Chapter IV

Orhan Pamuk: Bridging the Gulf between East and West

Turkey is most often described as a bridge between the East and the West and so is its leading novelist Orhan Pamuk. An ardent advocate of his country’s entry into the European Union, Pamuk through his magnificent novels explores the East-West kinship like no other Turkish novelist has done so far. Within a span of two decades he has emerged as a literary voice of truly universal proportions, as he belongs to that rare breed of writers who believe in literature’s power to bring humanity together. Through his novels he emphasizes genuine encounters between the civilizations not the enforced ones. Eminent critic and spokesperson of Swedish Academy from 1999 to 2009, Horace Engdahl (b.1948), in his Nobel announcement speech (2006) described Pamuk as a writer “who in the quest for
the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures”.

Pamuk is a westernizer but as a writer he is neither on the side of the Republicans nor the conservatives. He has chosen for himself a role similar to that of a bridge which “doesn’t belong to any civilizations and...has the unique opportunity to see both and be outside of it” (2006, retrieved). This unique yet challenging position enables him to view the two worlds, the eastern and the western, with an objective and purely artistic perspective. The significant role played by his fiction in developing an understanding between the East and West is widely applauded by the critics. Tom Holland (b.1968), an eminent critic writes that, “We in the West can only feel gratitude that such a novelist as Pamuk exists, to act as a bridge between our culture and that of a heritage quite as rich as our own” (2001, retrieved).

Pamuk’s exploration of new ways of reconciling the diverse cultures has made him popular among the politicians who strongly recognize the relevance of his fiction in today’s world, overshadowed by conflicts and violence. In 2004, George Bush, the then President of America, while addressing the NATO summit in Turkey quoted Pamuk and praised the role played by his literary works to bring East-West closer. Daniel Cohn Bendit (b.1945), the member of European Parliament, in a newspaper article wrote that Pamuk is “one of the intellectuals who made me understand the importance of Turkey joining the European
Union…he is one of the examples of the possible modernity of Turkey” (quoted in Bemong, Truwant & Vermeulen, 2008, p.113, retrieved).

Pamuk sees the West as a part of Turkey’s identity and rejects the view that his country “…should belong to either the East or the West or be nationalistic” (retrieved). He believes that Turkey possesses two spirits, one eastern, traditional, religious and the other western, modern and secular and for peace and prosperity it is compulsory that these two spirits remain in harmony with each other.

Pamuk in all of his novels tries to bridge the gulf between the East and the West, which he asserts can be done by shifting the focus from the differences that divide to the similarities that unite. This chapter will try to explore the themes and symbols used by Pamuk in his different novels to magnify chances of East-West reconciliation and peace.

**The White Castle (1990)**

According to the eminent novelist and critic Jay Parini (b.1948), *The White Castle* is “one of those rare novels that call into being a complete and self-sustaining world shot through with a peculiar brilliance” (1990, retrieved). Dr. Damon Young, a famed author and philosopher, calls it “a gripping tale of friendship and identity” (2013, retrieved). Another critic Christopher Lehmann-Haupt (b.1934) opines that the novel is “a promising antidote” to the East-West despair. *The White Castle* is one of Pamuk most successful novels which established his reputation as a potent novelist in the contemporary world literature. In this novel, Pamuk depicts
the East and the West, represented by Hoja and the Venetian slave respectively, as twins and explores the East-West relationship through their bond.

The Venetian Slave is the first one to notice the physical resemblance between him and Hoja, his master. The following is his reaction when he sees Hoja for the first time, “The resemblances between myself and the man…was incredible! It was me there…it was as if someone wanted to play a trick on me” (Pamuk, 1990, p. 13). Hoja at first seems unaware of it, but with time the similarities between him and his slave strike him too. Finally, one day he tells his slave, “Come, let us look in the mirror together” (Pamuk, 1990, p. 71) and, as the two fix their gaze on each other they are overwhelmed by their physical likeness.

Apart from them, others also begin to notice this, for example the Sultan, one day asks them “Have you two never looked at yourselves in the mirror together?” (Pamuk, 1990, 102). Amazed by their likeness, the Sultan at times orders them to stand together so that he can tell them apart or orders all the documents written by them for the Royal palace to be brought to him so that he can distinguish their handwriting and thoughts. This also indicates that their similarity is not limited to mere appearance but is more than that. With time they begin to think and act alike, as the Venetian slave narrates that “the sovereign would stop suddenly and, turning to one of us, say, ‘No, this is his thought, not yours…Now you are glancing around just as he does. Be yourself’.” (Pamuk, 1990, p. 102).
They learn each other’s language, Hoja learns Italian and the Venetian learns Turkish and begin to switch their roles. For example while, Hoja is busy in his project of making a war weapon to defeat the Poles, his Venetian slave frequently visits the royal mansion, feasts, brothels and wanders freely in the city. In the end the war weapon fails and they swap their identities permanently. Hoja evades to Italy and the Venetian settles down in Gebze. Pamuk, according to McGaha, through these two characters seems to be saying that “East and West are in fact so similar as to be interchangeable” (2008).

In this novel Pamuk also emphasizes the role dialogue and literature play in bridging the gulf between different cultures. He believes that literature is “the most valuable hoard that humanity has gathered in its quest to understand itself” and this is best demonstrated in the novel when the two Hoja and his slave sit face to face at the table to write their stories, dreams, fantasies and memories for each other. The process of writing enables them to understand each other better and in the end they are able to exchange their identities because they know enough about each other’s past and persona. The table at which they sit to write, made according to the Venetian’s specifications, is a symbol for the Novel which is a western genre and was introduced in Turkey in the 19th century as a part of westernization process. Hoja at first is not comfortable with this new piece of furniture and, even, compares it to a funeral bier but later he starts liking it. His initial uneasiness is a representation of the hesitation of the Turkish intellectuals as they turned from poetry to Novel writing.
Pamuk also demystifies the stereotypical representation of the easterners or Muslims, by some western writers, in this novel which in his own words was “written to escape from a conventional attitude” (quoted in McGaha, 2008, p. 97). For example, “The Captive’s Tale” from Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1612) and other narratives which are frequently referred by Pamuk, also tell the tale of captivity but otherize Turks or Muslims by depicting them as barbarians and villains. But, *The White Castle* is a captive’s tale with a difference. The Venetian Captive shares an exceptional relationship with his captor/master. In their twenty-five year long relationship sometimes the master is dominant and sometimes the slave but they live as an inseparable pair. Even after they take each other’s role the Venetian recalls his master with admiration, he narrates, “Hoja was the rest of me”, “I was Hoja’s very self”, “I loved him, I loved…his exaggerated sense of victory, his never ending plans…” and “I loved him…the way I loved…my own self I saw in dreams…” (Pamuk, 1990, p. 86-140).

The novel depicts their mutual attachment which becomes stronger as they learn to cope with their pre-occupied notions, jealousy and shift their focus from their difference to their similarities. The continuous process of dialogue between them also helps them to overcome the cross-cultural barriers. According to Pamuk at the heart of this novel there is a desire “for East not to be East and West not to be West” (quoted in McGaha, 2008, p. 97).

The ending of the novel is a powerful statement that gap between the East and the West cannot be filled by scientific or technological partnership but through
“the means they devise together to tell their stories in order to understand each other” (Haliloglu, 2008, p.120). The identities they embrace at the end is the not the outcome of imitation, they become the embodiment of each other’s self. The novel symbolizes the idea that friendship can flourish between different civilizations, through discourse and understanding as exemplified by these two men who form a strong bond despite the differences of religion and culture between them.

**The Black Book (1994)**

As discussed earlier, Pamuk has always openly admitted his admiration for the western literature. In fact he asserts that his interest in the eastern literature was evoked in the West and that he learned to approach the traditional, Islamic literature from the western writers. *The Black Book*, with all its complexities, is a brilliant combination of two different literary traditions and is hence his greatest tribute to all those masters, of both East and West who inspired him. The novel on one hand alludes to the Turkish mystical and allegorical poetry of Jelal ad Din Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), Farid ud Din Attar (1110-1220) and Sheikh Galip and on the other hand modernist and postmodernist style of Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), James Joyce (1882-1941), Thomas Mann (1875-1955) and Italo Calvino (1923-1985) and the result is a literary fusion that Pamuk so profoundly believes in. As he puts it in his own words:
In order to establish a modern and westernized nation, Ataturk and the whole Turkish establishment decided to forget Islam, traditional culture, traditional dress, language and traditional literature. It was all buried. But what is suppressed comes back. And it has come back in a new way. Somehow, in literature, I am myself that thing that comes back, but I came back with my postmodern forms. I came back as someone who not only represents tradition, traditional Sufi literature, traditional form, traditional ways of seeing things, but also someone who is well versed with what is happening in western literature.


*The Black Book* was Pamuk’s first attempt to blend Sufism and postmodernism, the eastern and the western literary techniques, and the result was an inventive and extraordinary novel of great artistic merit. According to Joan Smith, *The Black Book* “…establishes Orhan Pamuk as one of the freshest, most original voices in contemporary fiction” (1995, retrieved). *The Black Book* according to Goknar is an “inward-looking novel that excavates the city of Istanbul to find connections between European and middle Eastern cultures and forms” (2013, p. 214). Some critics call it his tour de force, while others criticize the novel’s plot for being irrelevant and monotonous. But there is no denial that with *The Black Book* Pamuk succeeded in creating a literary bridge between the East and the West.

A good number of critics argue that Celal’s character in the novel is based on Rumi and that the novel, with its history of Islamic Sufi tradition and the themes such as the search for the beloved, is a modern day *Mathnawi*
The novel tells the story of Galip, looking for his missing wife Ruya and her cousin Celal. The readers acquainted with names such as Jelal-ad-Din Mohammad Rumi and Sheikh Galip will at once notice that the main two male characters in the novel are named after these two poets. Galip, the main protagonist, is widely compared to Ask, the protagonist of Sheikh Galip’s *Husn u Ask*. In Galip’s *Husn u Ask*, a boy Ask falls in love with a girl named Husn. But before giving them consent for marriage the clan’s elders ask Ask to bring an alchemical formula from the land of hearts. The journey turns out to be quite dangerous and tiresome, he falls in a well and is captivated by a witch. He also falls for the daughter of the Emperor of China, because she resembles his beloved. Once he manages to climb out of the well, he is imprisoned in a castle. With each passing day his journey becomes more and more difficult but he continues his search. At last Poetry, who had been secretly in disguise following him all along tells him that “you are your beloved, your beloved is you; cant you see this?” in the end he realizes that he and Husn are not actually two different people but one and the same. The story has symbolic meaning and is considered one of the greatest works of Islamic Sufi poetry. Ask’s struggle for Husn is actually a struggle for self identity and union with God.

Earlier in the novel Galip remembers how he fell in love with Ruya while reading *Husn u Ask*. The building where they grew up as children together is called Sehrikalp (city of hearts). When she goes missing he too sets on a journey
to find her but for that he needs to find Celal first. He also meets his school mate Belkis who tells him that she has been in love with him since their school days and, even, tried to look like Ruya to win his heart. Ruya’s name in Turkish means a dream and the reader is never quite sure whether she really exists or is a part of Galip’s imagination. Some critics argue that she is Galip’s muse and not a person. In the end he finds neither Celal nor Ruya and but his own identity as a writer.

Critics also compare Galip to Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* (1922). Prominent critic Richard Eder (1932-2014) compares Galip’s character to Lewis Carroll’s Alice, from the *Alice in the Wonderland* (1865). According to various critics such as Bernt Brendemoen, Bill Marx, the novel, apart from the eastern Sufism, is also studded with references to the western literature and is a “Joycean epic infected with Borgesian doubt” (n.d, retrieved).

One of the main themes explored in the novel is the question of identity, “to be, or not to be, oneself” (Pamuk, 2006, p. 418) and how to be oneself in a world where everyone is trying to be someone else. For example, Galip tries to impersonate Celal because somewhere deep down his heart he idolizes him. Belkis imitates Ruya so that she can make Galip fall for her, the prostitutes try to look like the movie actress, the common people replicate the European movie actors and so on. In the chapter “Look Who’s Here” the unnamed prostitute a look-alike of the movie actress, Turkan Soray, asks Galip “who am I, who am I, who am I…If I am you, then you are me…How does it all add up, if I am you and you are
me” (Pamuk, 2006, p.149). The question is fully illustrated in the chapter “The Story of the Crown Prince”, which tells the story of Prince Osman Celalettin Efendi who in order to be himself abandoned his mansion, his family and moved to a far off place. For the first six years he voraciously read Voltaire, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Deltour, De Passet, Morelli, Shakespeare, Rumi, Sheikh Galip and many more. But, then he realized that these writers and their works had enormously influenced his thoughts and, thus, prevented him from discovering his authentic identity, he believes that “to be oneself…a person must hear only his own voice, his own stories, his own thoughts” (Pamuk, 2006, p.419). Therefore, in order to free his mind from their influence he removed all the books from his lodge, as he tells his scribe, “I had Bottfolio burned because he made me see myself as a westerner who longed to be an easterner, I had Ibn Zerhani burned because he made me see myself as an easterner who longed to become a westerner…” (Pamuk, 2006, p. 426). The Prince in order to find his authentic identity, disposed his lodge of everything, books, paintings, smells, colors, furniture, that he believed has left an impression on his mind and died in solitude summing up his whole struggle as “nothing” in his last utterance.

His obsession to find a true identity results in his isolation and his dream of restoring the glory of the Ottoman Empire remains incomplete as after his death the throne is taken by his younger brother Mehmet Resat Efendi in whose reign the Empire collapses. Through the Prince’s struggle to achieve an authentic self in
which he ultimately fails, Pamuk illustrates that “identities are combinations of cultures” and can be achieved through an exchange of ideas and perspectives and not in isolation. This could also be read as his reply to the opponents of westernization process who believe that Turkey in order to be true to its own identity needs to resist the western influence. In this novel, he makes it quite audible that valuing one’s own culture and tradition doesn’t mean that the good that comes out of the encounter with other civilizations and cultures should be resisted or devalued. Pamuk believes that “societies, tribes and nations do their deepest thinking about themselves by reading…through reading…they are able to argue who they are” (retrieved). This chapter is also his answer to those critics who criticize him of imitating the style of western writers. The Prince’s struggle to be himself is a complete contrast to that of Galip’s, who in order to be someone else become himself. He finds his identity as a writer by reading everything Celal has wrote and read.

Like The White Castle, in this novel too Pamuk uses the mirror gaze as a metaphor to depict the self realization of his protagonist. In the chapter “I Must be Myself”, Galip looks in the mirror in the barber’s shop but the person he sees in it is Celal. Saniye Canci Calisaneller in her article “Doppelganger in Orhan Pamuk’s The Black Book” (2011) argues that Celal and Galip are actually two selves or spirits of the same person. According to Calisaneller, Galip, the lawyer, symbolizes the ordinary self while Celal, the columnist, is his author self and
Galip’s search for him and his wife Ruya is actual his quest for self-identity. He achieves his goal by becoming a writer, by reconciling his divided selves, the “twin poles of East-West, feeling-Reason, spirit-matter” which they represent (Almond, 2007, p.114), as he thinks to himself, after seeing Celal’s dead body, “yes, yes, I am myself” (Pamuk, 2006, p.438). The novel depicts “writing” as the only consolation in a world where meaning, memories, history and love is lost, the only promise that holds things together in a world teetering at the edge of annihilation.

*My Name is Red (2001)*

*My Name Is Red*, which Pamuk calls his most “colorful and optimistic novel”, offers a gripping, momentous cultural dialogue between the East and the West. The novel depicts the Istanbul of Ottoman Sultan Murat III’s era (1574-1595). According to historians, Sultan Murat III during his reign maintained friendly relations with the West, particularly England and even, once proclaimed in a letter to Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland (1558-1603) that Islam and Protestantism have much in common “as both rejected the worship of idols” (retrieved). It was during his rule that ammunitions and other materials were exported from England to the Ottoman Empire and during the war with Spain in 1585 the Queen, even, discussed joint military operations with him. His Venetian spouse Safiye Sultan’s profound friendship with the Queen also played a vital role in bringing the two Empires together for some time. Apart from being a Sultan,
Murat III was a learned scholar, a poet, a Connoisseur of art and sponsored various artistic projects during his rule. He was also a great admirer of western art, and some historians argue he was highly impressed by the portraits made by the western artists. As a result, he commissioned his court miniaturist Nakkas Osman to paint a book containing the history of the Ottoman Empire along with the portraits of various Sultans. The scene in the novel where Master Osman is asked to copy the Venetian artist’s work is a reference to the historical event when portraits made by the Venetian artists were brought from Venice to be used as references by the Ottoman miniaturists.

Pamuk, quite skillfully using art and history as tools, highlights the theme that identities are combinations of cultures. This is best elucidated in the scene in which Enishte tells Olive that no art form is pure and that a masterpiece is always a blend of two distinct styles. Enishte, substantiating his argument with examples tells him:

We owe Bihzad and the splendor of Persian painting to the meeting of an Arabic illustrating sensibility and Mongol style with Turkmen subtleties. Today, if men cannot adequately praise the book-arts workshop of Akbar Khan in Hindustan, it’s because he urged his miniaturists to adopt the style of the Frankish masters. To God belongs the East and the West. May he protect us from the will of the pure and unadulterated.

(Pamuk, 2001, p.194).

According to Jonathan Jones, in this novel, “Pamuk creates a world where East and West are at a turning point in their relation, and art reflects this moment
of choice, on the brink of modernity” (2011, retrieved). The Sultan chooses the western artistic technique and so does Enishte, the master miniaturist of his palace. But, there are others too who are fascinated by the western art but are adamant to adopt it. However, in secret they desire a style and a portrait. For example, Olive, the murderer who throughout the story opposes the western art repeatedly questions Enishte, before killing him, whether or not he possesses an individual style. He wants to know from Enishte the distinctive features of his work, the character of his methods and what sets his work apart from that of his fellow miniaturists’. Another character who is fascinated with the western art of portraiture is Black. During his youth, working in Enishte’s workshop as an apprentice, he fell in love with Shekure. In order to express his feelings he made an illustration of the scenes from the tale of Husrev and Shirin where Shirin falls in love with Husrev by looking at his picture. To make it direct he wrote his own name and that of Shekure’s in the captions beneath the figures of the two lovers. Later, in her narrative, Shekure tells the reader that she would have guessed it right anyways because she was acquainted with Black’s style of depiction, “I all in blue, he all in red” (Pamuk, 2001, p.47). This is a clear indication that Black possesses an individual style and his act of writing his name on the illustration to convey his identity could again be interpreted as his desire to sign his works. But, after receiving a cold response from his beloved, he left Istanbul and traveled widely across the East for eleven years. It is during those years that he felt the need of
Shekure’s portrait “rendered in the style of the Venetian masters” as with time he began to forget her face (Pamuk, 2001, p.37).

Black, the main protagonist, believes that the eastern artists need to accept the growing influence of the western art. For example, towards the end he tells Olive that it would be futile on his part to hope that in Mongol Empire a pure eastern art exists as Akbar Khan, the ruler of India too, impressed by the western art has allowed his court artists to sign their works. But, in spite of the efforts made by Enishte and Black, Olive and other artists remain adamant in their opposition of the western artistic technique and their resistance to change their outlook results in the death of their art. At the end of the novel, Sultan Murat III passes away and Sultan Mehmet takes the throne and unlike the former ruler displays no interest in art. Enishte’s incomplete book is locked in the royal treasury and the conflict between tradition and modernity remains unresolved. The miniaturists discard the art of illustration. They paint neither like the easterners nor like the westerners. Black takes a governmental clerical post and other master miniaturists including Master Butterfly, take the job of drawing designs on carpets and cloths.

Like Black, Shekure too laments not having her youthful portrait which would have preserved her beauty and charm for the future generations to see. Apart from this, she wants a portrait of herself with her two sons, one in her arms
and the other sucking at her breast, which she calls her picture of bliss. The following is her description of her picture of bliss:

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...the eyes of the slightly jealous older brother and those of the mother should be locked...I’d want the bird in the sky to be depicted as if flying and at the same time...eternally suspended there.

(Pamuk, 2001, p. 503).

Her son Orhan tells her that such a picture could not be painted by the Venetian artists because they cannot stop time like the masters of Herat (eastern artists) and that the masters of Herat, could also not paint it because they overlook individual features and thus they won’t depict her as she is. This implies that a picture of bliss could only be made by blending the two artistic methods. Shekure’s dream portrait could be interpreted as a national “picture of Bliss” which would be as incomplete without the eastern tradition as it would be without the western technique.

Therefore, at the end of the novel, with high hopes she turns to her son Orhan, who is none other than the novelist, Orhan Pamuk himself, to write her story. In one of his interviews Pamuk was asked whether the six year old Orhan in the novel was his alter ego, he answered: “Orhan is not my alter ego; he is me. Most of the details and some of the anecdotes of the lonely mother and her son’s relationship are derived from my own experience” (retrieved). Shekure thus places
the responsibility on Pamuk’s shoulders to complete the unfinished task, to paint her “picture of bliss” in words. The novel, which is in itself a combination of the distinct literary traditions of East and West could be read as the “picture of bliss”. Like *The Black Book*, it is a literary bridge whose one foot is embedded in traditional Islamic literature and another foot is fixed in the postmodern western literature. And, the graceful steps that Pamuk takes as he wanders freely between these two world is what according to the critic, Dick Davis, establishes him as a “magnificently accomplished hybrid artist” (2001, retrieved).

**The Museum of Innocence (2009)**

The novel, set against the backdrop of Turkish westernized, upper class society, is an enthralling tale, not only of star-crossed lovers but of a city, its people, the changing culture, the decaying tradition and the glorious Bosphorus separating Turkey from Europe. A number of critics opine that the novel is a complete and captivating portrait of the city of Istanbul (Schwoeri, 2009, retrieved). In this novel too, Pamuk highlights the cultural confusion and the identity crisis brought by the wave of westernization, as discussed in Chapter III, but his main focus is on establishing a link between East and West in order to revitalize and reinforce their bond.

The most powerful symbol in relation to East-West interlacing depicted in the novel is Kemal’s museum which comprises of Fusun’s belonging and things associated with her one way or the other. He conceives of the idea of making a
museum during his trip to Paris, after Fusun’s tragic death in a car crash days before their marriage. After collecting the innumerable things that Fusun used including 4,213 cigarette butts, 237 hair clips, 409 lottery tickets, saltshakers, earrings and visiting 5,723 museums around the world, Kemal comes up with idea of writing a catalog for his museum in form of a novel. And the one he chooses for this job is none other than the novelist Orhan Pamuk, who appears as a character in the novel.

Throughout the novel Kemal is depicted as a westernized man who doesn’t bother to think about anything apart from his own estranged love life. But, later during one of his various foreign tours he begins to ponder over questions such as “What did these Europeans think about me? What did they think about us all?” (Pamuk, 2009, p.681). His museum is also an antidote to Turkey’s internalized sense of inferiority, as he tells Pamuk that during his tours to different western museums he realized that, “while the West takes pride in itself…the rest of the world lives in shame. But if the objects that bring us shame are displayed in a museum, they are immediately transformed into possessions in which to take pride” (Pamuk, 2009, p. 711). Kemal, like Pamuk, believes that past, symbolized by the objects, when left to decay becomes a mark of shame but if it is preserved with dignity it become a symbol of pride. As he tells Pamuk that “With my museum I want to teach not just the Turkish people but all the people of the world to take pride in the lives they live” (Pamuk, 2009, p.711).
Kemal’s museum of innocence is a bridge between two cultures, two worlds, the western world where he learned the art of collection and the eastern world whose objects he displays in it. The museum, as he tells Orhan Pamuk, is a western concept but “instead of displaying the Occidentalist fantasies of our rich, our museums should show us our own lives” (Pamuk, 2009, p.719). Unlike the Istanbul showrooms depicted in *The Black Book* (1994) which display the mannequin brought in from the West, Kemal’s museum is a celebration of the indigenous culture and history, past and present, East and West. His museum, according to Goknar is a “corollary to the national museum itself: a secular temple…of a happy synthesis…between tradition and modernity” (2013, p.241).

The museum is Kemal’s attempt to capture and preserve the soul of his era, by telling its story through ordinary, everyday objects, for the future generations of Turkey and for the rest of world. In the same way as Pamuk tries to preserve the soul of his beloved Turkey, whose history he tries to reclaim through his writing. At the end Kemal narrates his whole love story to Pamuk, the novelist who is supposed to write a novel on it. Like the museum, the novel too is a western concept. Kemal’s faith in the western artistic and literary models is Pamuk best way of conveying how a deeper study of other cultures and civilization establishes a bond of trust and respect.
Snow (2004)

In Orhan Pamuk’s own words Snow (2004) is his “only political” novel but without a political agenda. He asserts that his novel is different from other political novels because he is not taking sides and “there’s almost no propaganda in it” (quoted in McGaha, 2008, p. 156). The novel is a critical examination of the modern Turkey, its cultural and political crisis and its rapidly changing relation with the West. According to Margaret Atwood (b.1939), Snow is an exploration of the “divided, hopeful, desolate, mystifying Turkish soul” (2004, retrieved). According to another critic Tom Payne, the novel raises essential questions like, “How European a country is it? How can it respond to fundamentalist Islam and how can an artist deal with these issues?” (2004, retrieved).

In this novel, Pamuk defies the stereotypical images of traditional, religious easterners created by the westernizers to defend their own tough stance. He depicts the Islamists as progressive, individuated intellectuals, more rational and refined than the secularists. For example, he portrays Blue, the infamous leader of the Islamists, as a modern, educated, suave man. In one of his interviews Pamuk said that through Blue’s character he tried to break “the taboo in western civilization where there’s an invented evil person called an Islamic fundamentalist. I tried to see that person as a human being” (2004, retrieved). Similarly, through Kadife’s character Pamuk challenges the draped-in-jet-black-scarf image of the Muslim girls, by depicting her as a charismatic, intelligent and independent person. Apart
from these two, Sheikh Saadettin, the religious preacher is presented as a friendly, patient and thoughtful fellow. He is a complete contrast to the “beard provincial reactionaries” feared and despised by the westerners. According to various critics, Pamuk in this novel presents Islamic modernity and end of extremism as symbolized by Sunny Zaim and Blue’s death as a new solution to the East-West division (Daglier, 2012).

Years before writing Snow Pamuk would imagine a scene, which later became the inspiring idea for this novel, in which two men, one a secularist and the other an Islamist, discuss civilization in a prison cell. The protagonist Kerim Alakusoglu or Ka is undoubtedly the westernized, modern, secularist of Pamuk’s imagination who throughout the novel tries to engage people of opposite beliefs in a peaceful dialogue. He is the only one in the novel who has access to all camps, the secularists, Islamists, religious school boys, headscarf girls, religious preachers, journalists and leftists. In this novel, he is the metaphorical bridge as he plays the role of a mediator between the opposite camps. He is a combination of the eastern and western sensibility, he lives in Germany but writes poetry in Turkish. The Islamists begin to recognize him as their ambassador to the West and the secularists want him to help them find Blue, the infamous Islamist leader. He, although unintentionally, brings different groups, the Islamists, atheist Kurdish nationalists and leftists together to put forward their point of view and debate about Turkey’s relation with the West. Although the meeting doesn’t turns out to
be much successful but it is the only instance in the novel where people with divergent ideologies come together for a while.

Ka is a westerner, who before being exiled lived in the posh neighborhood of Nisantas (Freely has used this spelling in her English translation) and discarded religion because he believed it belonged to women wrapped up in scarves and men “with prayer beads in their hands” (Pamuk, 2004, p. 99). But, in Kars as he tells Sheikh Saadettin Efendi “I felt guilty about having refused all my life to believe in…God…but now I want to believe in…God…I want to be like you, but, because there’s a westerner inside me, my mind is confused” (Pamuk, 2004, p. 99-100).

Later, he tells Necip that he would prefer to be a westerner and a believer. In Germany, as we come to know from the narrator Orhan, Ka had never known the inner peace he felt in Kars where the snowflakes remind him of God and he is able to overcome his writer’s block. During the dinner with Ipek’s family he tells them that he believes that it is actually God who is sending him the poems. Ipek’s father on hearing this proclaims that Ka has come under the pressure of the Islamists but Ka rejects it and tells him that his faith has nothing to do with anyone and that he has changed from within. During his stay, he becomes more and more fascinated with God who makes the snow fall, who enlightens people and pays deep attention to the hidden symmetry of the world. One of the most important symbols is Ka’s thick, charcoal, made-in-Germany coat which becomes a signifier of his outer, westernized self. Then there is his green notebook, which contains the poems he
wrote during his stay in Kars, which symbolize his inner world, the landscape of his mind. However, both these selves are destroyed in the mayhem that engulfs his life: the coat is pierced by the bullet shots when he is attacked in Germany and the notebook too is lost. Instead of reconciling the conflicting ideologies Ka himself falls in the unredeemable pit of despair and death. In spite of Ka’s tragic death, the novel ends on an optimistic note as the novelist Orhan come to Kars to investigate relevant details of Ka’s short stay in the town as he plans to write a novel on him. Orhan (who is none other than Orhan Pamuk himself), the novelist’s entry reassures that readers that literature is the promised refuge in a world shattered by conflicts and clashes.

**Silent House (2012)**

*Silent House* is a tragic look at Turkey’s westernization process, religious fundamentalism and the growing gap between different sections of the Turkish society. The world persuasively depicted in the novel is the one disfigured by the conflicts and chaos, fear and fanaticism where ideologies have the power to determine life and death. The images evoked by Pamuk throughout the story are at once both spellbinding and disturbing. On the one side are the westernizers, ruthlessly trying to enforce their ideas and on the other side are the aggressive religious fundamentalists, turning the tables on them.
Far from the maddening crowd is Faruk, an overweighted, alcoholic, sterile, historian, engrossed in the silent archives of Gebze, researching on a plague that he believes occurred in the village in the 16th century. During his stay he also conceives of an idea of writing a book about the 16th century Gebze which would include every minute detail from meat prices to political policies. He, even, considers including the story of a swindler named Budak, so that readers who look for stories in the history books won’t be disappointed by his book. As a historian, Faruk wants to write history from multiple perspectives while adopting an objective approach. He believes that the job of a historian is like that of a storyteller because history is nothing but a story. Like Pamuk, Faruk begins to treat history as a “space of opportunity, a meeting place of the real and the imaginary, self and other, a space of negotiation, transgression, and even "the sublime" (Goknar, 2006, p.38).

Faruk is often compared by critics to Pamuk, according to Goknar, Faruk’s thoughts and dilemmas regarding his role as a historian could be read as reflections of Pamuk’s own transformation as a writer. Like his character, Pamuk too emphasizes on representing reality in his writing as impartially as possible. Through Faruk’s narrative the readers come to know that his wife Selma divorced him after he for years incessantly refused to consult a doctor. Their separation left him shattered and every time he finds himself thinking about her, he at once in order to distract his mind turns to history. For Faruk history serves as an antidote
to his sufferings, in the dusty record rooms full of the “smell and feel of the yellowed, mildewed, wrinkled pieces of paper” (Pamuk, 2012, p.85) he finds comfort and forgets about his own incomplete and distressed life. Faruk’s personal pathologies are representations of the national pathologies. As a Professor and historian he represents the Republican intelligentsia. His sterility symbolizes the secular state’s unproductiveness. The decrepit archive, where he spends most of his time in Gebze, represents the Ottoman history which was marginalized in the secular Republic to the extent that its very existence because dubious. For example, Faruk’s friends doubt that any archive exists in the village of Gebze. Through Faruk shift to history Pamuk seems to be saying that there is a need to reclaim the lost history or past in order to overcome the collective spiritual emptiness and social trauma.

Faruk, although an alcoholic like him, is a complete contrast to his grandfather Selahattin who spent all his life researching on the history of western science. He is also different from his brother Metin who dreams of going to America. Out of the main characters Faruk is the only one who ponders over questions such as how to be “oneself” in a country which has adopted a foreign culture and abandoned its own. Faruk’s attempt to recover the abandoned Turkish cultural history is an act of bridging the gaps created by westernization. He can thus be interpreted as an interlocutor who tries to link the secular national identity and the traditional Ottoman past.
Apart from this, in the last chapter of the novel, Pamuk captures the tense moment as Nilgun succumbs to her injuries after being brutally beaten by Hasan, while Fatma anxiously awaits her grandchildren in her room, unaware of the trouble that has befallen them. Clueless, restless and frightened, she finds solace by recalling the day when she, during her childhood borrowed a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* from her friends namely Sukran, Nigan and Turkan. The memories of that happy day calm her down as she begins to recalls the story of the English man lost on an Island. Like in his other novels discussed above, in this novel too, Pamuk presents the “book in your hand” as the only solace in a world engulfed in silence and terror.

As a novelist, Pamuk found his most cherished themes in the clash and interlacing of cultures and he left no aspect of it unexplored. However, his main focus has always been on discovering and emphasizing the similarities between the East and the West. He believes that more important than the clash of civilization is to understand that “other people in other continents and civilization are exactly like you” (retrieved). This he depicts in his novels as well, in *The white castle* (1990), the Venetian captive resembles his eastern master Hoja. In *The Black Book* (1994) the prostitutes look like the western movie actresses. In *My Name is Red* (2001), Enishte in Italy is stunned to see a portrait of a man who he thinks strangely resembles him. In *Snow* (2004) Ipek looks like Melinda, the western porn-star. In *The Museum of Innocence* (2009) the Jenny Colon bag made
by the eastern craftsmen is a stunning replica of the European brand. In *Silent House* (2012) Faruk sees a man who resembles the American actor Edward G. Robinson. Pamuk asserts that everyone is “sometimes a Westerner and sometimes an Easterner, in fact a constant combination of the two” (retrieved).

The physical likeness between Hoja and his Venetian slave, their act of chronicling their stories, Galip’s quest for self identity, the fusion of eastern and western literary techniques, Shekure’s picture of bliss, the consequences of resisting change too much, Ka’s returns to Kars, modernization of the Islamists, Kemal’s museum and Faruk’s interest in the Ottoman history, this chapter has tried to analyze these as Pamuk’s symbols for bridging the gulf between the East and the West. By depicting the East and the West as identical Pamuk deconstructs the generalizations made about both these cultures and tries to bridge the ruptures which it has created. The most dazzling aspect of his fiction is its dedication to the pursuit of harmony and balance between different civilizations. Through his novels he invites the readers to understand the East-West relationship from a different and optimistic perspective. Apart from this, Pamuk, in all the novels discussed above, emphasizes the power of literature to unite humanity. For Pamuk “literature is medicine” (2006, p.20) to the melancholy of the world and so is it for his characters. He believes that novels open up new paths for a nation to understand itself and other civilizations and this he justifies entirely in his own fiction.