

Julian Rentzsch – Petr Kučera (Eds.)

# Texts, Contexts, Intertexts

Studies in Honor of Orhan Pamuk



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Edited by  
Julian Rentzsch and Petr Kučera

STUDIEN ZUR TURKOLOGIE UND ORIENTALISTIK  
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Edited by  
Julian Rentzsch

Volume 1

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## Introduction

*Julian Rentzsch and Petr Kučera*

In 1982, the first edition of Orhan Pamuk's debut, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* ('Cevdet Bey and His Sons'), was published by Karacan Yayınları in Istanbul. At that time, the novel, which had been finished in 1978, had already won the *Milliyet Yayınları Roman Ödüllü* prize for unpublished novels. After its publication, the novel would earn its author another prize, the *Orhan Kemal Roman Armağanı*. In the year of the publication of the novel, Orhan Pamuk attained the age of 30. Hence, the year 2022 not only marks the fortieth anniversary of the launch of his first novel, but it also marks his seventieth birthday. Given his eminent importance in Turkish literature, and his recognition in world literature, as well as the relative paucity of studies on Pamuk in the English language, this twofold jubilee is a welcome opportunity to value and revisit his oeuvre from an academic perspective. Therefore, the editors asked colleagues to contribute to a volume with studies on various aspects of Orhan Pamuk's work. This volume is a collection of articles of the colleagues who responded positively to our request, and ultimately delivered their contributions.<sup>1</sup>

Considering that Pamuk's works have been amply translated into foreign languages, our initial aspiration was to include a larger number of contributions by international literary scholars who are not specialists in Turkish literature. After all, the comparative study of world literature has been widely accomplished through translations—otherwise a comparativist reading of Dostoevsky would require a profound command of Russian, and likewise with Mann of German, Proust of French, Joyce of English, and Undset of Norwegian. Orhan Pamuk is probably the only Turkish author with a comparable degree of accessibility in the languages of the world, or at least the languages of the “West”, and our expectation was that general literary scholarship would have a lot to say on a writer of his standing. To our surprise, and slight disappointment, the response of comparativists without a command of Turkish was scarce, with the result that the overwhelming majority of contributions is by experts who read Pamuk in Turkish. This result alone raises the question as to why this is

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1 We thank Erdağ Göknaar for suggesting the title of the volume.



so—is it a lack of interest in Turkish literature or a lack of courage to deviate from the well-trodden paths of the mainstream? Is there still an exoticism connected to literature in Turkish (or translated from Turkish)? Is it the rather unjustified fear that one might not understand the “too distant” cultural, historical, and literary context? Or is even Pamuk affected by the decline in esteem and popularity of Turkey due to the autocratic and oppressive politics of the ruling president and his Islamist and nationalist party alliance? Being able to read a work of literature in its original language per se is, of course, not a disadvantage at all, but we feel that “the others” could have added interesting perspectives on Pamuk’s oeuvre with their different profiles and areas of expertise.

That Orhan Pamuk forms an established part of the canon of world literature is evident not only from the number of translations of his work and the prizes he has won. That prestigious publishing houses in many countries have been eager to have his books in their program, and—at least since the award of the Nobel Prize—to have his new books translated into Turkish shortly after their publication signifies that Pamuk “sells”. Furthermore, while it is difficult to know with certainty, we may assume that his books are not only sold but also actually read by an open-minded, broadly interested, intellectual global readership.

Thus, in contrast with Pamuk’s reception on the part of the readers, and despite his international prestige, academic work on this author remains relatively confined to Turcologists and literary scholars who read his works in Turkish. This is reflected in the composition of our contributors, who are mostly scholars in Turkish studies working in Europe or the US, or scholars in literary studies, Turkish language and literature, or related disciplines in Turkey.

Within Turkish literature, Pamuk’s status is so eminent that virtually everyone reading Turkish literature has an opinion about him, be it positive, negative, or ambivalent. It is impossible to unsee Pamuk in the Turkish literature scene. His 1985 novel *Beyaz Kale* (‘The White Castle’) played a crucial role in the formation of “innovative” historical fiction in Turkey. At least since the publication of his novel *Kara Kitap* (‘The Black Book’) in 1990, Pamuk has been one of the dominant agents in the postmodernist turn in Turkish literature. Both the form and content of his work and his public statements are controversially received in Turkey, ranging from praise to condemnation—the most prominent accusations being that he pandered to an international readership at the expense of his “Turkishness”, and, of course, that he betrayed Turkishness itself. However, his role in the Turkish literary community is exceptional.

Pamuk's artistic development, constant stylistic re-invention, and breadth of topics are also remarkable. As hard as Pamuk's works resist being pigeonholed, a historian of literature might categorize his fiction as modern family sagas (*Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, *A Strangeness in My Mind*), innovative historical novels (*The White Castle*, *My Name is Red*, *Nights of Plague*), political allegories (*Snow*, *Silent House*), tragic love story (*The Museum of Innocence*), existentialist narrations (*The Black Book*, *The New Life*), or modern epic (*The Red-Haired Woman*). While Pamuk started with a writing style akin to the great tradition of the realist novel (*Cevdet Bey and His Sons*), he soon turned to modernist techniques of multiplicity of narrators, stream of consciousness, and blurred timelines (*Silent House*), before developing a distinct postmodernist style of narration (*The White Castle*). The experimentation with style and form peaked with his "postmodernist trilogy" in the 1990s—*The Black Book*, *The New Life*, and *My Name is Red*—and continued in the guise of a political novel in *Snow* and the Proustian analysis of psychopathology of obsessive love in *The Museum of Innocence*. The museum of the same name, whose layout replicates the structure of the novel and turns, so to say, textuality into reality, has become, since opening its doors in 2012, a hard-to-miss part of Beyoğlu's landscape and has brought a new meaning to the concept of museums (earning Pamuk the 2014 European Museum of the Year Award). In his last three novels, Pamuk seems to return—at least conceptually—more to the 'classical' understanding of the novel, producing a family saga-cum-city novel (*A Strangeness in My Mind*), an allegorical novella playfully drawing on elements of myth and epic (*The Red-Haired Woman*), and a finely constructed microcosmos of the *fin-de-siècle* Ottoman Empire almost prophetically anticipating the outbreak a world-wide epidemic (*Nights of Plague*). An attentive and enthusiastic reader of Turkish and world literature, Pamuk has also been present in the Turkish intellectual scene as a fine literary critic with his newspaper articles and essays, collected in *Other Colors*, *My Father's Suitcase* and *Fragments of the Landscape*; more recently, he made original observations on the art of the novel (*The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist*). Arguably, no other book in the last half century has been as influential, both domestically and internationally, in monumentalizing Istanbul as Pamuk's sophisticated, quasi-autobiographical *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. His penchant for photographs, as displayed in this book, which was later translated into two volumes of his own pictures of the city (*Balcony* and *Orange*), reveals another side of Pamuk's artistic talent. Firmly grounded in the geography of his native Istanbul as he is and making occasional forays outside the City, Pamuk has frequently been identified as *the* Istanbul author or even *the* Turkish writer, especially by international

media. This is an identification that Pamuk did not choose, and which has led to considerable misunderstanding and undeserved aversion in the Turkish intellectual scene. However, in his manifold roles as a prominent novelist, founder and curator of a museum, photographer, chronicler of Istanbul, literary critic, or simply public intellectual, Pamuk has been a “perennial star” within cultural and social debates in Turkey.

Outside Turkey, for example in Central and Western Europe, as well as in the US, Pamuk is esteemed as a serious literary voice, but inevitably viewed in connection with Turkey. He is often either seen as a representative of Turkey, or, depending on cliché and taste, as a representative of “another” desirable and more amiable Turkey. Consequently, he is often approached about his opinion on political and social issues in Turkey, about Turkish-EU relations, or about his (or “the Turks”) views on “the West”, and almost seems to function as an intercultural ambassador of Turkish issues, a role doubtless unsought by him.<sup>2</sup> Although this “international” role is fundamentally different from the internal Turkish one, we may at least suspect that the external view on Pamuk also has repercussions for his reception in Turkey.

Naturally, this opposition between “internal” and “external” perspectives on Pamuk and his literary work is also reflected, in some ways, in the contributions to this volume, although all the contributors share a profound insight into modern Turkish literature. The reading experience and the approach to any author necessarily differs depending on whether or not the reader was born and socialized in the same country as the author, and whether or not she or he reads the work in her or his native language.

Every contributor to this volume has his or her own experience or “story” with Pamuk, and the same is true of the editors. Petr Kučera has translated ten of his books from Turkish into Czech, which means having spent thousands of hours in private with Orhan Pamuk. He also greatly benefited from the generous responses by Orhan Pamuk to his relentless questions related to translation issues, and from the inspiring talks they had during their long walks through Prague. Moreover, it was after reading Pamuk’s *Kara Kitap*—and Yaşar Kemal’s *Ortadirek* (‘The Wind from the Plain’)—as an undergraduate student that he decided to devote himself to the study of Turkish literature.

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2 On this issue, see, for example, the contributions by Sylwia Filipowska and Simge Yılmaz in this volume.

Julian Rentzsch owes much of his knowledge of the Turkish language, especially syntax and lexicon, to the reading of Pamuk's novels. Moreover, Pamuk opened for him the portal to the fascinating world of Turkish literature; his passion for many other Turkish authors awoke only after his reading of several of Pamuk's books.

With regard to the thematic spectrum of the contributions included in this volume, we did not specify any restrictions in topics, therefore the essays are thematically diverse and result from the individual choices and preferences of the authors. There is naturally a thematical overlap among some of the essays, but every contribution adds a unique perspective to Pamuk's work. One aspect that deserves highlighting is the fact that the 18 studies in this volume are not confined to Pamuk's well-known works. In one way or another, they touch upon all of the eleven of Pamuk's existing novels,<sup>3</sup> as well as engaging with Pamuk's essays and photographic output – both of which are important, though often overlooked, elements of Pamuk's oeuvre.

Several contributions address issues of genre in Pamuk's work. Erol Köroğlu shows that, in contrast with claims in literature, Pamuk's first novel *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* is much more than a realistic novel in its classical sense. Rather, it uses the techniques of realism in order to subvert the reader's expectation about this genre, and in this respect anticipates narrative strategies used by Pamuk in his later novels. Halim Kara demonstrates how Pamuk's novels play with the genre of crime fiction without really typifying it, and exemplifies this strategy of subversion on the basis of the author's most recent novel, *Veba Geceleri* ('Nights of Plague'). Zeynep Tüfekçioğlu-Yanaşmayan reads *Veba Geceleri* as a historical metafiction. Designed both as a "historical novel" and a "history written in the form of a novel" by a fictional author Mîna Mingerli, *Veba Geceleri* questions the ontological status of the past and the essence of historiography. Julian Rentzsch reads the novel *Kırmızı Saçlı Kadın* ('The Red-Haired Woman') as a specimen of epic tradition using Greek and Persian heritage and transforming it into a modern urban epic.

Political aspects of Pamuk's fiction are addressed in many articles but occupy a central position in two contributions. Sibel Irzık investigates the entanglement of aesthetics and politics in Pamuk's novels, with a focus on *Yeni Hayat* ('The New Life'), *Benim Adım Kırmızı* ('My Name is Red'),

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3 For some reason, three novels—*The Silent House*, *The White Castle*, and *A Strangeness in My Mind*—attracted the least scholarly attention of the contributors, and are dealt with only cursorily in the volume.

and *Kar* ('Snow'), and observes how Pamuk negotiates questions of art and politics, and how politics are "put on stage" in his novels in the form of aesthetic meta-politics. Erdağ Gökner argues that the contrast between secularism and Muslim devoutness is racialized in Turkey, with whiteness attributed to the privileged Kemalist upper class and blackness associated with the less educated, Muslim lower class, and shows how, and to what degree, this contrast is represented in Pamuk's literary output, with a particular focus on *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*.

The representation and function of objects and people in Pamuk's work are investigated in another group of articles. Fatih Altuğ demonstrates how objects and other non-humans form networks and acquire a specific type of agency in three of Pamuk's novels, *Kara Kitap*, *Yeni Hayat*, and *Benim Adım Kırmızı*, and how the relationship between the human and the non-human is negotiated in these novels. Piotr Kawulok analyses how objects acquire uncanny qualities in Pamuk's *Kara Kitap* and Witold Gombrowicz's Polish novel *Kosmos* ('Cosmos'), and the different ways in which the protagonists of these novels, Galip and Witold, restore their relationship with the objects in their world in order to overcome the crises they live through. Zeynep Arıkan Yılmaz reads *Yeni Hayat* against the background of posthuman theory and shows that in the novel there is a fluidity of identity in which every signifier can have multiple signifieds. By replacing the authentic with the synthetic, a process in which originality is lost, *Yeni Hayat* proposes the possibility of an alternative history.

This brings us to the domain of poetics. Based on Pamuk's essay collection *Saf ve Düşünceli Romançı* ('The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist'), and examples from his novels, Zeynep Uysal demonstrates that the poetics of Pamuk's fiction builds on the idea of a landscape as the metaphor of the novel. As a result of this technique, Pamuk's novels constitute museum-like archives and landscapes based on the notion of visibility. Gunvald Axner Ims analyzes how the borders between fiction and non-fiction are blurred in Pamuk's work by the appearance in his novels of characters named Orhan, or an author named Orhan Pamuk, and by the primacy of symmetry, that is form, over factual accuracy in his autobiographical writing. The strategies of employing autofictional elements is investigated throughout Pamuk's oeuvre, with particular reference to his novel *Yeni Hayat*. Petr Kučera and Johanna Chovanec investigate *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* ('Istanbul: Memories and the City') and *Kara Kitap* for authenticity, originality, and intertextuality, and show what understanding of these concepts Pamuk offers, how they are embedded into the structure of both texts, and how they are affected by the post-colonial condition of an author writing from the margins of the "world republic of letters".

Another group of articles focuses on intermedial issues and visual art forms. Aysel Özdilek shows, with reference to *Masumiyet Müzesi* ('The Museum of Innocence'), how Pamuk appropriates cinematographic elements from Turkish *Yeşilçam* films for his novel. The novel itself is about the *Yeşilçam* film industry, and the love story in the novel contains various components of a *Yeşilçam* melodrama. However, Pamuk not only uses the conventions of the genre, but also breaks with them. Monika Schmitz-Emans investigates how Pamuk's photo books *Balkon* ('Balcony') and *Turuncu* ('Orange') connect to his literary work by addressing topics such as temporality, history, and memory. This aspect of Pamuk's oeuvre is compared with the work of the Austrian writer Gerhard Roth, who also supplemented his literary work with photography art. Esra Canpalat elaborates on the color aesthetics of the photographs in *İstanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir* and *Turuncu*. The photos in these volumes document the social and material transformation of Istanbul on the one hand and carry an emotional load of nostalgia on the other. They are used to place Pamuk's life and work in a narrative of a former Istanbul and they connect his individual experiences and recollections with the transformation of Istanbul.

Two contributions are dedicated to the reception of Pamuk. Sylwia Filipowska chronicles the reception of Orhan Pamuk's literary output in Poland, which began as late as 2003, when the first mention of Pamuk was made in the Polish press and gained impetus only after he had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006. Since then, there has been a constant and regular reception of Pamuk's work in the Polish press, although certain fields of interests are highlighted in the reviews, as well as in academic work. Simgе Yılmaz documents the reception of Pamuk in the German-speaking countries. She shows that the academic reception of his work in Germanophone culture began as early as 1987, starting with Turcologists, and later involving scholars from other disciplines. Pamuk has been discussed in the media since the publication of the German translation of *Beyaz Kale* in 1990. The reception in popular media usually pays tribute to the author's role as a leading intellectual of Turkey, resulting in a politicization of his positions and statements.

Finally, in his very broadly conceived contribution, Hasan Bülent Kahraman offers an overview of the historical and political context of Pamuk's background and analyzes his Istanbul novels, especially *Kara Kitap*, *Masumiyet Müzesi*, and *Kafamda Bir Tuhaflık* ('A Strangeness in My Mind'), in which the author draws a picture of the social, political, and physical circumstances in Istanbul of the post-1950 period and creates a political and critical memory of Istanbul centering around the concept of melancholia. Kahraman proposes the categories of *hot memory* versus

*cold memory* and argues that in his Istanbul novels, Pamuk provides a new politics of memory, in which the fluctuating memory with radical changes (“hot memory”) that hitherto dominated in Turkey is replaced by a more stable, static memory (“cold memory”), which comprises as many traces of the past as possible and is highly stable over time.

We are confident that the thematic spectrum of these essays, which due to their internal diversification could have been grouped differently, covers Pamuk’s oeuvre in sufficient breadth to do justice to this exceptional writer, and will provide the readers, specialists and non-specialists, with and without a command of Turkish, with valuable and stimulating insights. It is our hope that Orhan Pamuk will continue to inspire his readers and to annoy his declaimers. May his voice continue to resonate in Turkey, and around the world. Kalemiz daim olsun, Sevgili Orhan Bey!

## Non-Human Beings, Agency, and Networks in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*, *The New Life* and *My Name is Red*

Fatih Altuğ

Orhan Pamuk's three novels published in the 1990s, *The Black Book* (1990), *The New Life* (1994), and *My Name is Red* (1998), have significant thematic affinities in terms of fictionalizing non-human beings. Orhan Pamuk depicts how objects, texts, paintings, photographs, faces, maps, cities, styles, and signatures influence people. The novels pay attention to the agency that not only people but also other entities are capable of. Novelistic entities are elements of certain networks and have a role in forming new networks. In these environments, where an autonomous existence is impossible, everything is mediated by other things. In this study, I aim to show how Pamuk establishes the relationship between the human and the non-human and depicts the functions of networks in his novels by chronologically discussing Orhan Pamuk's novels of the 1990s. These themes are also intertwined with the discussions about the meaning and mystery of the world. Therefore, this discussion is closely related to the ontological, semantic, and semiotic aspects of Orhan Pamuk's novels.

### I

The chapter "When the Bosphorus Dries Up" is a micro-example of the fundamental principles how *The Black Book* entangles people and other beings. Here, the narrator describes various styles of relationships between entities and an imaginary world consisting of these relationships. In this chapter, Celâl speculates what might happen when the waters of the Bosphorus dry up, and the Bosphorus turns into a piece of land. In this new district of the city, mussels, jellyfish, and seaweeds mingle with objects that were once thrown into the sea. In the midst of the amalgam of sunken ships, skeletons, carcasses, organic and inorganic substances, new neighborhoods are established, new social relations are formed, and new epidemics occur. The New Bosphorus district is a dystopic place where history and biology, abjection and sociality, lost past and potential future, subjectivity and objectivity, living and nonliving are entangled.



Throughout *The Black Book*, subjects, objects, humans, non-humans, books, letters, cityscapes, maps, faces, originals, copies, and imitations form heterogeneous mixtures with different combinations in each chapter. While events are woven around Galip's search for Celâl and Rüya and Celâl's newspaper articles, Pamuk fictionalizes entities as having agency.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, a green ballpoint pen is a crucial and emblematic object that connects the novel's entities, chapters, texts, maps, and styles. It has a mysterious existence representing this fictitious network of relations and agents, traversing the novel from beginning to end. In various chapters of the novel, the reader encounters a green ballpoint pen used in writing the notes about Rüya, editing Celâl's writings, and marking the letters on the face and city maps. This pen, in a way, shuttles back and forth between the fictional and the physical world.

Alaaddin's shop appears in the novel as another micro-realm in which all kinds of objects and commodities are intertwined and fused. This realm is an assembly of things where toys, shoelaces, sharpeners, plates, chewing gums, backgammon dice, bottle openers, and other items come together. Various kinds of commodities and the desires of the residents of Nişantaşı come together through Alaaddin. In this commodity carnival, Aladdin

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1 My understanding of agency follows Bruno Latour's and Rita Felski's approaches. Adapting Latour's theory to literary criticism, Felski presents here how she envisions the agency of non-human actors: "Perhaps Latour's idea of the nonhuman actor can clear a path. What, first of all, are nonhuman actors? Speedbumps, microbes, mugs, ships, baboons, newspapers, unreliable narrators, soap, silk dresses, strawberries, floor plans, telescopes, lists, paintings, cats, can openers. To describe these radically disparate phenomena as actors is not at all to impute intentions, desires, or purposes to inanimate objects nor to ignore the salient differences between things, animals, texts, and people. An actor, in this schema, is anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference. Nonhuman actors do not determine reality or single-handedly make things happen—let us steer well clear of technological or textual determinism. And yet, as Latour points out, there are 'many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence,' between being the sole source of an action and being utterly inert and without influence. The 'actor' in actor-network theory is not a self-authorizing subject, an independent agent who summons up actions and orchestrates events. Rather, actors only become actors via their relations with other phenomena, as mediators and translators linked in extended constellations of cause and effect. Nonhuman actors, then, help to modify states of affairs; they are participants in chains of events; they help shape outcomes and influence actions. To acknowledge the input of such actors is to circumvent, as far as possible, polarities of subject and object, nature and culture, word and world, to place people, animals, texts, and things on the same ontological footing and to acknowledge their interdependence" (Felski 2011: 582–583).

does his best so that people can reach the objects of desire; sometimes, he travels through the city for a single object and finds it. Here, the desires for objects are in flux, and the collective desire can turn from one object to another in a short time. Alaaddin's shop is a medium where impenetrable relationships between commodities, people, and desires occur.

Air shafts in apartments also contain an abject amalgam of objects, lost things, microbes, and bacteria, just like the Bosphorus mentioned above. The entities here, which give birth to curiosity and fear, are uncanny and dangerous:

They spoke of the air shaft as one might speak of an ugly and contagious disease; the void was a cesspool into which they too might fall if they didn't watch their step; it was the crucible of evil, insinuated by sly unknown hands into the very heart of their lives.<sup>2</sup>

Orhan Pamuk fictionalizes how people form networks of relationships with non-human beings, focusing on The New Bosphorus, Alaaddin's shop, air shafts, and green ballpoint pens. He demonstrates that these complex and heterogeneous networks have agency in everyday life and on the fictional level. *The Black Book* is an actor-network in the sense defined by Michael Callon:

The actor-network is reducible neither to an actor alone nor to a network. Like networks it is composed of a series of heterogeneous elements, animate and inanimate, that have been linked to one another for a certain period of time. [...] An actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of.<sup>3</sup>

Another important figure of the theory, Bruno Latour, also refuses to think of subject and object as hierarchical and binary. He views entities of different types such as subject, object, human, animal, discourse, organization, and structure as relational. Non-human entities are not passive components of their relationships; they are capable of agency because they affect the interaction. In this case, no element is pure; it is always part of heterogeneous networks.<sup>4</sup> Orhan Pamuk constructs *The Black Book* as a network of people, objects, texts, discourses, and other entities. Each element contributes to the intra-textual interaction and is therefore capable of

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2 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 190, Pamuk 2006: 208.

3 Callon 1987: 93.

4 Jóhannesson & Bärenholdt 2009: 15.

agency. At the same time, the elements form the network called *The Black Book* in a multi-layered manner and are determined and mediated by this network.

The relations Galip and Celâl establish with non-human beings are also crucial in understanding the novel's perception of the world and the meaning. Galip's views on the function of objects in fictional texts and his approach to objects in daily life are compatible. He opposes the erasure of the relative autonomy of objects and their instrumentalization by a human subject. He is bored in the artificial world of detective fiction, while Rüya is fond of it. All subjects and objects in this world cannot resemble themselves, either because they resemble clues or because the author forced them to fake clues.<sup>5</sup> He only desires a detective novel in which the author does not know the murderer, in which objects and characters imitate what they are in life, not clues in the author's mind.<sup>6</sup> The same logic applies when Galip looks at the household goods right after Rüya has left the house. Galip, who looks at Rüya's jewelry, clothes, furniture, and other objects as clues pointing to where Rüya is, soon realizes that this act is hopelessly pointless.<sup>7</sup> Objects do not respond to Galip's meticulous attention.

However, the objects in the house did not reveal themselves to Galip even when Rüya was at home. Galip believes that Rüya has turned the house into a "secret, mysterious and slippery area."<sup>8</sup> He thinks that all housewives arrange the house as such a zone and that housewives have a secret network that others cannot penetrate. Household items are also inaccessible for Galip, as they are under the influence of this network resembling a cult.

In Celâl's columns, the object conception of the novel is presented as a kind of theory. According to Celâl, "most people [...] fail to see the inner essence of the things around them, simply because these things are right under their noses, while they pay great attention to the secondary properties of things that seem just beyond them, simply because they find them in dark corners, on the edge of things, and therefore think them more obscure."<sup>9</sup> Celâl composes his writings in line with this idea. When readers discover the meanings Celâl conceals in the so-called hidden corners of his writings, they are satisfied and leave the newspaper aside, thus ignoring

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5 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 51.

6 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 52.

7 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 53.

8 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 55.

9 Pamuk 2006: 94, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 88.

the obvious meanings of the article. Celâl's approach is similar to Graham Harman's concept of real object:

The real objects are hidden because no matter how much they malfunction or how much we stare at or theorise about them, no amount of information about them will ever exhaust their depths.<sup>10</sup>

Ordinary people are content with the sensual aspects of the objects they encounter. Although according to Harman, it is impossible to transcend the radical alterity of a real object, ordinary people of *The Black Book* live their lives by knowing only the sensual qualities of objects as the reality of objects. These people, unlike Celâl, are unaware of the difference between the real and the sensual.

As Galip reads Celâl's writings, he identifies with him and appropriates his notion of object. While wandering around the Süleymaniye Mosque, Galip experiences the mosque as an autonomous object:

He felt that the mosque, like the stones on which it was built, was a self-sufficient, closed, enormous object. The place neither invites people to one place, nor sends them to another. Just as nothing was a sign of anything, anything could be a sign of everything.<sup>11</sup>

Galip feels that the entities inside the mosque are more "naked" than they should be, and they are calling him to give them meaning. Although Galip seems to have encountered the real existence of the mosque in this experience, he sees himself as the subject who is authorized to make sense of this experience. Galip is about to attribute absolute meaning to the mosque by erasing its alterity, which cannot be reduced to human subjectivity. Nevertheless, two older men appear in the mosque, and this pure moment of Galip's humanistic autonomy has faded away. The outside is always there; the relations between entities are constantly mediated.

As the novel progresses, Galip's relationship with objects also changes. In this respect, his encounter with a junk dealer and the items he sells is a turning point. These items, consisting of records, shoes, pliers, telephones, and the like, fascinate Galip; but, after a while, Galip realizes that the source of fascination is not the objects themselves but the arrangement of the objects. There is a measured distance between things, they do not touch each other, but this order is not accidental; it is intended. Objects are not merely what they signify; they point to secondary meanings. Galip

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<sup>10</sup> Harman 2013: 193.

<sup>11</sup> Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 181.

senses that there is such a second meaning, but he does not know this second meaning. He wants to enter the “mysterious world of second meanings.”<sup>12</sup>

When Galip enters Celâl’s house, he is surprised that all the furniture and household items in the room are as he remembered from his childhood. It is as if the things are not themselves:

If there was anything new, it was a simulation of something old; Galip had to ask himself if this was part of the game, as if these things were meant to trick him into thinking the last quarter century had never happened.<sup>13</sup>

These old things are also clues. Galip tries to find signs of Celâl’s whereabouts based on their characteristics, appearance, smell, and arrangement.<sup>14</sup>

In Celâl’s column, in which he describes a person who has trouble sleeping, it is claimed that the household items are waiting for sleep along with that person. One of the person’s tactics for sleeping is imagining the bewilderment of a man who discovers the secondary meanings of objects. He experiences this discovery as complete intoxication. The person finally sleeps, and the objects next to him are this time “distant, alien, and strange.”<sup>15</sup>

In these anecdotes, objects and people mediate each other to produce meaning. On the one hand, the objects themselves seem to perform a mysterious meaning; on the other, the person who arranges the objects in a certain way produces this meaning. It is an experience in which the subjects arranging the objects entangle with the objects themselves and the person observing the objects in this arrangement.

While searching for Celâl and Rüya in the city, at home, and in Celâl’s columns, Galip increasingly feels that “a deeper reality that holds together things, words, and meanings is gone.”<sup>16</sup> As his ideas about Celâl change, his relationship with the objects also changes. When Galip thinks that Celâl is knowable, he believes that “items and objects are extensions of an intelligible world,” but the essence of objects completely changes as he realizes that his image of Celâl is false: “Household items become dangerous signs of a world whose secrets cannot be easily solved any longer and those

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12 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 198–199.

13 Pamuk 2006: 237, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 217.

14 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 220.

15 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 228.

16 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 230.

who do not seem friendly at all.”<sup>17</sup> In his columns, Celâl frequently refers to displacements between themes or between the author and the person described by the author. Galip thinks that there is a strong connection between the qualities of objects and Galip’s metonymic discourse based on displacements. As he reads Celâl’s writings, he feels that “the deep meaning and optimism that binds the trivia together” is being withdrawn.<sup>18</sup> Galip describes the room where this intense and uncanny reading experience takes place as a “ghostly realm.”<sup>19</sup>

In *The Black Book*, not only everyday objects or Celâl’s writings, but also books and movies have agency. The texts encountered in different environments influence and transform people. According to Bedii Usta, films lead to the disappearance of gestures of ordinary people on the street, which have existed for centuries. The new gestures of laughing, opening windows, slamming doors, holding a teacup, wearing a jacket, nodding, coughing, and getting angry are appropriated from the movies and have become widespread.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes, the novel depicts the emotional dynamics of Galip’s identification with the female character in a film. The filmic experience presents to the reader how Galip realizes both being himself and being someone else.<sup>21</sup> According to Rüya’s ex-husband, movies have radically changed people’s worldviews. Cinema, as a product of cultural imperialism, has blinded people. By putting themselves in the shoes of the people they see in the movie, they become subject to the Western powers.<sup>22</sup> However, Galip thinks that this man turned his life, which he thought authentic, into a movie. He designed a pure life unaffected by films to resist cultural imperialism. The items in the house and his relations with his wife and children are arranged according to a particular ideal. However, in the final analysis, this arrangement has transformed daily life into a representation, a kind of film. Even though this family got rid of the influence of a particular film, they could not be freed from the agency of the art of cinema.<sup>23</sup>

Galip evaluates the world, the city, texts, films, and objects, all entities as signs, symptoms, or clues, to find Rüya and Celâl. Each entity seems to point to something else along with itself. The sentences in Celâl’s writings

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17 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 231.

18 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 234.

19 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 237.

20 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 64.

21 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 102–103.

22 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 118.

23 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 120.

“signify themselves and other things simultaneously.”<sup>24</sup> As words are read repeatedly, they “lose their meaning and turn into some shapes made of letters.”<sup>25</sup> Then, Galip starts reading the city, trying to understand the gestures and facial expressions of the urbanites. He is searching for that expression in which “the secret” appears for a moment. He aspires to the real meaning behind people’s “masked expression.”<sup>26</sup> He carefully looks at the city with all its details, even including the writings on the bags that people carry in their hands. He thinks that the words and letters on the bags are signs that will show “the other truth,” “the original truth.” People, letters, and pictures are all signs of a mystery. Behind every entity, there is a “hidden hand.” For him, the tricks played by this “hidden hand”, which is the perpetrator of the secret that surrounds everything, should be deciphered. The secret hand “deftly arranged everything in such a way that it pointed to that very secret meaning, and yet, it managed to remain hidden.”<sup>27</sup> Thinking of each object as a piece of this game, Galip assumes that he will discover the mystery by reading objects and signs as if he were reading people’s faces. When he looks with patience and attention, it seems that he can reach the hidden meaning, but the clues and signs are so numerous and complex that the meaning is constantly deferred. In the infinite variety of signs, the secret remains inaccessible.

After a while, the maps in Celâl’s house join the play of signs. Maps of Istanbul, Cairo, and Damascus are filled with arrows drawn with a green ballpoint pen. While the arrows on the Istanbul map coincide with the itineraries of Galip’s city journeys, the arrows form the face of an older man when he overlaps the maps of the three cities. The city, the map, and the face are intertwined. Unable to attain the secret in this entanglement, Galip desires to distance himself and become someone else:

But now, as the world drew away from him, its secrets still intact, as the objects surrounding him lost their aura of familiarity to become alien signs from an alien planet, as he stared into maps to find faces he could not recognize, all Galip wanted was to escape from the body that had brought him to this hopeless vista.<sup>28</sup>

Galip thinks that Celâl, unlike himself, has reached this secret and surpassed the complexity of maps, cities, faces, and signs. In his columns,

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24 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 192.

25 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 194.

26 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 195.

27 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 196.

28 Pamuk 2006: 264, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 240–241.

Celâl invites his readers to enter the “secret poetry” of faces and the “terrible mystery” of looks.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to the agency of these columns, Galip’s imagination and the “sediments of his memory” are activated.<sup>30</sup> Following Celâl’s call, he first attempts to examine the human faces in the photographs Celâl has collected and then looks more carefully at the faces of the people in the city and reads them.

The executioner in one of Celâl’s columns has similar experiences. He is tasked with beheading a rebellious ruler. After strangulating him, the executioner cuts off the head with a razor (called *şifre*, “cipher”), but the expression on the face of the severed head haunts him. The meaning of the world becomes plural and mysterious. His relationship with the entities in the world had changed: “He now realized that all the plants, objects, and timid animals were signs of a realm as old as memories, as simple as despair, and as frightening as nightmares.”<sup>31</sup> The world now seems to tell the executioner a story, say something, and indicate meaning, but this expression quickly disappears “in a misty unclarity.” The expression on the face of the severed head dissolved the absolute meaning, the idea of an intelligible world.

As the effort to read columns, cities, faces, objects, and people progresses, Galip falls more and more under the influence of Hurufism. Believing that entities are keeping a secret from him, Galip sees shapes made of Arabic letters on people’s faces in the photographs or on the streets. People’s faces merge with the letters.<sup>32</sup> However, instead of connecting events, his mind “gets lost in the mists of a meaning trapped between letters and faces.”<sup>33</sup> Here, the face is envisioned as a network of letters. The meaning of the network will be revealed with a look that pays attention to every detail and letter of the face. Nevertheless, at first glance, the face is illegible.

*The Black Book* understands Hurufism as a theory of semiotics:

According to Fazlallah, the dividing line between Being and Nothingness was sound, because everything that passed from the spiritual to the material world had its own sound; even the “most silent” objects made a distinct sound when knocked together. The most advanced sounds were, of course, words; words were the magic building blocks

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29 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 245.

30 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 247.

31 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 262.

32 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 267.

33 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 269.



of the exalted thing we called speech and they were made up of letters. Those wishing to understand the meaning of existence and the sanctity of life and see God's manifestations here on earth had only to read the letters hidden in the faces of men.<sup>34</sup>

According to this view, the world is not a place that exposes its meaning at first sight, it is fused with secrets, and in order to reach these secrets, it is necessary to know the mystery of the letters. When Galip learns this wisdom, he feels inner peace. All the objects around him, the coffee cup, the ashtray, the book opener, and his hand resting next to them like a drowsy crab, signify a secret world. These entities are also part of the secret world.<sup>35</sup> Rüya also resides in that world. Galip is on the threshold of that world and is about to cross this threshold thanks to the secret of the letters.

The divine mystery of this other realm is reflected in all beings, objects, and people in this world. "The world is a sea of clues."<sup>36</sup> Objects are signs of themselves and this mystery. There was a time when meaning and movement, things and their images, words and their referents, dreams and reality, poetry and life, names and people were one and could not be separated from each other. In this moment of absolute correspondence, objects were extensions of people's souls, not just their bodies. However, this "golden age", this correspondence fantasy is over. While the world is an ambivalent and mysterious place, fused with secrets, the mystery of the world and the letters on the faces have disappeared with it. The world and faces are now illegible.<sup>37</sup>

One of the characters, F. M. Üçüncü, is the source of Galip's and Celâl's thoughts on Hurufism and his understanding of the relationship between letters, words, and meaning function like a Derridaean "différance".<sup>38</sup>

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34 Pamuk 2006: 297, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 269–270.

35 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 270.

36 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 272.

37 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 277.

38 "Building on theories of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida coined the term *différance*, meaning both a difference and an act of deferring, to characterize the way in which linguistic meaning is created rather than given. For Derrida as for Saussure, the meaning of a word is a function of the distinctive contrasts it displays with other, related meanings. Because each word depends for its meaning on the meanings of other words, it follows that the meaning of a word is never fully 'present' to us, as it would be if meanings were the same as ideas or intentions; instead it is endlessly 'deferred' in an infinitely long chain of meanings. Derrida expresses this idea by saying that meaning is created by the 'play' of differences between words—a play that is 'limitless,' 'infinite,' and 'indefinite.'" *Britannica*, s.v. "Jacques Derrida".

Words refer not to meaning, but to other words, the meaning is constantly deferred, but precisely this movement of deferral and differentiation is a productive process: “Sentences, paragraphs, in short, all writings had secondary and hidden meanings. However, if it is thought that these meanings were also written in other sentences, words, that is, letters, in the end, an infinite series of hidden meanings emerged, in which the third meaning from the second meaning, the next from the next, would be discovered by ‘interpretation.’”<sup>39</sup> Here, letters, cities, and faces function similarly with this logic of *différance*. The transition from one entity to another is not in the form of deepening and reaching the hidden meaning; the signs of the language, city, and face are constantly diffused on a surface.

So a reader who set out to solve the mystery in his own way, following his own logic, was no different from a traveler who finds the mystery of a city slowly unfurling before him as he wanders through streets on that map: The more he discovers, the more the mystery spreads; the more the mystery spreads, the more is revealed and the more clearly he sees the mystery in the streets he himself has chosen, the roads he’s walked down and the alleys he’s walked up; for the mystery resides in his own journey, his own life. It would be at that very moment when the woeful reader, weakened by the pull of the story, sank so deep into it as to lose his bearings, that our long-awaited savior, the Messiah some dared only name as He, would finally manifest Himself.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike in Derrida, there is still room for a final signifier in this understanding. The Mahdi is the source of *différance* and dissemination, and when the Mahdi comes, everything will become clear again. Before the Mahdi comes, the aspirant must be able to put himself in his place and foresee how he will act. Working on the letters of one’s face and then being able to step into someone else’s shoes and identifying with others are such pre-Mahdi activities. Galip identifies with Celâl, who he thinks diffuses the Mahdi’s guiding signs, and desires to write his texts in Celâl’s style. When Galip looks at his own face with this enlightenment, he reads the letters of his face for a moment; the meaning appears and immediately disappears. He describes the terror he experienced during this time through his relationship with objects:

Perhaps the thing he would later call terror came from his surprise that the truth could be so simple, for he was struck with the same awe

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39 Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 288.

40 Pamuk 2006: 318–319, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 288.

one might feel upon glancing at a slender tea glass sitting on a table and seeing it as a thing of incredible beauty, while at the same time seeing it as a familiar object of no special interest.<sup>41</sup>

*The Black Book* is a valuable text in that it shows the type of networks through which the world and the meaning of life are mediated. All entities in the world are part of this network, and cities, faces, maps, texts, discourses, movies, styles, people, and objects constitute the layers of this network. The meaning of life and text is related to an intricate interpretation mechanism that does justice to each entity's partial agency.

## II

Some of the themes in *The Black Book* are also developed in *The New Life* (Yeni Hayat), published four years later. In terms of Orhan Pamuk's approach to the agency of objects, the two novels are in continuity. One of the most distinctive elements of *The New Life* is the agency of a mysterious book with the same title as the novel. Later, we learn that it affected a vast audience, but at the beginning of the novel, we learn how the life of the narrator, Osman, changed by reading this book. As soon as he starts reading the book, Osman's relationship with objects becomes paradoxical:

I was so affected by the book's intensity I felt my body sever itself and pull away from the chair where I sat reading the book that lay before me on the table. But even though I felt my body dissociating, my entire being remained so concertedly at the table that the book worked its influence not only on my soul but on every aspect of my identity.<sup>42</sup>

The book's effect is embodied in the light that Osman says comes out of the book. This light both blinds and brightens Osman's mind. Like Celâl's writings in *The Black Book*, this book seems to guide Osman to a country he never knew existed. This book, which seems like an everyday item, makes Osman feel the existence of another world and opens the doors of that world. Within a short time, Osman cannot distinguish between the world in the book and the book in the world: "It was as if a singular world, a complete creation with all its colors and objects, were contained

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41 Pamuk 2006: 323, Pamuk 1990 [2021]: 292.

42 Pamuk 2002: 3, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 7.

in the words that existed in the book; thus I could read into it with joy and wonder all the possibilities in my own mind.”<sup>43</sup>

While considering the agency of artworks from a Latourian perspective, Rita Felski refers to the sociability that the artwork needs even in its most autonomous state. In order to be remembered and continue to exist, works of art must have the skills to attract their readers or audience. Works of art evoke certain feelings in people by creating commitment, activating and influencing them. The value of a work is related to what it reveals or hides about the social context that surrounds it, as well as what emotions it arouses in the receiver, what perception changes it triggers, what affective bonds it creates, in other words, what it makes possible for the reader or the audience. The agency here does not belong only to the work as a whole; in the Latourian model, novels, films, etc. as well as characters, plot elements, cinematography, styles, and other formal techniques can be considered as agents. Each can be an agent that develops alliances, generates commitments, triggers translations, and inspires to reproduce, imitate, transform.<sup>44</sup>

In line with Felski’s arguments, we have seen the agency of films and columns in *The Black Book*. In *The New Life*, on the other hand, the agency of a book has almost absolute and transformative power. The encounter of Osman and the other characters in the book leads to inner turmoil, a rupture from the ordinary social environment, and the formation of new alliances. Osman’s authentic memories, associations, and ties disappear with the book, and his relationship with the old world and the bonds he established with entities are broken. While exploring every object from his new perspective, he also feels that the object can acquire a magical quality. He feels as if he is made of light leaking from the book. The book’s new world “annulled all existence and transformed the present into the past.”<sup>45</sup> Whatever object he touches, he feels the oldness of that object.

I was all too painfully aware that this world was contingent on a string of misinterpreted signals and an ingrained miscellany of indiscriminate habits, that real life was located somewhere either outside or inside, yet definitely somewhere within those parameters.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Pamuk 2002: 6, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 10.

44 Felski 2011.

45 Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 21.

Going on bus journeys, he first searches for Canan and, after finding her, both seek out Mehmet. Meanwhile, Osman also experiences the miraculous effect of traffic accidents. Accidents and collisions are moments when a new truth is revealed. After each accident he survives, Osman feels that he is someone “discovering, once again, the tactual, olfactory, and visual properties of things.”<sup>47</sup> Immediately after the accidents that reveal a new understanding of time and a new possibility of life, people, objects, the living, the dead, entire bodies, and severed organs are intertwined, and the entities are arranged with a new mixture in the accident scene. Experiencing and observing this assemblage increases Osman’s vitality. In this sense, the sites of traffic accidents are environments similar to the New Bosphorus, Alaaddin’s shop, and air shafts in *The Black Book*.

On their way in search of Mehmet, Osman and Canan attend the meeting of an anti-modernist resistance movement in disguise. The resisters, who desire an authentic life uncontaminated by western technology, favor preserving old ties with objects. Various items, machines, watches, and mechanisms are diverted from their purpose intended by the Westerners and brought together as brand new mixtures; thus, modern technology is culturally appropriated. As the ‘new life’ both as a book and as Western modernity erases the mystery of things, Doctor Fine [Dr. Narin] and this group around him are concerned about protecting the objects’ secrets. Their philosophy reflects an ideal similar to the golden age that Hurufis refer to in *The Black Book*. Early humans could see things as they were, not as an image. The visible object and its name also corresponded with each other; the names directly signify the objects. “Back then, time was time, hazard was hazard, and life was life.”<sup>48</sup> However, Satan starts the Great Conspiracy, destroying people’s happiness. Johannes Gutenberg, considered to be Satan’s disciple, invents the printing press and multiplies words, thus breaking the ties between words and objects. The printing press disseminates words:

Like hungry and frenzied cockroaches, words invaded the wrapping on bars of soap, on cartoons of eggs, on our doors, and out in the street. So, words and matter, which had formerly been inseparable, now turned against each other.<sup>49</sup>

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46 Pamuk 2002: 32, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 36.

47 Pamuk 2002: 58, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 52.

48 Pamuk 2002: 106–107, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 104.

49 Pamuk 2002: 107, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 104.

The leader of this group of resistance fighters, Doctor Fine, is a person who approaches things with care and loves them wholeheartedly. "He had recognized that discovering the unique properties of each object constitutes the highest good."<sup>50</sup> According to him, things have a memory: "Substances inquire after each other, come to an agreement, whisper to one another, and strike up a harmony, constituting the music we call the world."<sup>51</sup> Mehmet / Nahit, of whom we learn that he is Doctor Fine's son, rose to the bait of the Great Conspiracy, read the book *The New Life*, and turned his back on the animals, plants, and things in the land where he was born and grew up. The experience of "magical, necessary, and poetic concept of time"<sup>52</sup> that was transmitted to people from things in ancient times has now disappeared with the ubiquity of uniform and industrial objects. While objects and people lived in peace, new styles of commodities, "these lackluster, prosaic objects,"<sup>53</sup> led to the loss of peace. Against this, Doctor Fine and others have formed a counter-network advocating their new item order. They struggle to establish "the sovereignty of our own unadulterated annals of time,"<sup>54</sup> which is in danger of being destroyed by the modernists.

Doctor Fine's target is also books that disrupt the ancient harmony, like the book called *The New Life*. These books that "had lost their glow, clarity, and truth but pretended to be glowing, clear and true"<sup>55</sup> have become his mortal enemies. The book *The New Life* also caused the loss of his son. After reading this book, Mehmet / Nahit "had closed his eyes to the wealth of life, that is, the 'unmanifested symmetry of time,' carried away by some kind of 'blindness' against the 'totality of details repositied in each object,' having succumbed to some kind of 'death wish.'"<sup>56</sup>

The world of *The New Life* is radically ambivalent. The struggle between the dominant network of modernity and the counter-network of authenticity deeply affects and obscures the value of texts, objects, and images. The book in the novel is misleading and profane for some people, guiding and sacred for others. Objects enable deterritorialization and territorialization in different networks. It is not possible to establish a common

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50 Pamuk 2002: 123, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 119.

51 Pamuk 2002: 123, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 119.

52 Pamuk 2002: 127, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 122.

53 Pamuk 2002: 127, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 123.

54 Pamuk 2002: 130, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 125.

55 Pamuk 2002: 131–132, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 126.

56 Pamuk 2002: 132, Pamuk 1994 [1996]: 127.

language between networks. Each network generates irreconcilable world perspectives, alliances, and attachments with others.

### III

*My Name is Red*, published four years after *The New Life*, offers its readers more multi-layered and entangled networks than *The Black Book* and *The New Life*.<sup>57</sup> *My Name Is Red* opens with the words of the deceased, Elegant Effendi [Zarif Efendi]. The first chapter is presented from his point of view, speaking from the mouth of someone who has just died. By describing the exact moment of his death and what happened at the moment of the erasure of his worldly agency, Elegant Effendi's corpse gains a post-mortem agency. Witnessing the decomposition of his body, this corpse is more curious about the identity of the perpetrator of the murder than the concern for his post-mortal state, and he invites the addressees of his narrative to join him in his curiosity: "Who is this murderer, who vexes me so? Why has he killed me in such a surprising way? Be curious and mindful of these matters."<sup>58</sup> However, soon after, the context of what happened to him is extended to religion, traditions, and ways of seeing the world. As soon as the call to the addressee of the deceased to wonder who is responsible for his death is put forward, it is shifted from a stand-alone perpetrator to a context that points to a network of agents.

While trying to find the murderer of Elegant Effendi and later Enishte, Black traverses a network of relations in which many social, aesthetic, religious, amorous, visual, and textual mediations are intertwined. Although Black's will to solve the murders is more evident, finding the murderer is a collective effort. Moreover, the historical and social context is presented through a narrative structure in which human and non-human agents, animate and inanimate characters are the focalizer-narrator.

The text, which begins with the victim's desire to find the perpetrator of the murder, comes into being as an assemblage, where each entity has partial agency and is composed of narration and focalization acts performed by these entities. *My Name is Red*, in a way, is an assembly where the discourses and perspectives of human and non-human, animate and inanimate, come together. The miniaturist of the secret book, prepared

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57 For a more in-depth analysis of how agency and networks are thematized in *My Name is Red*, see Altuğ 2019.

58 Pamuk 2001: 6, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 12.

under the direction of Enishte at the request of the Sultan, also draws some beings for the storyteller (*meddah*), which are also elements of the secret book, and the storyteller shows the pictures of these beings in the coffee house and tells their stories.

Two Dervishes, Women, and non-human beings such as Dog, Tree, Coin, Death, Red, Horse, and Satan figure as protagonists both in the stories of *My Name is Red*, in the “secret” book, and in the stories of the *meddah*. The novel weaves the animation of these figures with the narratives of Black, Enishte, Orhan, Shekure, Esther, Butterfly, Stork, Olive, Master Osman, and Murderer. So, what is at issue in *My Name is Red* is not merely the presentation of specific and static events and debates in the Istanbul of the 1590s from different perspectives; the main issue is the coexistence of the plurality of perspectives that are performed formally and thematically in the novel; therefore, each perspective is immanent in the dynamic truth of the novel.

In the chapter “I am a Tree”, a tree fallen from its story is the narrator. While in Qazvin, Shah Tahmasp’s nephew, Ibrahim Mirza, gathered together the best of bookbinders, illuminators, miniaturists, and calligraphers to create a unique copy of Jami’s *Seven Thrones* (*Haft Awrang*). Envious of this project, Tahmasp wants to undermine it by dispersing all the artists to different parts of the country. However, on the suggestion of Ibrahim Mirza’s bookkeeper, each page of the book is delivered to artists in different cities of the region through messengers, and each calligraphy is brought to Qazvin after it has been illuminated and embroidered. Thus, the formation of the book takes place with the collective effort of numerous relations and agents brought together by a network extending to all directions.

The tree is disconnected from its story because its messenger was robbed by thieves while moving within the web of these relations. Being disconnected from the network, that is, being out of context, causes the tree to lose its meaning, so the tree asks its interlocutors about its meaning, similar to the victim’s asking about his murderer. “I don’t want to be a tree, I want to be its meaning.”<sup>59</sup>

The color red, which is the narrator-focalizer in the “My Name is Red” chapter, is scattered everywhere, from Firdusi’s caftan to “the wings of angels, the lips of maidens, the death wounds of corpses and severed heads [...]”.<sup>60</sup> Red is like the network itself. Like the green ballpoint pen that tra-

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59 Pamuk 2001: 57, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 59.

60 Pamuk 2001: 203, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 203.



verses *The Black Book*, the color red is a web that connects all nodes of the book and the universe. In this chapter, we see how far the network of the red color has reached, as well as what material processes it goes through and which entities are assembled in it. However, more importantly, red is an absolute agency that gives vitality and agency to all beings. Red appears with similar qualities in the scene of Enishte's encountering the divine in his post-death journey:

The red approaching me—the omnipresent red within which all the images of the universe played—was so magnificent and beautiful that it quickened my tears to think I would become part of it and be so close to Him.<sup>61</sup>

Red becomes disseminated in the realm of art, the universe, and the inner world of the secret book. Master Osman describes the red used in the paintings included in the secret book in a similar way:

An artist's hand that I couldn't identify had applied a peculiar red to the painting under the guidance of an arcane logic, and the entire world revealed by the illustration was slowly suffused by this color.<sup>62</sup>

Examples of the agency of texts and works of art that we see in *The Black Book* and *The New Life* are much more abundant in *My Name is Red*. Reading a book or gazing at a painting means opening oneself to literary or artistic work. Artworks generate an effect on the audience / reader. They produce new feelings and ideas in the person. The stylistic differences in the works of art lead to the diversification of the effect. Before encountering a Western-style painting, the functions of the paintings are clear for Enishte:

Our eyes, fatigued from reading these tales, rest upon the pictures. If there's something within the text that our intellect and imagination are at pains to conjure, the illustration comes at once to our aid. The images are the story's blossoming in color. But painting without its accompanying story is an impossibility.<sup>63</sup>

Here, the action performed by the painting gains meaning through its relation to the story. The painting, which secondary to the story, fulfils clearly defined functions such as helping the eye to rest, the mind to

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61 Pamuk 2001: 251, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 250.

62 Pamuk 2001: 273, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 271.

63 Pamuk 2001: 27, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 33.

visualize a story, and the story to become more vivid. However, with a portrait painting he encounters in Venice, Enishte is exposed to a completely different agency:

More than anything, the image was of an individual, somebody like myself. It was an infidel, of course, not one of us. As I stared at him, though, I felt as if I resembled him. Yet he didn't resemble me at all. He had a full round face that seemed to lack cheekbones, and moreover, he had no trace of my marvelous chin. Though he didn't look anything like me, as I gazed upon the picture, for some reason, my heart fluttered as if it were my own portrait.<sup>64</sup>

As he contemplates the work, Enishte, who feels the affects that the artwork arouses in him, personally experiences what a picture disconnected from its story can do. Of course, this is not a painting without a network; it is an agent which is an element of the European painting network, described in different contexts throughout the novel. While describing this exposure, Enishte also provides the context surrounding the work.

In each layer of *My Name is Red*, we witness aspects of paintings, fictional texts, and letters that transform, move and affect the addressees. Not only are the organic unity of the texts, but also the styles and the signatures of the artists capable of agency. In order to understand the texts, paintings, and murders, it is necessary to pay attention to the singular power of each nuance of the creative act and the network formed by each nuance. In terms of the networks' degree of entanglement, *My Name is Red* is much more complex than *The Black Book* and *The New Life*. Inter-personal, inter-textual, and inter-medial networks cooperate. From art traditions to style, each element of the novel has different agency capabilities. Events, styles, murderer, victims, collaborators, and plots circulate in the "secret" book, in the oral stories of the meddah, and in the novel itself, constantly being reinterpreted and forming new alliances. Orhan Pamuk's attempt to fictionalize actor-networks reached its peak with *My Name is Red*.

Orhan Pamuk's novels are texts that try to understand and represent human mental processes and imagination subtly. The main topics of Orhan Pamuk are how the external world, objects, and other people are perceived and how this perception is transformed into the inner experience. In this study, I attempt to demonstrate that we need to include non-human entities to analyze *The Black Book*, *The New Life*, and *My Name is Red*. Objects, texts, works of art, narrative techniques, writing or painting styles, and

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64 Pamuk 2001: 28, Pamuk 1998 [2017]: 34.

animal or animal representations affect the course of events and the inner worlds of the characters in these novels. The entities affect, transform and modify plots, interpersonal relationships, subjective experiences, and social and historical context. People and other entities are not isolated from each other, but together they form assemblages and networks. By following these networks, we can analyze the connections, tensions, conflicts, and alliances between all actors, human or non-human.

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## Neither Here nor There: The Entangled Worlds of *The New Life*

Zeynep Arıkan Yılmaz

*The New Life*<sup>1</sup> is a novel of experience. It begins with the protagonist's enthrallment by the book he reads: "I read a book one day and my whole life was changed."<sup>2</sup> This beginning leaves the reader with the impression that the plot will develop around the protagonist's life story. However, the momentum of the story turns out to be the protagonist's search for the lost book and his beloved, Janan, who introduces him the book. The major part of the plot consists of his journey across Turkey, full of adventures and dangerous encounters in search of the lost book that he believes will lead him to a "new life". During his journey, the protagonist constantly becomes someone else and gets divided into three parts: Mehmet/Nahit/Osman. At a certain point, we even lose track of which "I" was the original one and which came next. It is even questionable who we mean when we say "he" because he no longer has a unified "I": his "I" is fragmented. Indeed, its essence is not solid, but fluid. The space-time structure in which he exists is more like a scattered configuration than a linear and progressive line. On this fluid chronotope, it looks as if he is floating in an eternal loop of "now and here": "The beginning and the end of our journey was wherever we happened to be."<sup>3</sup> All of his actions relate to other actions he performs and the irony in his manner of speaking (he constantly negates himself) creates an alienating effect. It is obvious to the attentive reader that he is not "realistic" enough to represent a real person, but he is rather a sum of transformations and relationships. It would be wise to call him an actant as Latour uses the term.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Pamuk 1997.

2 Pamuk 1997: 3.

3 Pamuk 1997: 173.

4 "An 'actor' in ANT [Actor-Network-Theory] is a semiotic definition—an actant—, that is, something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action" (Latour 1996: 370).

All these aspects lead us to the familiar destination: at first glance *The New Life* (NL) fits into the category of the postmodern novel in terms of its self-referentiality. Instead of representing the external world<sup>5</sup> and being an allegory, it creates its own world, a world with artificial symmetry.<sup>6</sup> It is a simulation, a copy without an original, as symbolized by the countless copies of the book in the novel. My aim in this article, however, is to add another dimension to the widespread reading of Orhan Pamuk's NL. I will argue that, in the midst of this lush textuality, something seems to emerge that transcends and exceeds the hyper-reality of the text. It is this "something" that pushes the novel to the limits of language and material reality, to "the threshold where the other world [is] visible"<sup>7</sup> to "a new world [that] materialize[s] with each step [he takes]"<sup>8</sup>. This intertwining of thing and word enables the novel to resist simulation on a certain level "in so far as [it] stretches the boundaries of representation to the utmost, it reaches the limits of life itself and thus confronts the horizon of death."<sup>9</sup> I will try to elaborate my argument in light of these questions: How does the novel relate to its social and historical context? Does it represent the external reality or does it create a completely autonomous universe that is indifferent to its context? What message does its medium convey to us; in other words, how should we interpret its narrative strategies in terms of meaning-making? What role does corporeality play in the novel? What becomes of the protagonist in the end? Since he is an organic and discursive part of the novel, what then becomes the novel? I will try to find answers to these questions with regard to posthuman theory, a term that refers to the entanglement of the two worlds of discourse and materiality.

### *Posthuman*

Let me briefly explain what posthuman means and what it has to do with NL. It may be helpful to start by clarifying that "posthumanism or the

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5 I distinguish here between the external reality of the text and the material reality. The external reality refers to a particular time-space, in this case Turkey in the 1990s, and is therefore interwoven with the hegemonic discourse of its time. Material reality, on the other hand, refers to the reality beyond the discourse, something that many poststructuralists believe is impenetrable.

6 Ecevit 2004: 140.

7 Pamuk 1997: 66.

8 Pamuk 1997: 9.

9 Blanchot 2000: 107.

posthuman cannot just be understood as the follow-on, the supersession or the outcome of the postmodern and postmodernism. Instead, they should be seen as co-implicated and entangled in their respective critiques of humanism.”<sup>10</sup> Either antihumanism, which is almost synonymous with postmodernism, or posthumanism “must not be confused with cynical and nihilistic misanthropy.”<sup>11</sup> They both have the connotations of plurality of self, lack of the unity of self, pluralization of both the historical and the literary narrative, lack of a teleological and deterministic mode of thinking; all of which are closely related to the loss of faith in Humanism caused by WWII. Thus, the historical and socioeconomic context of both is the post-war period.<sup>12</sup> The rise of neo-liberalism, radical changes in the means of production and technological development had a great impact on the concept of man and his subjectivity. “He” once had the confidence to believe that he was the creator of history and the master of nature, only to find out that he was instead the object of both. He changed his role from the omnipotent “being”, the lord over all other beings in the world, *ashraf al-makhlūqāt*, to a fragmented object of history that does not dominate nature but is dominated by it.

The philosophical roots of postmodernism or antihumanism, in keeping with its historical and sociopolitical context, lie primarily in the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 70s; the Tel-Quel circle in France, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Foucault<sup>13</sup> are some of the major figures of this period. These post-structuralists rejected “the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality, and the universal.”<sup>14</sup> With the linguistic turn, the main focus of philosophy turned to language. Philosophers of the time argued that language preceded tangible reality in the external world and that reality and knowledge were accessible to us only through their discursive representations. According to them, reality became synonymous with representation: there was no reality outside the realm of language. The domination of the concepts of discourse and representation in philosophy has also affected literature. The postmodern novel is a playground for this philosophical mindset in the way it folds in on itself; instead of representing the external world, it is self-referential. To

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10 Herbrechter 2017: 64.

11 Braidotti 2013: 6.

12 For a comprehensive analysis of the socio-political and historical context of antihumanism see Braidotti 2013: 16–26.

13 Foucault differs from the others in that his field of research goes beyond the subject of language. His main concern is power.

14 Braidotti 2013: 25.

name some characteristics of this novel, we can mention the pluralization of characters, the dominance of intertextuality as a deliberate, self-aware practice, the meta-fictionality or self-referentiality of the text. Literary texts exist in a network of other texts, creating their own universe that replaces external reality. It does not seem intended to refer to what happens outside of itself, for example, in the realm of *realpolitik*. It is precisely this aspect of the postmodern novel that has been criticized in various quarters for being apolitical. Whether or not it reflects *realpolitik*, the postmodern novel has, in any case, laid another stone on the wall of antihumanism by decentring the shadow of God, i.e., man. As Stefan Herbrechter claims, it even went one step further and ushered in the era of the posthuman and posthumanism in many respects. He claims that “with their insistence on existential or ontological plurality, the fragmentation of identity and a breaking up of aesthetic norms, the breaking up of narrative continuity and teleology, many postmodern texts are thus, one could argue, more radically ‘posthumanist’ than their current successors.”<sup>15</sup>

Although the term “posthuman” is a rising star in the humanities, it is—at the same time—much more controversial than the term “postmodern” or “antihuman”. There is no single definition or approach to the concept. The associations attached to it are in any case closely linked to advanced technology, the concept of prosthesis, and environmental crisis. The rapid progress in high technology and the degree of integration of human life into it provide the ground on which a new understanding of “human” has begun to develop. Perhaps one of the most significant changes lies in the once taken-for-granted perception of the “natural”. “The natural universe is now understood as a much more fluid, dynamic and interdependent system that imposes significant limitations on our capacity for measurement.”<sup>16</sup> Since the twentieth century, the natural, the pure, and the authentic seem to be gradually replaced by the synthetic: We are becoming synthetic. Machines becoming our prosthetic extensions turn us into hybrids and rob us of the essence we once thought we possessed. They replace not only parts of our body such as memory or limbs, but also our labor. In the midst of catastrophic scenarios, in the gloomy light of scientific findings that warn of the extinction of the human species in the world, and in a century when robots are taking over the labor power of humans, a change in the definition of “human” is inevitable. After all, the human in Dante’s 1300s, the time of the Italian

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15 Herbrechter 2017: 64–65.

16 Pepperell 2003: 251.

Renaissance, is not the same as the human today. This need for change paved the way for a paradigm shift in the humanities as well. Ergo, the term posthuman was introduced in the academy. While some thinkers take the dimmest view due to the gloomy background of the overall picture,<sup>17</sup> others see this paradigm change as having the most promising potential. Although posthumanism does share the same antagonism to Humanism as antihumanism, which considered man to possess a supreme power over nature, and to the humanist era when “tangible steps were being made through scientific endeavor to exert control over nature or at least harness its forces,”<sup>18</sup> the fundamental aspect that distinguishes it from antihumanism is that materialism plays a crucial role in its philosophy. Unlike the thinkers of the Linguistic turn, posthumanist thinkers claim that language and materiality are entangled with each other. “The posthuman subject is not postmodern [in that sense], that is to say it is not anti-foundationalist. Nor is it deconstructivist, because it is not linguistically framed. The posthuman subjectivity [...] is rather materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere.”<sup>19</sup> Looking from their perspective, then, there may actually be a threshold between the inside and outside of the text and the text might entangle with “something” on this threshold: not in the sense of an object to grasp but to intertwine with, to “become”. I argue that it is this posthuman condition that is at the heart of *NL*. In other words, the constant process of “becoming” on its various levels brings the novel closer to posthumanism.

### *The New Life*

It is important to keep in mind that the ground upon which the process of becoming takes place in the novel, namely the foundation of *NL*, is simulation. It generates “a form of closed self-reference, a field of meaning production in which the world is drawn, relentlessly, into its own sealed sign system.”<sup>20</sup> The text then resists being allegory in the sense that it cuts off its connection to the external reality by refusing to represent real

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17 Baudrillard is probably the leading figure of the group of pessimists. According to him “the human gives way to the post-human when the virtual replaces the actual as the primary mode by which we conceptualize and experience reality” (Smith 2010: 16).

18 Pepperell 2003: 248.

19 Braidotti 2013: 51.

20 Boxall 2020: 305.



people or real events. In other words, the text is self-referential and, instead of being mimetic, it is diegetic. I would like to mention three points to explain this simulacral character of the text. The first manifestation of it is perhaps the image of the lost book within the book. It would not be wrong to say that this image signifies the loss of a fixed signified, a single meaning. The novel warns the reader on many levels of the absence of a narrative universe in which words have a unified meaning and word and thing correspond organically: "This led me to understand that the words and their meanings were, of necessity, dissimilar."<sup>21</sup> The second indication of the simulacral structure of the text is the constant copying of the book within the novel. While the original and authentic book (meaning) is lost, there are many copies of it (meanings) that circulate in the novel, possessed by countless people. The replacement of the original by numerous copies fulfills the primary principle of simulation: "simulation that does not merely compete with but actually displaces the original."<sup>22</sup> If the original is inaccessible, and "meaning" can only be rendered by the copy, the image, and the representation, then the relationship between the thing and word is arbitrary and results in one thing having multiple meanings.<sup>23</sup> This inapproachability to the authentic is also linked to intertextuality, which is the third point I want to make. Novels do not construct their meaning alone, but through a network they build. Every novel is connected to other novels: a sequence without a starting point. If we look through the window that Harold Bloom opens in his well-known book *The Anxiety of Influence*, we cannot simply say that Orhan Pamuk's *The New Life* is a copy of Dante's *The New Life*, because the hermeneutic of the former alters the hermeneutic of the latter, confusing the definition of the original.<sup>24</sup> By and large, the network within the sign system of the single novel and the network between different novels create their own universe, a universe sealed and closed to external reality. This is also the case in *NL*: "A good book is a piece of writing that implies things that don't exist, a kind of absence, or death... But it is futile to look outside the book for a realm that

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21 Pamuk 1997: 6.

22 Baudrillard 2017: 250.

23 Thinking about brands is helpful in understanding the arbitrariness between words and things. Take Coca Cola, for example. Cola means much more than the black sweetened liquid: the images in the advertising, pictures of Andy Warhol, high calories, etc.

24 Bloom 1997: 148–149.

is located beyond the words.”<sup>25</sup> The source of knowledge is in the novel itself and not elsewhere.

However, returning to the main argument of this article, at certain moments, the novel seems to seek “the materiality of life subsumed beneath its simulacra.”<sup>26</sup> One of the text’s strategies for engaging with the subsumed and attempting to trace the “thing” beyond words is the way it treats nonhuman beings. It establishes a lateral relationship between the human and the nonhuman by aligning both on the level of “truth”:

[H]eads that had been ripped to pieces, bodies that were rent, hands sundered, [...] drivers who had tenderly taken the wheel into their guts, brains that had exploded like heads of cabbage, bloody ears that still wore earrings, eyeglasses both broken and intact, mirrors, florid bowels carefully laid out on newspaper, combs, squashed fruit, coins, broken teeth, baby bottles, shoes—all manner of *matter* and spirit had been eagerly sacrificed to the moment of truth.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, nonhuman objects are freed from the burden of being functions that serve humans and gain material autonomy as “things beyond words”. One of the protagonist’s inner dialogues with Janan is an example of this strategy: “Look how all those highways we travel *exist as themselves* without being in the least aware of us once we have traveled over them, stretching out full of themselves, made of stones and asphalt and warmth on summer nights under the stars.”<sup>28</sup> Nonhuman beings existing as themselves are in line with the new materialist mindset that there is something outside of language, something that cannot be absorbed by it. In this sense, the text threatens the simulacral structure from the ground up, reaching out to “all manner of matter”.

Another moment of resistance to simulation in the novel occurs in the conjunction of *NL* and the external world. As I have mentioned several times, although their relationship is rather antagonistic in the sense that *NL* does not speak for external reality, it nevertheless appropriates it almost unconsciously as its narrative dynamic. Attempting to represent it instead would have turned external reality into discourse, thus locking it into the realm of textuality. This is precisely the trap into which many ideological novels fall. *NL*, on the other hand, mimics the postmodern

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25 Pamuk 1997: 222.

26 Boxall 2020: 308.

27 Pamuk 1997: 57, emphasis added.

28 Pamuk 1997: 170, emphasis added.

world on an ontological level by internalizing the zeitgeist and making it the supreme principle, so to speak, of its narrative mode, or narrative experience: “The book is part of something, the presence and duration of which I sense through what the book says, without it actually existing in the book.”<sup>29</sup> This narrative experience becomes evident in the moments when the protagonist suspects that the essence of his life is to be found in the text, not elsewhere: “Mehmet had initially mentioned a previous life when he was someone else [...]. That was the life he had encountered in the book.”<sup>30</sup> Since the protagonist’s reality exists only within the book, there is actually no outside for him. Being trapped in the text, the only possible realm he can reach is within the text, not in a place beyond words, for his being consists of nothing but words. This state of being caught in textuality, which creates a reality within reality, is the point at which the novel ontologically imitates the postmodern world. The passage in which the narrator blurs the boundaries between the television images and real life perfectly depicts the postmodern condition that the novel imitates:

In the bright light in the place, while three television sets were on, I watched a smartly dressed little girl who couldn’t manage to pour on her french fries a new brand of “ketchup” that came in a plastic bottle and required the help of her mother. There was a plastic bottle of the same TASTEE brand of ketchup sitting on my table, and the golden yellow letters on the bottle promised me that if I collected within a span of three months thirty of those bottle caps, which were so difficult to open that they made a mess of little girls’ dresses when they finally did, and sent them to the address below, I would be eligible to enter the contest that would take the winner for a week’s excursion to Disney World in Florida.<sup>31</sup>

The reality of the ketchup as a material substance is replaced here by its image. The image and the representation (TASTEE) of the food, outweigh the ketchup as a thing. The thing on the table becomes a copy of the image on the television and the image of the television is not original because it is a product of a serial production. That ketchup is an image and not a thing is underscored by the protagonist’s treatment of it: Instead of eating it and actualizing its material reality, he pluralizes the process of copying and thinks of collecting “thirty of those bottle caps” to go

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29 Pamuk 1997: 222.

30 Pamuk 1997: 62.

31 Pamuk 1997: 291–292.

to Disneyland. Needless to say, the choice of Disneyland is by no means accidental. Baudrillard uses it as an example to explain hyperrealism:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.<sup>32</sup>

By mimicking the external world, the novel reveals its fictional nature and thus bypasses “the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.” This approaches it to the material reality. This paradoxical relationship of the novel to material reality thus places it “neither here nor there,” but on the border between two realms.

Another simulacral aspect of the postmodern era that the novel traverses is social constructions and identity formations. As Rushdie states, “[c]ultural identity, national communities and homelands, these are imaginary, simulacral.”<sup>33</sup> Communities that exist in *NL* are very much in line with Rushdie’s account. On his way to find the lost book, the protagonist meets Doctor Fine, who “struggles against the book, against foreign cultures that annihilate us, against the newfangled stuff that comes from the West, and his all-out battle against printed matter.”<sup>34</sup> He has an organization whose agents have code-names after famous watch brands (Omega, Zenith, Serkisof, Seiko, Movado). He turns out to be Nahit/Mehmet’s father, whom the protagonist transforms over time. In the end, he disappears. Whereas Doctor Fine resembles the conservative opinion leaders of Turkey who represent a right-wing ideology, Rıfkı Ray, the author of the book, reminds us of the republican ideology. From the children’s books he has written, one can conclude that he is a combination of the first idealists of the late Ottoman Empire and the young Turkish Republic. In this sense, he is also a father figure, whom the protagonist “had known [...] in [his] childhood when [he] used to read madly his illustrated fictions.”<sup>35</sup> He is murdered because of his political stance. At first glance, these two figures seem to represent Turkey’s hegemonic and polarized worldviews. However, if we look at them more closely, we will see that they contradict these worldviews in many ways at the same time. Some of their attitudes or statements do not fit into the ideological categories to which they seem to belong.

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32 Baudrillard 1988: 172.

33 Rushdie 1992: 12.

34 Pamuk 1997: 83.

35 Pamuk 1997: 223.

The fact that these two figures are not perfect representatives of their communities coincides with what Rushdie said: despite the faith of the members of a group or identity in the similarity they share, the idea of being identical is fictitious, it is simulacral. For communities are imaginary, they do not really correspond to the reality of their individual members. By refusing to portray members of ideological communities according to their stereotypes, the novel alienates the reader and challenges the doxa. This questioning of the doxa enables the novel to resist it. This resistance displaces it from the simulacral reality of imaginary communities and brings it closer to the material reality of the individual subject. The reality is hidden in uniqueness and not uniformity. Grasping the uniqueness of the self and of the moments in life, rather than being deceived by the illusion of a harmonious unity “from which everything dangerous and negative [is intended to be] expelled”<sup>36</sup> is at the heart of the wisdom the protagonist learns: “Let the unique moment have its reign.”<sup>37</sup>

Although I have said that the protagonist has learned some wisdom about the material reality of an individual subject by the end of his journey, it is crucial to note that he himself is not a familiar subject. To understand his peculiarities and the process by which he becomes a subject, let’s take a look at the “point of departure for the great journey that [took him] to unique *experiences*.”<sup>38</sup> From Martin Jay’s *Songs of Experience*<sup>39</sup>, we can derive the idea that there are two major veins in the classification of “experience”. One is characterized by separating the mind from the body and the self from the other, paving the way for the scientific revolution, humanism, and the Anthropocene. This definition of experience is closely related to “understanding” the object. Consequently, an intact subject that understands the object, which is radically outside of it, is a prerequisite for experiencing the world. The other tendency, on the other hand, distrusts the duality of mind and body and emphasizes the impossibility of radically separating the self from the “other”. It involves the self in the act of experiencing the world. It too presupposes a subject of experience, but this subject is more fluid. On the surface, *NL*’s plot seems to resemble the second definition of experience, but ultimately, it departs from it because it lacks a subject, a unified “I” capable of experiencing the world. This is evocative of the postmodern definition of experience. Postmodernists

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36 Baudrillard 2005: 202.

37 Pamuk 1997: 172.

38 Pamuk 1997: 44, emphasis added.

39 Jay 2005.

claim that “instead of containing or reflecting experience, language constitutes it.”<sup>40</sup> In truth, they are highly pessimistic about the possibility of experience outside of discourse, noting therefore that “experience in whatever guise is in a terminal crisis”<sup>41</sup> in the postmodern era. This crisis is also present in *NL*. It is even implied from the beginning that the journey of experience is endless and thus unattainable: “If only I could always walk like this, walking fast, without stopping if only I could go on journeys, it seemed I’d reach the universe in the book.”<sup>42</sup> The irony here is that the act of reaching requires the act of stopping. Not only the act of stopping, but also a unified subject to take that action is absent from the novel, which prevents it from enacting an experience. A unified subject is absent because the protagonist becomes protagonists in the course of his journey.

This process of pluralization of the self is the opposite of the experience of, say, Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. Unlike this famous novel character, who turns a white page at the end of his story and enters the world of adulthood as a self-sufficient, unified individual, the experience of Mehmet/Nahit/Osman ends in the dissolution of the self. *Oliver Twist*’s progressive universe thus transforms into the chaotic universe of Mehmet/Nahit/Osman in *NL*. Unlike *Oliver Twist*, he is not a representative of Man, but a mere narrative device alongside others, such as *NL*’s images, sentences, and paratexts: his essence is the text itself. The merging of the protagonist with the textuality of the novel causes him to lose his significance and displaces him from the kingdom of his earlier counterparts. Mehmet/Nahit/Osman is deprived of the authority to convey the “message” of the story. The fact that the protagonist does not have an independent and unified self, nor is he the focus of the novel, prevents him from having the kind of experience described in *Bildungsromans*.

Although this fact is in accordance with the poststructuralists’ account of experience mentioned above—that there is no experience outside the realm of discourse—the brief moments when Mehmet/Nahit/Osman’s experience becomes too corporeal, too sensual, confound this account and place the novel at the intersection of existence and absence, life and death, language and material reality, and open up a space where the entanglement of these opposites becomes possible:

I remembered the passengers who were neither here nor there stirring blissfully, as if sharing together time that had come out of paradise.

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40 DeMan 1983: 232.

41 Lyotard 1989: 191.

42 Pamuk 1997: 11.

Shortly all the sleepy travelers would be awake, and the stillness of the morning would be broken with happy screams and thoughtless cries; and on the threshold between the two worlds, as if discovering the eternal jokes existent in a space without gravity, we would collectively discover with confusion and excitement the presence of bloody internal organs, spilled fruit, sundered bodies, and all those combs, shoes, children's books that spilled out of torn suitcases.<sup>43</sup>

*NL* eventually shares the same fate with the “bloody internal organs, spilled fruit, sundered bodies, and all those combs, shoes, children's books” that appear at the instant of the accident. On the surface, it seems to create a universe of arbitrariness reminiscent of the random order of things: organs and fruit, bodies and combs, shoes and books. Both inside and outside the narrative, it looks messy like these objects; in terms of its narrative elements such as images, plot, setting, protagonists; as well as in terms of demarcation from external reality. However, if one turns the picture upside down, the first impression will be undermined. Instead of arbitrariness, one finds an almost compulsive symmetry within the narrative.<sup>44</sup> The same is true of the relationship between the text and the world outside it: While it is true that it does not represent external reality, at various levels it “surveys, maps [...] realms that are yet to come,”<sup>45</sup> which leads to the text reaching its limits and approaching the “flesh of the world”.<sup>46</sup> At this in-between location, we meet the material reality of the body that is impossible to be internalized by the text; an inability of which the text is aware: “What was it that made one's life incomplete? A missing leg, answered the green-eyed nurse who put some stitches on my knee.”<sup>47</sup> It is this *awareness* that acknowledges the existence of the corporeality, of the vital body located outside of itself, which brings us to Braidotti's formulation of the posthuman condition.

In the end, the threshold between inside and outside, word and thing, hyperreal and material reality, community and unique individual, self and other, text and body where *NL* finds itself, brings it closer to posthumanism, as defined by Braidotti. As in the case of the posthuman world, the

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43 Pamuk 1997: 295.

44 The novel creates this symmetry by employing various narrative strategies, including the constant juxtaposition of its own sentences. The novel ultimately begins with the protagonist's enthusiasm for a new life and ends with his rejection of it.

45 Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 4–5.

46 I borrowed the term from Merleau-Ponty.

47 Pamuk 1997: 51.

“center” in the novel is constantly de-territorialized, both in terms of textual discourse and the subjectivity of the protagonist. The lack of a center, a fixed point of observation, pushes the limits of textuality and materiality. The novel and the protagonist’s subjectivity reside “somewhere” on the border between the two worlds. They are constantly transforming and becoming their “other”, which leads to different interpretations of the novel and the pluralization of the protagonist. This plural subjectivity of the protagonist resembles the posthuman subject, who is no longer “the reflection of [God’s] own infinite attributes.”<sup>48</sup> Rather, he is deprived of the essence in which humanistic thought also had very much faith, and, in contrast to its predecessors, is decentered from the Anthropocene. The lack of integration not only affects the subjectivity of the protagonist, but also applies to the human bodies we encounter at the scene of the accident. Their disintegration parallels the distortion of the ideal body image of the humanist era, which “doubles up as a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values.”<sup>49</sup> Mehmet/Nahit/Osman, then, is far from being DaVinci’s Vitruvian man. The characters who come closest to this man of humanism, which is the measure of all things, are Doctor Fine, who “speaks like a god who was standing on a hill and regarding the creation that was animated by his own volition,”<sup>50</sup> and Rıfki Ray who is the godlike creator of the “book”.<sup>51</sup> We can interpret their extinction in the end as a sign of the transformation of humanism into posthumanism.

It may come as a surprise to some that Janan and the angel have not yet appeared in this article. After all, they are the two engines of the protagonist’s never-ending journey. Two engines that don’t really exist, at least not “anymore”. It would be disgraceful not to be “aware that not only [does Janan] mean *soul mate*, but it also signifie[s] *God*.”<sup>52</sup> But what about the Angel? The most common association of this intertextual image is Rainer Maria Rilke’s Angel<sup>53</sup>, which is reminiscent of the Angels of Islam.<sup>54</sup> But since we have said that the reality of *NL* is a simulacral one and each signifier can have multiple signifieds, I can take the liberty of

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48 Pamuk 1997: 105.

49 Braidotti 2013: 13.

50 Pamuk 1997: 130.

51 The survivor of Süreyya is perhaps due to his escape to “distant obscure towns” from the “gaudy consumer products” but also from a community (Pamuk 1997: 172). As Ecevit states, his uniqueness is the key to his happy end (Ecevit 2004: 86).

52 Pamuk 1997: 39.

53 Ecevit 2004: 108.

54 Campbell 2003.



saying that the angel also evokes the angel of history. My association is based on two foundations: first, the name of the bus the Angel confronts at the end of the story, Magirus, which rhymes with the name of the Angel of History, Angelus Novus<sup>55</sup> and which, throughout the novel, carries the protagonist “toward the rest of *civilization*.”<sup>56</sup> Second, it is based on the similarities between the protagonist’s depiction of the Angel he encounters for the last time, before the “unavoidable accident”, and Benjamin’s interpretation of Klee’s painting of Angelus Novus. In his last appearance, the Angel seems “as pitiless as he [is] distant and wondrous. Not because he wanted to be like that, but because he was only a witness and could do nothing more.”<sup>57</sup> Angelus Novus is also just a witness. What he sees is “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet,”<sup>58</sup> in which he cannot intervene because “the storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call *progress*.”<sup>59</sup> If we agree on the kinship of the two angels, then we can interpret the indifference of *NL*’s angel as the absence of the progressive paradigm in the novel. As we know, progressivism and “faith in the spirit of history” is one of the most prominent ideologies of the humanist era, when the deterministic worldview dominated both philosophy and hegemonic discourse. As mentioned earlier, this understanding changed irrevocably after World War II. The death of God and the waning belief in progress are reflected in *NL* in the form of the absence of Janan and the Angel. In that sense, there is no God (Janan) or a teleological history (Angel) to intervene with the wreckage caused by the accidents. Just as the battlefields are the playground of history, the repetition of accidents is the playground of the novel’s story. Thus, the constant repetition of the act of copying in the novel resembles the act of the historian who records the ever-repeating traumatic history of humanity that leaves the world in ruins.

Following this logic, then, we can claim that the author’s death at the end (both Rıfki Ray’s death and the imminent death of the protagonist as narrator) corresponds to the death of the historian who writes his/story. As catastrophic as this may seem at first glance, this is where I believe the ethics of the novel lie. After all, it is the death of the author/historian

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55 It rhymes also with Novalis, with whose epigraph the novel begins.

56 Pamuk 1997: 180.

57 Benjamin 1969: 249.

58 Benjamin 1969: 249.

59 Benjamin 1969: 249, emphasis added.