels her to come forward as a leader of the headscarf girls, with the agenda of opposing the government’s policy of intruding upon women’s personal decisions about their bodies” (132). Thus, her act of wearing headscarf enables her to transcend the hackneyed image of the Muslim girl as a downtrodden and silenced subject incapable of taking individual decisions.

In *Snow*, there are two religious high school boys who add a doppelgänger dimension to the novel. They are Necip and Fazil. They are identical in appearance and, moreover, their close friendship bestows on each of them a mysterious ability to
tell what the other is thinking. However, Fazil’s initial attitude towards Ka, the westernized atheist, is obviously different from that of Necip’s. From the very first meeting, Necip respects Ka. But during their initial encounter with Ka, Fazil and Mesut–another religious high school boy–insult and mock Ka and inquire him how is it being an atheist. They shower Ka with questions concerning his disbelief and demand him to give answers as they expect. They want him to answer that he feels extremely guilty for being an atheist and even feels like committing suicide. Because of their ideologically charged education, they can’t refrain themselves from harassing an atheist.

Initially, Necip speaks like an extreme believer. He says: “If we even forget or miss our morning prayers, we’re so worried about our sinful state that we can hardly sleep at night” (Snow 86). Later, putting up the ambiguity in his character, the religious high school boy who wants to become the world’s first Islamic science-fiction writer says to the atheist poet: “You are my future. And my instinct also tells me this: when you look at me, you see your own youth, and that’s why you like me” (Snow 137). Then he continues reluctantly to unveil the atheist within him. He admits that, at least sometimes, he doubts the existence of God. He says to Ka:

‘There’s another voice inside me that tells me, “Don’t believe in God,” because, when you devote so much of your heart to believing something exists, you can’t help having a little suspicion, a little voice that asks, “What if it doesn’t?” You understand, don’t you? Just at those times
when I realised my belief in my beautiful God sustained me, I would sometimes ask myself, just as a child would wonder what would happen if his parents died, What if God doesn’t exist, what happens then? (Snow 138)

This discord within Necip is both a consequence and reflection of the discord that exists within the Turkish society regarding faith.

As has been said before, during his first confrontation with Ka, Fazil talks like an extreme fundamentalist. But after Necip’s death, Fazil behaves different and he reminds Ka of Necip. When Ka meets Fazil after Necip’s death, Ka even calls him “Necip.” It is during the secret meeting at the Hotel Asia that Fazil publicly flaunts the face of his ambivalence. During the meeting, Fazil openly threatens Kadife that if she removes her Headscarf, he will commit suicide. His insistence on wearing headscarf can be read as fundamentalism. However, it is impossible for a true believer even to think of suicide as it is against the norms of Islam. Fazil himself knows that his act of threatening is nothing but pure blasphemy. Therefore, suddenly after the vow, he feels pangs of conscience and prays to God to forgive: “God forgive me, I’ll never say that again!” (Snow 291). But he is too much troubled and confused to keep the promise that he has given to God. When Ka returns after hearing Fazil’s concerns, Fazil says to Ka:

‘Are you going to see Kadife?’ asked Fazil, hopelessly. The pity and annoyance he could see on Ka’s face made him blush with shame. As
the latter left the tea house, Fazil shouted, ‘I want to kill myself. If you see her, tell her, if she bares her head, I’m going to kill myself. But it won’t be because she’s bared her head. I’ll do it just for the pleasure of killing myself in her honour.’ (Snow 295)

It is not his religious faith but his love for Kadife that drives him to utter these words. His love for Kadife is also guilt-ridden because his dearest friend Necip was intensely in love with her. Fazil confesses to Ka that actually he was in love with Kadife even before the death of Necip. But he suppressed it for the sake of his friend. He adds to his confession that he felt a secret pleasure when he heard about Necip’s death. But after Necip’s death, Fazil feels two selves within him—his own and Necip’s. As Turkey bears two selves—the Eastern and the Western—Fazil too bears two and therefore he fails to remain himself. Obviously, Necip, Fazil and Ka are linked and together they remind readers of a Turkish Republican poet who later turned to Sufism. Sibel Erol says: “. . . Necip, Fazil and Ka, are parts of a whole; together they add up to the name of the famous religious poet Necip Fazil Kisakurek, who is referenced in Snow when his work Buyuk Dogu (The Great East) is mentioned” (420).

Muhtar Bey, İpek’s ex-husband and Ka’s classmate, is another important character in Snow who carries two incompatible selves within him to share the plight of his nation. When Ka reaches Kars, the municipal election is imminent and Muhtar is the mayor candidate of the political Islamists. Earlier, when he was a university student, Muhtar Bey was a leftist. Therefore, he narrates his story of political
transformation to Ka. As he was a total failure in Istanbul, Muhtar reached Kars to manage his father’s business. But he found it hard to accept neither the impoverished city nor the people there. He says:

‘It was as if the city of Kars and the people in it were unreal. Everyone wanted either to die or leave. But I had nowhere left to go. It was as if I’d been erased from history, banished from civilization. The civilized world seemed so far away that I couldn’t even imitate it. God wouldn’t even give me a child who might do all the things I had not done, who might release me from my misery by becoming the Westernized, modern and self-possessed individual I had always dreamed of becoming.’ (Snow 55)

Even though he is a Political Islamist, it is clear from his words that even now he treats the West as the ideal and for him only the Western civilization is worthy of calling “civilization.”

Then, Muhtar continues his story. Because of his sense of failure and utter desperation, in a drunken stupor, one night he decided to end his life and stretched out on the frozen pavement beneath a tree in the hope that he would freeze to death. But in that state of drowsiness he had a vision. He saw the child he never had. Revealing the depth and breadth of his mental slavery, Muhtar then Boasts to Ka that the child that he had in his vision was a European. He says: “What a joy it was to see this child, a boy already grown, and wearing a tie, but his manner nothing like that of our tie-
wearing bureaucrats. No, this son of mine was a true European” (Snow 55-56). In his vision he saw the child kissing the hand of an old man and light radiated from that old man in all directions to lay bare the abode of His Excellency Saadettin Efendi, a Kurdish reactionary Sheikh. Then he approached the Sheikh and got treated kindly. The Sheikh dug out the believer in him and he started his journey back to Islam. Perplexing the reader, he adds: “And he would bring me back to the path I had always believed in, deep down inside, even as an atheist: the road to God Almighty. Just the promise of salvation brought me joy” (Snow 57). Then for some days, he led a double life because it was not easy for him to accept himself as a fundamentalist. During the day time he pretended like an atheist and carried with him The Republican, the most secular newspaper in Turkey. He even showered abuses on fundamentalists. But at night he sought the refuge of the Sheikh. Finally, he revealed this secret to his highly westernized wife, İpek and later, as she doubted, he forced her to cover her head and she opted for divorce. When he continues his narration, it becomes clear that, like the earlier leftist, the present Islamist in him is also shallow because he tells Ka that mere belief in God was not enough to provide him peace. He says: “It was at this point that some devil within—half utilitarian, half rationalist—a remnant of my atheist days began to goad me . . .” (Snow 58). He was in search of success and power and that’s why he joined the religious party. Really, his conversation with Ka reveals the fact that he holds two conflicting selves within him. Earlier, when he was an atheist, there was a believer deep down inside him. Now, when he claims himself a believer, an atheist lurks inside him.
Turgut Bey, the father of İpek and Kadife, describes himself as a westernized communist secular democrat. It is his approach to the headscarf that reveals his ambivalence. As he is a democrat, initially he supports Kadife when she decides to wear a headscarf for one day’s revolution because he thinks that the headscarf is one of the strongest means of protest against the state. Kadife says:

‘In the beginning, my father was proud of me–the day I went to school wearing the headscarf, he acted as if I had found a special new form of rebellion. He stood with me in front of my mother’s old mirror with the brass frame as I tried on the headscarf, and while we were still in front of the mirror, he gave me a kiss. Although we never talked about it a great deal, this much was clear: what I was doing was worthwhile not as a defence of Islam but as a defiance of the state.’ (Snow 116)

Then Kadife tells that as Turgut Bey is proud of his daughter he is afraid too because when he was a communist he had experienced the cruelty of the state. Therefore, he feels that his daughter is at the gunpoint of the state. After the one day’s “revolution” when Kadife fails to remove her headscarf, Turgut Bey, painfully, ceases to support her because of the Western Enlightenment ideology that he holds dear. Sometimes headscarf girls visit Kadife’s home and then Turgut Bey behaves ambivalent. Kadife says to Ka: “If one of those girls comes to the house, he’ll sometimes play the atheist bastard, but before long he’s encouraging them to stand up to the state” (Snow 117).
Later, when Ka asks Turgut Bey to sign a joint-statement against the theatre coup with some Kurdish nationalists and political Islamists to publish it in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, he again falls in a dilemma. Sibel Erol says:

Pamuk here amply exposes the hypocrisy of the Turkish public, who on the one hand criticize any military coup as a loss of democracy, while on the other hand want the status quo guaranteed. Their dilemma is similar to that of İpek’s father, the former Marxist Turgut Bey, who has to decide whether he will choose the top-down perspective of the Enlightenment or what is perceived to be its opposite, a bottom-up democracy, when trying to make up his mind about signing the manifesto. (414)

As a democrat, Turgut Bey should stand for the oppressed people and for that he should speak against the coup. However, protesting against the coup is like supporting the political Islamists and that is against the ideals of European Enlightenment. When Turgut Bey finds it hard to choose between the ideals of democracy and Enlightenment, Ka advises him to stand for the oppressed and finally he signs the statement.

Later, Kadife decides to bare her head for Zunay Zaim’s theatre to save Blue. Then, Turgut Bey speaks contradicting his own ideals. He tries his level best to prevent Kadife from baring her head because he fears that his daughter will provoke
the fundamentalists by doing so. He does not want to sacrifice his daughter in order to uphold his ideals.

Hande, one of the headscarf girls, is totally confused. After her friend Teslime’s suicide, she decides to take off her headscarf because she doesn’t want to cause more troubles to her parents who have sacrificed a lot for her studies. But all her attempts to remove the headscarf fail because she can’t imagine herself without her headscarf. She spends days locked up in a room and tries to “concentrate” but she never becomes daring enough to bare her head. She says: “I try all day, but I can’t conjure up the vision I want to see, the vision of myself without a headscarf. Instead I keep seeing all the things I want to forget” (Snow 124). She becomes someone else when she tries to visualize herself without a headscarf. The state sent a stylish westernized woman from Ankara to persuade the headscarf girls to abandon their veils. Paradoxically, the headscarf girls, including Hande, liked that agent of persuasion. Whenever Hande tries to think of herself without a headscarf, she becomes the westernized woman from Ankara. She says:

‘... whenever I try to imagine myself walking through crowds with my hair flying all around me, I see myself as the “agent of persuasion.” In my mind’s eye I’m as stylish as she is, wearing stilettos, and dresses even shorter than hers. And men are staring at me. I find this pleasing—and at the same time shameful.’ (Snow 124-125)
It is evident from her words that she feels attracted to the Western ways of life, but at the same time an even more powerful feeling of repulsion pulls her back.

Blue is another significant character in the novel. The secular media in Turkey provides him the stature of an extreme fundamentalist. But the readers can perceive traits of ambivalence even in him. When Ka first sees Blue, he feels astounded by the appearance of the so-called “Islamist terrorist”. Blue does not fit into the hackneyed mould of a Muslim fundamentalist. The narrator says:

His eyes were deep blue—almost midnight blue—a colour you never saw in a Turk. He was brown-haired and beardless, much younger than Ka had expected; he had an aquiline nose and breathtakingly pale skin. He was also extraordinarily handsome, his gracefulness born of self-confidence. In his manner, expression and appearance, there was nothing of the truculent bearded, provincial fundamentalist whom the secular press had depicted with a gun in one hand and a string of prayer beads in the other. (Snow 75)

Thus, at least in the case of appearance, Blue differs from the image that the media spreads.

There are numerous rumours in Kars about Blue and his fundamentalism. The most notorious rumours are regarding his involvement in two murders—the murder of an effeminate and exhibitionist TV personality named Güner Bener who made an
inappropriate remark about Prophet Mohammed during a live broadcast, and the murder of the ex-mayor, who showed an extreme zeal in modernizing and westernizing Kars. It is a truth that Blue threatened Güner Bener after the controversial TV show. Blue made it clear that he would kill the host unless the host made a formal apology on the next show. When the host was reluctant to apologize, Blue repeated his threats several times in different television channels and became popular as a political Islamist. But later someone really killed Güner Bener. To avoid the press, Blue stayed in hiding and became the major suspect. Hence, the media crowned him with the image of a brutal militant Islamist. Among the characters in the novel, there are diverse views regarding Blue. İpek and Necip don’t believe the rumours about Blue and they argue that Blue is a good human being, whereas Sunay Zaim and Z Demirkol assert that Blue is a bloody terrorist. Later, when Blue is in the custody of the MİT operatives, Ka meets him. Then Blue rejects the criminal charges against him. He reads a part of his autobiography to Ka:

In spite of the fact that I believe it is sometimes necessary to kill the enemies of Islam, I have never killed anyone; nor have I ever ordered anyone’s death. The man who assassinated the former mayor of Kars was a deranged Kurdish driver who was angry because he was threatening to take all the horse-drawn carriages off the streets. I came to Kars for the girls who were committing suicide. (Snow 329)
But, adding to the confusion of the readers, the murderer of the director of the Institute of Education in Kars, finally, confesses to the authorities that he has visited Kars on Blue’s request. All these disparate narratives on Blue leave him mysterious.

Throughout the novel, the trait that Blue wants to flaunt before others is his extreme hatred towards the West. He confesses to Ka that he was a godless atheist in his youth and it is his extreme hatred towards the West that brought him close to Islam. He says that it is his duty to protect his faith and culture from the all engulfing Western culture and that’s why he fights against the West and the blind westernizing pursuits of his secular state. But it seems that his hatred towards the West is quite shallow because often he shows an extreme desire to become famous in the West as a political Islamist. This desire to be known by the West unveils his ambivalent attitude towards the West and Westerners.

Sunay Zaim, Z Demirkol and His Excellency Saadettin Efendi are some other major characters in Snow. Apparently they don’t exhibit any traits of ambivalence. Sunay Zaim and Z Demirkol are extreme secularists who want to throw away the “burden” of tradition to embrace Western culture and progress. On the other hand, His Excellency Saadettin Efendi is a Kurdish reactionary sheikh who wants to stick to the tradition. When people with polar opposite views live within the same society, there are numerous possibilities of conflicts and dialogues. Thus, the depiction of these extreme characters really contributes to the portrayal of the Turkish cultural ambivalence.
In the unique cultural context of Turkey, even the creation of fictional entities is a political act. Orhan Pamuk says in *The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist*:

> In closed or semi-closed societies, where individual choice is restricted, the art of the novel remains underdeveloped. But whenever the art of the novel does develop in these societies, it invites people to examine their lives, and it achieves this by presenting meticulously constructed literary narratives about individuals’ personal traits, sensations and decisions. (59)

Through his meticulously constructed characters, Pamuk unveils the cultural dilemmas of the citizens of his native country to reveal the absurdity of all such dilemmas.

Carrying an uncertain and ambiguous identity, Turkey exists in the geographical and cultural border between Asia and Europe. Therefore, it is hard even for the most conservative Turk to remain inert to the Western ways of living and thinking. The irresistible West appeals him with the hope of a new life, but simultaneously his centuries-long Islamic past holds him back from emulating the infidels. It is the fate of most of the Turks to remain ambivalent between the indomitable East and the irresistible West. Consequently, the most blatant trait that most of the characters of Orhan Pamuk manifest is ambivalence. In *The White Castle*, through the portrayal of the relationship between the Ottoman master and the Venetian slave, Pamuk represents the conflict between the two incompatible selves
that most of the Turks carry within them–the Eastern and the Western. In the novel, the Venetian scholar is an embodiment of Western values and culture and therefore all major Turkish characters–Hoja, Sadik pasha and the Sultan–maintain an ambiguous relation of intense affection and aversion with him. Of course, the behaviours of various Turkish characters to the Venetian reveal the Turkish attitude towards the West. In *The Black Book* and *The New Life*, Pamuk allegorically dramatizes the Republic of Turkey’s ambivalent quest for a “new life”. In *The Black Book*, everybody wants to become someone else, but at the same time hates the idea of losing himself or herself. In *The New Life*, numerous characters leave their “old” lives in search of the new life offered by a text. They find themselves torn between the actual and textual realms. It is hard for them to leave the “real” in order to attain the ideal. The plight of the readers of the text quite eloquently articulates the plight of the Republic of Turkey.

All major characters in *My Name Is Red*, except Master Osman, exhibit contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion towards the “blasphemous” Western Renaissance painting. The miniaturists, who participate in Uncle Enishte’s painting venture that combines the Eastern and the Western painting methods, suffer from pangs of conscience as they feel that they are cheating their traditional art and conventional master. *Snow* portrays the contemporary Turkish dilemmas by sketching some unforgettable characters, who are torn between extreme fundamentalism and secularism. In the novel, extreme theists suspect the existence of God and break the
norms of religion while atheists experience divinity and some of them even turn to religion, but with different motives. Thus, most of the major characters of Orhan Pamuk are torn between the clashing civilizations of the unyielding East and the alluring West.