

**LANGUAGE OF THE SELF THROUGH ART AND
REPRESENTATION: *MY NAME IS RED***

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Abstract

In his *My Name is Red*, Pamuk's clever use of metafiction shows that the novel responds to problems of plurality, inclusivity, and exclusivism concerning the theoretical debates on belonging, identity, and secularism in the nation-state. In the present study, we first show that the novel's statement is expressed via the inherent plurality of the narrative, achieved through constantly shifting perceptions and the use of several unexpected narrators in the novel. Second, we find such a pluralist use of metafiction quite significant, because the novel not only gives voice to the underrepresented, but also because Pamuk's metafiction offers an alternative and more plural, inclusive and democratic understanding of self-reflexivity. Metafiction in Pamuk's sense can make meaningful contributions to theory and its capacity to better understand modern, cosmopolitan and multicultural nations.

Keywords: art, representation, metafiction, secularism, nation-state

**SANAT VE TEMSİL ARACILIĞIYLA KİMLİĞİN DİLİ:
*BENİM ADIM KIRMIZI***

Öz

Benim Adım Kırmızı romanında Pamuk'un üstkurmaca kullanımı ulus-devlet bünyesinde aidiyet, kimlik ve sekülerizm üzerine teorik tartışmalarla doğrudan ilişkili olduğu gibi, çoğulculuk, kapsayıcılık ve dışlayıcılık gibi önemli kimlik meselelerine roman formu aracılığıyla bir cevap niteliği de taşır. Bu çalışma ilk olarak romanın kimlikleri sorgulayan politik duruşunun yapısal olarak anlatının çoğulculuğu ile olan bağlantısını ve bu bağın romanda sürekli değişen bakış açıları ve sıradışı/beklenmedik anlatıcılar aracılığıyla nasıl geliştirildiğini açıklar. Makale üstkurmacanın çoğulcu bir perspektifle kullanılmasının politik önemini ve temsil meselesi ile ilişkisini gösterdikten sonra *Benim Adım Kırmızı* eserinin alternatif olarak nasıl daha kapsayıcı, çoğulcu ve demokratik bir anlatı sunduğunu gösterir. Bu bakımdan Pamuk'un üstkurmacayı çoğulcu bir şekilde kullanması modern, kozmopolitan ve çokkültürlü

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ulus-devlet yapısının anlaşılabilmesi bakımından önemli olduğu gibi, bu alanda süregelen teorik tartışmalara da yazın ve roman aracılığıyla özgün bir katkı sunar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: sanat, temsil, üstkurmaca, sekülerizm, ulus-devlet

"Thus withered the red rose of the joy of painting and illumination that had bloomed for a century in Istanbul, nurtured by inspiration from the lands of Persia."

(Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, p. 501)

Introduction

Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is a historical detective fiction that narrates the story of a search for the murderer of the miniaturists in 16th-century Ottoman Istanbul, when and where painting was forbidden for *ostensibly*² religious reasons,³ which opens up an argument about the reasons for the disappearance of the arts of the miniature and painting in Istanbul and the Ottoman world. *My Name is Red* is not only the story of the murder of miniaturists, but also a critique of Turkish modernity and its failures: specifically, its strict identity categories, its mutually exclusive grammar, its fear of the different and difference, as well as the apathy of the people.

In this paper, I argue that Pamuk's *My Name is Red* demonstrates three critical points. First, each pole of dichotomies⁴ in the world of the novel by definition ceases to have meaning without the other half. To state this in the language of the novel, "nothing is pure."⁵ Second, *My Name is Red* delineates the infertility of seeing the self, art and the world through identity categories, as well as how adopting or internalizing *the imaginary*⁶ could drag individuals into the grammar of mutual denunciation. And third, the identity categories in question fall short of explaining the complexity of human psychology and behavior. Overall, Pamuk's *My Name is Red* questions the place of the individual within the overarching narratives; specifically, Pamuk's novel traces individuality between tradition and the modern.

² Pamuk's novel shows that the problems are too intricate to explain with simple classifications.

³ "We're struggling with something more forbidden and dangerous; that is, we're struggling to make pictures in a Muslim city" (*My Name is Red*, 200).

⁴ Some of these dichotomies are meaning and form in art, miniature and portraiture, fiction and fact, East and West, as well as religious and secular.

⁵ (p. 194).

⁶ I borrow the terms from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Section II of this paper discusses how Pamuk's novel employs both metafiction and several fables to show how fiction and imagination come to reality and start shaping identities.

Introduction to Dichotomies

Dichotomies are defined as "mutually exclusive or contradictory" categories.⁷ However, *My Name is Red* complicates this relationship by questioning the contradictoriness of dichotomies and bringing the trait of *complementariness* to the forefront. In other words, Pamuk's novel does not see the parts of the dichotomies as the antithesis of one another; rather, it depicts them as parts of a whole that are nourished by each other. More specifically, for example, in *My Name is Red* the arts of *miniature and portraiture* are not simply opposites; rather, the miniature artists continuously re-question and re-position their art and works in relation to their European counterparts and hence, directly or indirectly, are influenced by European portraiture.

Another dichotomy is *God's time vs. the individual's time*⁸ in painting, which is supposedly connected to Eastern (Tebriz and Istanbul) and Western (European) artistic traditions, but the miniaturists in the novel secretly hide personal details in a miniature, thus inserting their own perspectives and time into their work, which is otherwise supposed to be an omniscient view. In other words, the dichotomy of God's time vs. individual time imposed by Master Osman (Pamuk, 1998, p. 83) falls short of considering the hidden styles and creative skills of the miniaturists. Likewise, the dichotomy of *word and image* becomes a complementary one, as the miniaturists seek ways to disguise their images under the form of *calligraphy*, beautiful writing (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478). *Meaning in art*⁹ is juxtaposed with *form in art*,¹⁰ but some supposedly devoted¹¹ artists enjoy drawing things merely for the pleasure of drawing even though the painting still has a story (Pamuk, 1998, p. 81);¹² and there are also several works and "books commissioned by sultans, shahs and pashas" painted for the "beauty" of the image (Pamuk, 1998, p. 323).¹³ In other words, a miniaturist might both have a story, and draw/paint out of the pleasure of painting an image. Correspondingly, there are

⁷"A division into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities" in "Dichotomy." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, Web. 28 Nov 2015.

⁸"According to Master Osman, 'time is' what separates a good miniaturist from others (83). "This dichotomy is also related to the dichotomies of an omniscient view vs. perspective, as well as Sufism vs. Realism and East. vs. West.

⁹The art work as a part of a moral story vs. the art work by itself (meaning form). The miniature: all images must be a part of a moral story (*My name is Red*, 132)

¹⁰Portraiture, focusing on the details, gestures and generally, on the form(s) of the human.

¹¹Here, I use devoted in two senses; miniaturists are supposed to be devoted to both religious values and artistic tradition.

¹²Butterfly and the debtor's scene. He takes pleasure in making personal additions, such as the beautiful daughter of a debtor (Pamuk, 1998, p81)

¹³ Another example is when Ottoman Sultan expects all miniaturists in his workshop to avoid painting without a moral story (Pamuk, 1998, p.132); however, we witness several miniaturists who do otherwise. Olive is an example (Pamuk, 1998, p.145-146)

other miniaturists who employ their creativity to undermine the hierarchy of the intended moral story of the miniature;¹⁴ hence, a detail in a miniature becomes a significant individual image. In other words, the separation of form-based European artistry from meaning-based Eastern miniature becomes impossible to effect fully.

An additional dichotomy is *subject* and *object* in the art of miniature: the artists argue over whether the image of horse should be drawn from memory (Pamuk, 1998, p. 58, 88, 92, 94, 227, 264, 306) and either as an example of its kind (an object), or as a distinctive individual separate from all others of its kind (a subject); several miniaturists enjoy drawing distinctive images, or place personal clues¹⁵ that may lead the image back to its creator. Consequently, this is one more dichotomy whose parts are not always in conflict with each other, but artists—deliberately or not—may do both simultaneously.

Fiction and fact is another significant dichotomy in Pamuk's novel, and more particularly how *fiction/imagination seeps into reality*.¹⁶ Several fables narrated by miniaturists show readers how fiction could become real.¹⁷ One interesting question Pamuk's novel raises is how the characters fail to recognize the fictionality in/of their lives and traditions, even though they narrate different versions of this theme. Similarly, Ottoman and Frankish artistic traditions are juxtaposed with traditions of Tebriz and Herat, which, in the end, show that these traditions not only position themselves towards each other, but also considerably benefit from other artistic traditions. So an *either/or* is not so relevant in this context.

The dichotomies of *secular and religious, traditional/conservative and progressive* are other central themes in the novel; however, as this paper will show, similar to several dichotomies mentioned above, these are not separate and conflicting entities, nor can they be clearly and easily defined. The following three parts of this essay show how Pamuk's *My Name is Red* undermines the hierarchical and conflicting relationship of dichotomies; and then how interpreting art and life according to mutually exclusive identity categories can drag individuals into the grammar of mutual denunciation.

¹⁴Miniaturist Butterfly who paints the Sultan and the dog in the same tone of red (Pamuk, 1998, p.81):

¹⁵Olive's unintended style and his distinctive way of drawing the nose of the horse (Pamuk, 1998, p.333) is a good example. This is what gives him away as the murderer.

¹⁶(Anderson, p.36)

¹⁷One example is the story of Fahir Shah (Pamuk, 1998, p.85-87). Another example is in Section II of this paper; see "The Quintessence of Histories"

The Pluralism of *My Name is Red*

The dichotomies mentioned above, by definition, have two poles and one pole of a dichotomy cannot exist without the other; as Enishte Effendi mentions, "nothing is pure" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 194). However, *My Name is Red* does more than just state this. The novel articulates this through its form: for instance, events and many details, which would otherwise not be recounted, are narrated through various characters. As the story progresses, readers get to know the stories of various symbolic characters, narrated by themselves: a dog¹⁸ which reminds readers that they are reading a fiction (Pamuk, 1998, p. 12);¹⁹ a coin which warns²⁰ readers that he/it is "not genuine" but "counterfeit" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 125); a tree with existential questions asking "to which story was [it] meant to add meaning and grace?" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 59);²¹ death, who complains that it "had not been drawn with enough mastery"(Pamuk, 1998, p. 155);²² two outcast dervishes who died a long time ago but managed to survive as they were "rendered²³ in the Venetian style" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 373); Satan, who implies that evil is as important and necessary as virtue (Pamuk, 1998, p. 350);²⁴ a horse wondering and asking "whether it is [him] being depicted in all cases" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 263);²⁵ or the color red, informing us that red is "everywhere. . . before us" but "[r]ed cannot be explained to he who cannot see" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 228).²⁶ Such multiperspectivism is the formal stance of the novel towards pluralism. Through metafiction and self-reflexivity, *My Name is Red* not only endorses a multiplicity of voices, but also shows the existence of a multitude of perspectives in an *allegedly* religious and conservative community. Thus, the hierarchy of the narratives is undermined by giving voice to various living and non-living

¹⁸The dog in question is cursed by a fundamentalist cleric (Pamuk, 1998, p.14), and there is a religious animosity towards dogs (Pamuk, 1998, p.15). The dog's perspective adds to the critical, humorous and ironic tone of the narration.

¹⁹The self-reflexivity of the novel. This sort of use of metafiction is a central theme of the work, and reminds the readers of the fictionality of beliefs, identities and traditions.

²⁰One of the several examples of the novel's self-reflexivity.

²¹The question of the tree is significant, as it is related to several other dichotomies, such as Venetian/European Painting cv. Istanbul/Eastern Painting, the moral function of art vs. art of art's sake. The tree wonders whether it is possible for him to exist outside a moral story, a role or identity given to him.

²² This is another important theme of the novel: criticism of a general superficiality of works, and lack of depth of knowledge. On a larger scale, this is criticism of Turkish modernity.

²³ Pictured.

²⁴"If all men went to Heaven, no one would ever be frightened, and the world and its governments could never function on virtue alone; for in our world evil is as necessary as virtue and sin as necessary as rectitude" (Pamuk, 1998, p.350)

²⁵ Even though the horse figure is painted frequently, and the horse is sure that the artists perceive him differently, he finds a commonality in the paintings: "Of course, I'm proud of myself. Yet, I also question whether, indeed, it is I being depicted in all cases. It is evident from these pictures that I'm perceived differently by everyone. Still, I have the strong sense that there's commonality, a unity to the illustrations" (Pamuk, 1998, p.263)

²⁶"The meaning of color is that it is there before us and we see it", said the other. 'Red cannot be explained to he who cannot see' " (Pamuk, 1998, p.228)

things, including things of the imagination. For instance, *the color red* cannot be described through dichotomies, traditions, worldviews, or identity categories, nor is it religious or secular. Yet, as the color itself states, red is everywhere (Pamuk, 1998, p. 228). It is this in-betweenness and impossibility of classification that gives its name to Pamuk's novel, *My Name is Red*. As the epigraph puts it, "the blind and the seeing are not equal."²⁷ Thus the novel calls for a new perspective, beyond the discourse of conflicting dichotomies or identity categories.

Then, what exactly does the color red signify? Pamuk's novel is pluralist in his answer to this question, as the color red does not have a fixed meaning:²⁸ Butterfly, one of the miniaturists, depicts a scene in which the Ottoman Sultan frees wretched people from their debts, and, with a sudden decision, he adds "the poor debtor's wife" into the scene, "wearing a purple dress in the wretchedness of destitution, along with his longhaired daughter, sorrowful yet beautiful, clad in a crimson mantle" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 81). In another scene, Butterfly feels proud about doing "something the old masters never did," that is, painting "the dog resting off to the side in precisely the same hue as the Sultan's caftan of atlas silk" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 81). It is the cursed dog, also one of the narrators of the novel, that comes to be painted in the same *hue* as the Sultan. Thus, the color red becomes a tool for some miniaturists to insert their unique individual interpretation into the miniature, and, therefore, the miniaturist secretly signs the painting, which becomes a way to undermine the implicit social hierarchy.

Another dichotomy in *My Name is Red* is *word and image*. Similar to other dichotomies, these two entities do not always oppose each other. Black, a miniaturist, admits that "pictures are forbidden by . . . faith," but pictures can be drawn in the disguise of calligraphy as "no one has anything to say against decoration" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478). Because "masterpieces . . . are ultimately seen as an extension of border ornamentation, no one would take issue with them, reasoning that they enhanced the beauty of writing and the magnificence of calligraphy" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478). Thus, word and image are not separate and opposing entities, particularly in the context of the art of the miniature and calligraphy. Similarly, Enishte Effendi, while trying to convince Black to write stories for the illustrations, says that "poetry and painting, words and color, these things are brothers to each other"

²⁷This is a verse from the Quran from the sura of "The Creator," which adds more depth to the novel's call: Pamuk's work does not simply classify religion as a backward or primitive entity; therefore it does not have a stadial perspective.

²⁸This pluralist attitude of Pamuk's novel is clearly different from the monist view of Master Osman, who believes in just one tone of red. Master Osman agrees with the great masters of the miniature on this issue: "Only a weak and hesitant miniaturist would use a variety of red tones to depict the red of a caftan, they claimed—shadows were not an excuse. Besides, we believe in only one red" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 227).

(Pamuk, 1998, p. 134). Therefore, the dichotomy of word and image is another example of transitivity between two non-rigid entities.

Mutual Denunciation: Seeing *The Self, Art and The World* through Ideologies and Identity Categories

Considering that the whole novel is the story of a failure that leads to the disappearance of the art of miniature, Pamuk's novel raises a basic question: why and how did this happen? In this respect, *My Name is Red* problematizes the infertility of seeing *the self, art and the world* through monolithic perspectives and identity categories, and shows how internalizing *the imaginary* in the extremes can drag individuals/artists into the grammar of mutual denunciation. In this context, one of the central themes in the novel is whether the miniature artists could have a style or not (Pamuk, 1998, p. 119, 443, 457, 458, 483); and style is seen as a "fault" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 339) as well as an "imperfection" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 22, 79, 80). The miniature artists are expected not to display any marks of individuality in their miniatures.

Why should an artist not have a style? In the workshop of miniaturists, style and signature are not allowed, because *selflessness* is expected from the artist. Master Osman, the head of the miniaturists' workshop, says that "[i]t is indeed important that a painting, through its beauty, summon us toward life's abundance, toward compassion, toward respect for the colors of the realm which God created, and toward reflection and faith. *The identity of the miniaturist is not important*" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 70).²⁹ This is a view in which the miniaturists are expected to repeat the tradition before them, not developing anything new, not questioning the current methods, as well as rejecting any other *rival* methods including the European portraiture and the use of perspective. In doing so, the miniaturists are also required to avoid anything mundane, and to depict a world "that Allah envisioned and desired" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 24). In this respect, the head miniaturist seems to be following a fanatical and monist reasoning in his justification for the refusal of perspective, style and signature in art.

Olive, the murderer miniaturist, explains why he killed Elegant Effendi by stating that Elegant was complaining that the "use of the science of perspective and the methods of the Venetian masters were nothing but the temptation of Satan," picturing "the face of a mortal using the Frankish techniques, so the observer had the impression not of a painting but of reality" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 194). Elegant comes to believe that "this image has the power to entice men to bow down before it, as with icons in churches. . . which is the Devil's work, not

²⁹ Emphasis mine.

only because the art of perspective removes the painting from God's perspective and lowers it to the level of a street dog" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 194). Here, Elegant has an *either/or perspective*: the science of perspective of the Venetian masters vs. Eastern tradition; the temptation of Satan vs. God's way; the moral lesson of a painting vs. bare reality; the Devil's work in perspective vs. God's omniscient view; and finally, the faithful man vs. a street dog. Still, Pamuk's novel delves deeper into the psychologies of the miniaturists and shows that this *either/or perspective* is too reductionist, and even the most traditional miniaturists desire uniqueness and style: Black says that "Everybody secretly desires to have a style" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 307). Thus, even though uniqueness is not one of the desired characteristics among the miniaturists in Master Osman's miniature workshop, there is something enticing in both being unique and painting the unique(ness) for the miniature artists.

How limiting is belief and tradition for the miniaturists in *My Name is Red*, particularly considering that most miniaturists limit their art (by using only the omniscient view and avoiding perspective) in terms of form? Most miniaturists require their artistic work to be a part of a moral story; in other words, images in the miniatures are strongly expected to be a part of a story (Pamuk, 1998, p. 30, 31, 57, 59, 66, 95, 132, 144-145). More specifically, in terms of function, some miniature artists defend the idea that miniatures should "serve *our* religion," (Pamuk, 1998, p. 130)³⁰ whereas in terms of content, story is held to be "essential for the miniature" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 132). Put differently, unlike European portraiture, miniatures of 16th-century Istanbul in *My Name is Red* are expected *not* to be painted without a moral story, and an image without one is received as blasphemy (Pamuk, 1998, p. 148). This, actually, is where the conflicts in the novel start, and they lead to events including the murders; and it is how the conflict between tradition and modern materializes.

The conception of time is another element in Pamuk's novel that shows how imagined identities separate themselves from *their counterparts*. Master Osman explains his criteria to distinguish a "genuine" painter from a bogus one, so he asks three questions to all young miniaturists: which tradition (European or Eastern) a miniaturist believes in, which time he tries to paint in —particularly, "the illustrator's time" or "Allah's time," and what he thinks about the blindness of the artist (Pamuk, 1998, p. 73). These questions are strictly related to the expectation of evading individuality and uniqueness; moreover, they call for an idealized/moralized version of painting and art. This is another point of conflict between old and new, or tradition and the modern.

³⁰Emphasis mine.

What exactly does the head-miniaturist Osman mean by a separation between "illustrator's time" and "Allah's time," which is his second question and criterion? While explaining his philosophy of the miniature, first he defines the time of illumination: "[b]efore the art of illumination there was blackness and afterward there will also be blackness" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 92). In other words, Master Osman believes that this world he is in is temporary, and the mundane life is irrelevant, particularly when compared to the idea of eternity. Master Osman takes this idea one step further and clarifies the function of his understanding of art: "[t]hrough our colors, paints, art and love, we remember that Allah had commanded us to 'See'! To know is to remember that you've seen. To see is to know without remembering. Thus, painting is remembering the blackness" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 92). If the art of illumination is an act of remembering of this blackness, of what existed before, it differentiates itself from the "Frankish" painting that depicts the *here and now*.

Master Osman makes his point more clear by defining what he means by the blackness: "[t]he great masters, who shared a love of painting and perceived that color and sight arose from darkness, longed to return to Allah's blackness by means of color. Artists without memory neither remember Allah nor his blackness" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 92). Thus, the act of remembering is recalling God, and Master Osman's ideal miniaturists, according to him, should portray things with a desire to integrate with God, and their main interest should not be this mundane world. Master Osman's view of art (and hence, that of his workshop)³¹ is highly ingrained with his religious beliefs. He even goes further to claim an ultimate goal for the art of the miniature by saying "[a]ll great masters, in their work, seek that profound void within color and outside time" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 92). Thus, Master Osman commissions the art of the miniature with the task of laying a bridge between this temporary world, and the real, eternal time of Allah. This is the exact distinction he makes between *Illuminator's time* and *Allah's time*. This is also why all the miniaturists are expected to draw from memory, and blindness is seen as a respected status for elder illuminators, as they have the experience to draw directly from memory, without any need to look at the object itself.

Blindness is one of the central themes in *My Name is Red* and the idea of blindness is also at the core of the artistic formation of the miniaturists. There are two types of blindness that are idealized within the world of the miniaturists: the first one is metaphorical blindness, that is, closing one's eyes to this temporary world and drawing/painting merely from

³¹Master Osman imposes his strict understanding of art in the workshop: "Those of us who believe that the old morality ought to persist at the workshop, that we should follow the path laid by the Persian masters. . . We shouldn't forgo the old models (Pamuk, 1998, p. 114)"

memory,³² and the other is actual blindness in old age, performed in order to prove that the seasoned miniaturist does not need to *see* anymore in order to paint, as in the example of Master Osman who blinds himself (Pamuk, 1998, p. 394) with the same plume needle that the Persian Master Bihzad had blinded himself with years ago (Pamuk, 1998, p. 397). Why do the miniaturists blind themselves? The first reason is to prove they have attained an artistic and spiritual level where a master miniaturist is able to illustrate things merely from memory, and in the same omniscient way that God allegedly sees things: "[p]ainting is the act of seeking out Allah's memories and seeing the world as He sees the world" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 96). But secondly, it is equally important how murderer-miniaturists like Olive *sees* this world: "filthy and miserable" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 91).

Banning distinct artistic styles and signatures, avoiding uniqueness and individuality, classifying the work of art only as part of a moral story, the enthusiasm to paint outside of individual time, and blindness: what brings all of these ideas together? In other words, which artistic and political perspectives is *My Name is Red* questioning? A reductionist answer could have been *religion*, indicating *religious fanaticism*, but that is not the case. Pamuk's novel juxtaposes the realist tradition, represented by European portraiture, with the Sufi tradition in the context of the Ottoman miniature, and explores the place for individuality and originality in this conflict.

The dialogue between Olive (the murderer miniaturist) and Enishte Effendi (who oversees the painting of the secret book in the European style, commissioned by the Sultan) is a good example in which *My Name is Red* brings together the realist and Sufi perspectives. Olive finds it "dishonorable" to "imitate the world," because "[t]hey³³ depict what the eye sees just as the eye sees it" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 206). Thus, the first difference between the two traditions is that the realist European painting depicts things *as they are*. Olive's understanding of the miniature is shaped by his belief: in Master Osman's workshop; he

³²All miniaturists in the novel --Olive (Pamuk, 1998, p. 333), Butterfly (Pamuk, 1998, p. 335), Stork (Pamuk, 1998, p. 337)--draw the figure of a horse starting from its hooves or forelegs, completely from memory. The reason is explained via a fable:

". . . one can properly complete a picture of a horse beginning from its hoof only if he carries the entire horse in his memory. Obviously, to render a horse through excessive thought and recollection, or even more ridiculous, by repeatedly looking at a real horse, one would have to move from head to neck and then neck to body. I hear there are certain Venetian illustrators who are happy to sell tailors and butchers such pictures of your average street packhorse drawn indecisively by trial and error. Such an illustration has nothing whatsoever to do with the meaning of the world or with the beauty of God's creation. But I'm convinced that even mediocre artists must know a genuine illustration isn't drawn according to what the eye sees at any particular moment, but according to what the hand remembers and is accustomed to. The painter is always alone before the page. Solely for this reason he's always dependent on memory" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 324).

³³Olive means Frankish/European artists who do portraits and use perspective in painting.

refuses to "paint what they see," instead, says Olive, "we³⁴ paint what we look at" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 206). What is the difference between *seeing* and *looking at*?³⁵ There is no selectivity in the former (*görmek*; to see), whereas the latter (*bakmak*; to look at) is a totally selective act, as the looker chooses in which direction to look, and what to see. It is no coincidence that the depiction of several figures (the dog, Satan, death, the woman, the outcast dervishes) for the secret book creates turmoil both in the coffee house and among the miniaturists. It should be noted that Pamuk's use of metafiction and having these *unexpected* minor characters partake in the narration is a deliberate and pluralist attitude. Master Osman's or Olive's negative stance towards realist painting is also connected to the dichotomy of *uniqueness and collective identity*: Olive, for instance, finds European portraiture dangerous as it creates a desire to be "different from all others, a unique, special and particular human being" (206), something he finds incompatible with a collective identity.

On the other hand, *My Name is Red* does not leave much doubt about the influence of Sufism on the miniaturists. While expressing the close relationship between himself and Butterfly, Olive states that they "were never closer than when working on the eight illustrated plates that were to accompany a collection of Fuzuli poems" while they were working together in Tebriz twenty years ago (Pamuk, 1998, p. 120). Hence, Pamuk carefully shows the influence of Sufism in Istanbul and Tebriz, both at the time of and twenty years before the incident, and more interestingly, Sufi ideals are influential on both the murderer (Olive) and the victim (Elegant).

How is the idea of collective identity connected to Sufism? Since the days and nights Olive and Elegant spent together in Tebriz twenty years ago, Olive still vividly remembers one single but striking line they used to recite from the collected works of Fuzuli: "I am not me, but eternally thee" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 120). This line, referring directly to God, sees the individual and the rest of the world as a revelation of God. This pantheist view mostly informs the understanding of the self and the world, and shapes the miniaturists' philosophy of art, as well. Therefore, uniqueness and individuality, for Olive, become incompatible with the collective identity formed by the revelation of God.

³⁴Even though there seems to be an ambiguity in the use of "we", it is more probable that Olive refers to the miniaturists of Istanbul and Tebriz, generally non-European artists. The other and less likely possibility is referring to the miniaturists in the workshop of Master Osman. This is unlikely, because all miniaturists relate their art to other artists in Tebriz and Herat in the east.

³⁵In the original: Gözün görüverdiği her şeyi gözün görüverdiği gibi resmediyorlar. Onlar gördüklerini resmediyorlar, bizler ise baktığımızı" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 197).

The separation between the realist painting of Europe and the Sufi-informed miniature of Tebriz and Istanbul is reiterated and emphasized by Olive through another example: "[a]s we begin to paint in imitation of the Frankish and Venetian masters, as in the book that Our Sultan had commissioned from your Enishte, *the domain of meaning ends and the domain of form begins*" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 386).³⁶ Here, *the domain of form* refers to the European painting that portrays "a unique, special and particular human being" with all the distinctive details in each artistic work (Pamuk, 1998, p. 206), whereas *the domain of meaning* indicates the pantheist Sufi view that sees people and the world as a reflection of a superior being, of God. This is also the reason behind most miniaturists' endeavor to paint and figure "the world as Allah sees it" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 97), not as the painter sees things. How is tradition or the modern represented in this dichotomy? The artists in question are expected to choose one specific *form* over the other, and such an *either/or* type of expectation becomes too limiting, inefficacious and in the long run, destructive. Thus, Pamuk's novel questions the usefulness of any formalist, reductionist perspectives of self and art.

How does *My Name is Red* problematize such a perspective? What might be wrong with defining art through certain political or religious identities? Through a parable in the novel, Pamuk relates³⁷ the disappearance of the art of the Ottoman miniature to the story of the Ottoman Sultan, who feels a great discomfort with the "miraculous clock" sent by the Queen of England, as it "symbolized the power of the infidel"(Pamuk, 1998, p. 500). After smashing the clock, the Sultan dreams of the Prophet, who tells him: if [he] "allow[s] his subjects to be awed by pictures and, worse yet, by objects that mimicked Mankind and thus competed with Allah's creations, the sovereign would be diverging from divine will" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 500-501). The parable shows another version of how an art(istic work) gets lost through imagined identities that produce the language of mutual denunciation.

Nevertheless, Pamuk's novel further complicates this issue through its form once more: we learn that the Prophet's warning comes to the Sultan in a dream. After the Sultan smashes the clock, he "more or less"³⁸ dictates the events to his "faithful historian,"³⁹ which were then depicted by calligraphers in pieces, which eventually made their way into a book

³⁶Italics mine.

³⁷"Thus withered the red rose of the joy of painting and illumination that had bloomed for a century in Istanbul, nurtured by inspiration from the lands of Persia" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501).

³⁸Pamuk's irony is noteworthy: unreliability is emphasized.

³⁹Pamuk is very ironic at this point. The word faithful (*sadık*, in Turkish) refers to the professional integrity and reliability of the historian. However, several layers of fictionality and Pamuk's use of metafiction makes it quite hard for readers to believe in the authenticity of the story.

entitled "The Quintessence of Histories,"^{40 41} which subsequently came to be told as a parable by one of the characters, and then came to be published in the novel (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501). The quintessence of history,⁴² then, was a story in a story in another story, which was only *approximately* narrated to the calligraphers, who brought the story together to create a book, which was merely a dream in the first place. In other words, there are several layers of fictionality, and with each additional layer in metafiction, Pamuk's novel reminds readers of the nature of *imagined* identities and the difficulties that may arise when/if art and art-works are read through these lenses.

In connection with this, *My Name is Red* brings another twist to the plot. At the end of the novel, the murderer miniaturist confesses to his crimes and retrospectively states that there was nothing to kill or die for: "[t]here was. . . neither a painting nor anything else so mysterious that it called for murder!" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 482), because Olive realizes that Enishte Effendi had just aimed "to prepare a provocative book whose taint of illicitness would feed his own pride. . . with a slavish awe toward the pictures of the Frankish masters" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 479). Olive now believes that "there was nothing damaging or sacrilegious in the book," and Enishte, well knowing this, just "pretended that he was preparing a forbidden book and it gave him great satisfaction to be involved in such a dangerous venture" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 479). Otherwise, Olive cannot see "anything contrary to religion, any faithlessness, impiety or even the vaguest illicitness" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 479). This twist is important, because it becomes further apparent at this point that *My Name is Red* is more about Turkish modernity, than it is about the Ottoman world. Enishte Effendi attempts to imitate European portraiture, similar to the Turkish experience of modernity that has attempted to copy European models of governance—such as secularism and nationalism—since the 1920s. However, these projects, Enishte Effendi's book and, by implication, Turkish modernity, fail to be completed successfully (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501) as they lack the required depth.

Identity Categories Fall Short of Explaining the Complexity of Human Psychology and Behavior

As the previous section explicates, Pamuk's *My Name is Red* shows that dichotomies (meaning-form, miniature-portraiture, fiction-fact, East-West, religious-secular, etc.) and

⁴⁰Similarly, Pamuk continues his ironic style, showing how imagination turns into reality.

⁴¹Again, ironically, Pamuk writes that the Sultan "forbade its illustration by miniaturists" (*My Name is Red* 501).

⁴²This is also what lies behind the disappearance of an artistic work, the clock, just like the disappearance of the art of miniature.

related conflicts do exist; however, there is no *either-or relationship* between the parts of dichotomies, and these categories are insufficient to account for the intricacy of human relationships. In other words, the subdivisions of dichotomies mentioned in this study are not always in conflict with each other, but they are complementary constituents of a whole. In addition to this, Pamuk's novel further complicates the matter: a close inspection of the murderer miniaturist shows that the psychology of the murderer Olive is complex, which is displayed through several mental and behavioral shifts. Put differently, the murderer miniaturist's split personality and unstable psychology make it both impossible and irrelevant to categorize his behavior in the aforementioned dichotomies, such as eastern or western, religious or secular.

At one moment, Olive feels guilty about the murder,⁴³ and feels restless and perpetually dissatisfied⁴⁴ in the next. Then he makes himself believe that his crime is now a thing of a distant past,⁴⁵ but then he can't help thinking about it⁴⁶ and he frequently "finds himself in the same strange state of mind" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 148). As we keep observing Olive in his stream of consciousness, his mind leaps back to his past and re-experiences his previous moral and sexual splits and traumas.⁴⁷ Olive's split personality shows influence beyond a stream of consciousness and the two murders: the self-narrative of Olive unmistakably proves that his personal disorder has been influential on his view of art.⁴⁸ Olive also seems to have delusions of grandeur, as he repeatedly tells himself that he is the best artist⁴⁹ by far.

⁴³"Now and again, I even feel as if I haven't committed any crime at all" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 18). Pamuk's characterization of Olive is important: Olive is psychologically unstable.

⁴⁴ "Nevertheless, being a murderer takes some getting used to. I can't stand being at home, so I head out to the street. I can't stand my street, so I walk on to another, and then another" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 18). And Olive continues his walks, "which grow increasingly longer due to [his] restlessness" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 20).

⁴⁵ ". . . my offense at times recedes from me like a foreign galleon disappearing on the horizon" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 18).

⁴⁶"I force myself to think of different things." (Pamuk, 1998, p. 21).

⁴⁷"I force myself to think of different things, just as I forced myself, writhing in embarrassment, to banish thoughts of women when performing prayers as an adolescent. But unlike those days of youthful fits when I couldn't get the act of copulation out of my thoughts, now, I can indeed forget the murder that I've committed" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 21).

⁴⁸ "I've spent my time appeasing these jinns and demons. I've painted pictures, which many regard as miracles that have issued from my hands, with the help of these evil spirits. But for seven days now after dusk, since I murdered that disgrace, I'm no longer able to control the jinns and demons within me. They rage with such violence that I tell myself they might calm down if I go out for a while" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 146)

⁴⁹"They're justified in being jealous. Not one of them could surpass me in mixing colors, in creating and embellishing borders, composing pages, selecting subjects, drawing faces, arranging bustling war and hunting scenes and depicting beasts, sultans, ships, horses, warriors and lovers. Not one could approach my mastery in imbuing illustrations with the poetry of the soul, not even in gilding" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 19-20).

In another conversation, Olive explains why he killed Elegant Effendi: having overheard the rumors about the secret book commissioned by the Sultan, he fears that Elegant would denounce all miniaturists as "unbelievers. . . committing blasphemy" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 147). Therefore, in order to prevent the destruction of the entire workshop and rescue the Sultan from his helplessness, Olive takes on the task of murdering Elegant (Pamuk, 1998, p. 147). It is true that Olive believes Enishte Effendi's secret book project is "pure blasphemy" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 148); still, one question becomes relevant: how right would it be to explain the murder, Olive's and other artists' approaches to art and the inevitable disappearance of the art of the miniature only with the vague category of religion or the subcategory of *the religious* motives? In other words, how possible is it to categorize Olive's motives and inner conflicts with the narratives or dichotomies of *western and eastern* or *religious and secular*? As a likely answer to this question, Pamuk's novel shows readers that the roots of the problems related to art and life lie much deeper and are more complex than they appear to be. In addition to the *complementariness of the dichotomies* and the novel's clever *use of metafiction*, the *complex psychology* of the murderer becomes the third element that helps readers question the validity of thinking through identity categories.

Olive finds Elegant and Enishte Effendi —his two victims— very similar, almost like the two sides of the same coin, on the basis that they were both spreading fear around.⁵⁰ Olive goes further to claim that Enishte and Elegant tried to scare him and that Enishte hid the pieces of the whole picture to create an air of mystery; and thus, they just wanted to feel more significant⁵¹ by pretending that the project itself was a big "heresy" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478). In this regard, Olive believes that Elegant and Enishte Effendi "were a perfect match for each other" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 479).

With another twist, Pamuk's novel demonstrates that the murderer and the murdered are not so dissimilar, and that they are suffering from similar, if not exactly the same problems. Even if Olive's claims about Elegant and Enishte Effendi (stated above) are true, it must be noted that Olive has a similar issue of delusion of grandeur, and he wants to be at the center of attention just like his victims. Moreover, just like Enishte Effendi, Olive tries to

⁵⁰"A genuine Muslim knows the fear of damnation serves to frighten others, not himself. This is what Elegant Effendi was doing, you see, he wanted to scare me. It was your Enishte who taught him that he might do such a thing; and it was then I knew that this was indeed the case" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478).

⁵¹"Your Enishte taught Elegant Effendi that he was involved in some forbidden project by covering up the final picture, by revealing only a specific spot to each of us and having us draw something there—giving the picture an air of mystery and secrecy, it was Enishte himself who instilled the fear of heresy" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 478).

achieve this through imitating and copying the means of Europeans, which is another striking similarity:

In the center of this world, where Our Sultan should've been, was my own portrait, which I briefly observed with pride. I was somewhat unsatisfied with it because after laboring in vain for days, looking into a mirror and erasing and reworking, I was unable to achieve a good resemblance; still, I felt unbridled elation because the picture not only situated me at the center of a vast world, but for some unaccountable and diabolic reason, it made me appear more profound, complicated and mysterious than I actually was. I wanted only that my artist brethren recognize, understand and share in my exuberance. I was both the center of everything, like a sultan or a king, and, at the same time, myself. (Pamuk, 1998, p. 485)

Several issues are revealed here: first, Olive is envious of the Sultan's central position in the hidden painting, and he craves to replace him; second, just like Enishte Effendi and the hidden project, Olive does not create something new and only attempts to paint his face to replace that of the Sultan;⁵² third, similarly to Enishte Effendi and the book project, he fails to finalize his endeavor; and four, similar to his victims when he has accused, Olive takes an ambivalent, guilty pleasure from his attempt which, ironically, is doomed to failure. But most importantly, the common point in all three (Enishte Effendi, Secret Book Project and Murderer Olive) is *the way they all fail*: all of the aforementioned are copycats, imitators of the European means of artistic production.

Then, this brings us to the dichotomy of the *murderer and the victim*. Once more, Pamuk's novel shows that the people in these two categories are not so different from each other. In terms of imitating other traditions, failing to self-question, not being able to explore and find an original means of artistic production, the murderer Olive and the victim Enishte Effendi are very similar. For these reasons, the disappearance of the miniature cannot be explained simply through the religious-secular dichotomy, as these common problems occur in both central characters.

Accordingly, *My Name is Red* offers a loud and clear critique of the way people perceive art and life. In a highly pessimistic tone, Olive predicts that all their methods "will die out. . . colors will fade" and nobody will care about books or paintings (Pamuk, 1998, p. 206); mice, termites and worms will eat up the manuscripts, women will burn up books and paintings in the stoves, children will tear out the books, and whatever is left will be banned by the "religious censor" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 207). The way Pamuk makes Olive complain about

⁵²Note the similarity: Olive clearly states: "I was unable to achieve a good resemblance" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 485).

the audience/reader evokes the feeling that Pamuk, as a modern Turkish writer, is indirectly addressing the people of the modern Turkish community who fail to establish a critical and productive engagement with *the self*, *art* and *the world*. Once more, Pamuk's novel reminds how all parties —similar to the characters mentioned above— lack a serious and productive critical engagement with art and the world: "[w]hile mothers destroy the illustrations they consider obscene, fathers and older brothers will jack off onto the pictures of women and the pages will stick together" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 207). More than anything else, in *My Name is Red*, it is this shallowness and disinterestedness that lead the way to the disappearance of art. And in the end, Shekure informs readers of what happened afterwards:

the conflict between the methods of the old masters of Herat and the Frankish masters that paved the way for quarrels among artists and endless quandries [sic] was never resolved. For painting itself was abandoned; artists painted neither like Easterners nor Westerners. The miniaturists did not grow angry and revolt, but like old men who quietly succumb to an illness, they gradually accepted the situation with humble grief and resignation (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501).

Whose story is this, that of a group of miniaturists in 16th-century Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire, or that of modern Turkey? Pamuk hides certain clues in the novel, which might help find an answer to this question. In the closing scene between Olive and the other miniaturists when Olive is being blinded, a likely answer is provided: "Thanks to your Enishte, we've all learned the meaning of portrait', I⁵³ said.' God willing, one day, we'll fearlessly tell the story of our own lives the way we actually live them.' 'All fables are everybody's fables', said Black" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 483-484). Thus, the answer is probably both; Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is a well-rounded critique of Turkish modernity questioned within the historical context, which is incomplete and "unfinished" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501) just like the Euro-imitation book project of Enishte Effendi.

Conclusion

My Name is Red delineates the shortcomings of reading and understanding the world through the lenses of certain monolithic perspectives or dichotomies. However, the monolithic perspectives in question cannot be reduced to any single narrative of nationalism, Islam, nor Sufism. Instead, Pamuk's novel questions *living through any imitated model*: the miniature artists in *My Name is Red* continuously re-position their art in relation to the *great masters* of Tebriz, or the *blasphemous* Frankish portraiture artists. Yet, miniaturists barely do anything systematically productive to create something new, except for re-interpreting the European

⁵³ Olive.

and Persian artistic means of production. The project of Enishte Effendi, being nothing more than an imitation of European art, is doomed to fail and has no future, because it lacks the essential intellectual/scientific accumulation and the inquisitive curiosity behind it. Correspondingly, the disappearance of the art of the miniature is linked to an analogous reason: between Europe and Tebriz, Ottoman Istanbul fails to develop anything new beyond incompetent imitations. In this respect, *My Name is Red* shows that the *either/or perspective* (as in the example of making a choice between the old masters of Tebriz or those of Europe) does not work, because such a perspective is far from being inquisitive or creative.

In his definition of *historical stadial consciousness* José Casanova writes that secularism makes a separation between modern and pre-modern, defining *the secular* as modern, and *the religious* as backward or primitive. Pamuk's novel does not have such a strict Euro-centered secularist perspective; and religion is not perceived merely as "an intellectual regression" (Casanova, p. 59). In that sense, Pamuk is not biased towards religion and has a more balanced critical view of Turkish modernity, one that does not scapegoat religion.

Another idea that comes from the novel is the shortcomings of dichotomies in explaining the complexity of human psychology and behavior. *My Name is Red* demonstrates that dichotomies such as secular/religious, East/West, religious/secular and meaning/form may be too limiting at times, and may not be able to account for the intricacies of human lives. In several examples, Pamuk's novel shows that the subdivisions of the dichotomies are not always in conflict with each other. As the tree in the novel says, "the story is more complicated" (Pamuk, 1998, p. 56).

Patricia Waugh writes that metafiction brings the element of play into writing to show that the act of writing itself is something fictional; however, she continues, in a language-based universe, history itself is an entity that is very similar to fiction; and one of the functions of metafiction is to show this fictionality (p. 49). In this respect, metafiction has two significant roles in *My Name is Red*: first, the sharp use of metafiction helps readers question the imagined, constructed, fictional aspects of the culture, something the characters of the novel fail to see. In other words, *My Name is Red* explores the concepts of fact and fiction and specifically how they relate to imagination and reality. Through the frequent use of self-reflexivity, via fables told by characters, and with several layers of fictionality, *My Name is Red* shows its readers what the characters cannot see: how the imagined seeps into reality.⁵⁴ This is also how Pamuk's novel "disforms" any imaginative identity as Mirze explains (p.

⁵⁴Term is borrowed from Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, p. 39.

290). Second, being pluralist in perspective, *My Name is Red* gives voice to the parties who are not represented in a dichotomic either/or perspective: Satan, a dog, a coin, or outcast dervishes are some of these. As Göknaar states, “multiperspectival style” has “political import” (p. 313), because the characterization of these implies that the strict social values in the world novel fall short of acknowledging and representing the elements that are left out. Interestingly, it is art and language (and hence, the novel itself) that gives visibility and recognition to the under-/mis-represented, which accounts for the political stance of Pamuk’s work.

My Name is Red is a critique of Turkish modernity (Göknaar, p. 38). Even though the novel is set in 16th-century Istanbul, Pamuk's work is more in dialogue with 20th-and 21st-century modern Turkey, rather than with the Ottoman world. This is so, because the novel, at the very beginning, informs the reader that there has been a murder (a murder of a miniaturist), but also, at the end of the novel, the disappearance of the art of miniature is declared, tying together all the other events in the plot (Pamuk, 1998, p. 501). Therefore, through its “continuous unfolding and bringing together of different social grammars” (Ali and Hagood, p. 522), Pamuk's novel becomes the story of the shortcomings of Turkish modern life: its troublesome and superficial relationship with European culture, its unproductive identity categories, its mutually exclusive language, and the inherent fear of others and any change that might come from the outside, as well as the apathy of the people. Turkish modernity, just like the imitation work of Enishte Effendi, is an unfinished business. This is how *My Name is Red* depicts the shortcomings of identity categories, as well as the inevitability of failure in trying to impose these categories on art and life.

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