

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS:
A BAKHTINIAN APPROACH TO ORHAN PAMUK'S *WHITE CASTLE***

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In an interview conducted by *New Perspectives Quarterly* in 2000, Orhan Pamuk says:

I think I get my energy from this traditional wall that still exists in Turkey between East and West, between modernity and tradition. All the artists and intellectuals of previous generations have had an idea of a Turkey, which would be either totally Eastern, or totally Western, totally traditional or modern. My little trick is to see these two spirits of Turkey as one and see this eternal fight between East and West, that takes place in Turkey's spirit, not as a weakness but as a strength, and to try to dramatize that force by making something literary out of it. (Pamuk 2000, 20)

Pamuk's *White Castle* is one such attempt to dramatize what he calls "the eternal fight" between the East and the West in a historical setting. In this novel Pamuk challenges the boundary between the eastern and the western patterns of thinking personified by his Ottoman "master" and Italian "slave." As he ironically claims in his postscript to the Turkish edition of the novel in 1986, Pamuk himself does not know whether the Italian slave or the Ottoman master is the actual writer of the "manuscript" of *The White Castle* (This postscript is not included in the English

version of the novel). He achieves this intended effect of mixed identity on the plot level, as well as by creating fluid stylistic boundaries (stylistic hybrids) to allow for varied play within his characters' speech types. When we finish reading *The White Castle*, the question "Who is the implied writer of the so-called 'manuscript'?" remains unanswered. It is not clear whether the writer is the Venetian captive, Hoja himself, or Faruk, "the boozy historian, who had quite enough troubles in *The House of Silence*" (Berman 1991, 47). It could as well be the obscure left-handed copyist mentioned in the later part of the novel. These personae are different faces of the same author Pamuk wants us to imagine. Is not the free-spirited Hoja of the novel, in a sense, taken captive by the stagnant notions, dysfunctional institutions and narrow-minded people of his own culture? As Pamuk mentions in the quote above, the Eastern and the Western "spirits" can belong to one and the same self. However, most readers with modernist expectations suppose that the novel is written by the Venetian slave, and the two main characters in the novel exchange their identity in the end. The final blurring of the lines of identity between the two characters in the novel cast doubt upon the persona of the Western narrator that we meet in the beginning. This is how Pamuk actually challenges the usual patterns of thinking based on East-West dualism. Can an Easterner portray the mindset of a Westerner, if he is the supposed writer of the manuscript for example? On the other hand, can a Westerner actually learn to adapt himself to the Eastern lifestyle that he loves to hate passionately, if we are to believe the narrator's story?

Through Bakhtin's dialogical approach to stylistic hybrids, I will demonstrate how the question of mixed identity that we find woven in the overall structure of the novel appears in the linguistic manifestations on the sentence level in *The White Castle*. In my analysis I chose to utilize Bakhtin's theory because it is as a hybrid construction itself — a cross between literary and linguistic approaches to literature. However, from "linguistic approach" we should not understand counting up of certain words or phrases in a novel, or drawing a "structural" map of the carcass of a novel for the uninitiated, as is the usual practice in most Turkish university criticism today. Such traditional studies tend to overlook generic aspects of literary language. They approach a novel like any other text, a monologic data source whose function is to

support a certain generalized linguistic observation. On the other hand, the so called “literary” analyses of the language in a novel generally lack the systematic rigor, and descriptive linguistic tools required for methodical integrity.

Bakhtin (1981, 271) takes language not as “a system of abstract grammatical categories” but rather a live, “ideologically saturated world view.” For Bakhtin, form and content in discourse are one, and they both manifest a certain ideological component. The novelistic discourse is an environment in which mutually alien words and accents harmonize or struggle with one another. Bakhtin (1981, 280) defines the dialogic nature of language as a chess game: “Every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.” He calls this process “internal dialogism of the word.” This sort of internal stratification reflecting a constant discord and negotiation amongst various sociological components of language is a property of any discourse in general, and it is often mistaken for novelistic dialogism. However, the language in the novel embodies “dialogized heteroglossia”: a deepened form of the dialogic essence of language. Dialogism in the novel penetrates into the smallest “molecular” levels of discourse, and is populated with the author’s own socio-ideological intention. The so-called

dialogized heteroglossia involves the quoted verbal speech of characters ... the relationship between the characters’ discourses and the author’s discourse (if represented in the text) and between all these discourses and other discourses outside the text, which are imitated or evoked or alluded to by means of doubly-oriented speech. (Lodge 1988, 136)

Bakhtin celebrates the multiplicity of voices in a novel as the colorful representation of reality independent of a hegemonic, centralizing influence of a unitary world view.

Traditional stylistics is unable to cope with the stylistic diversity of the novel as long as it relies on the unity of language, and it takes individual, period-bound overtones as its object of study. Besides this, linguistic description of isolated

elements, a classification of these elements into “classical” forms, or the study of the language of a certain author does not do justice to the stylistic diversity of the novel. Stylistic studies of elements like “image,” “symbol,” and “epic style” are all oriented toward a single-languaged genre, while “the style of a novel is only to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its ‘languages’” (Bakhtin 1984, 262). Bakhtin’s theory of the novel is different from the traditional theories in that it “shifts attention away from the problem of individual texts and *a priori* concepts to the problem of the correspondence between genre categories and socio-historical reality” (Cobley 1988, 336). Here is a much quoted passage from Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel”:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention...This is what a novelist does when he distances himself from the language of his own text by adopting the voice of an implied author, a teller of tales. Moreover, the relationship of this author to his characters, and the relationship between the characters themselves is “dialogized” and distanced from their own voices in the novel through hybrid constructions of the voices of others in “concealed form,” “without any of the *formal* markers usually accompanying such speech, whether direct or indirect”. (Bakhtin 1981, 303)

When we analyze the dialogic property of the novelistic discourse in Orhan Pamuk’s *White Castle*, we confront various different patterns of the East-West conflict in the internal worlds of characters. In the beginning, the author himself chooses to hide behind his implied self, Faruk Darvinoğlu, a modern day Turkish

“encyclopedia writer.” The “found” manuscript at first seems to belong to a Venetian narrator, but the text overturns this assumption of identity through various hints in the later part of the narration as to the involvement of Hoja as the actual writer of the text. The reader’s willing suspension of disbelief is upset by the text itself which constantly reminds us that the hand that actually writes the lines we are reading belongs to somebody we can not exactly find out. Throughout the narrative we have double-voiced discourse, which is always internally dialogized. In the hybrid constructions of language in *The White Castle*, we can easily trace “another’s speech,” in the speech types of the main characters, which opens a whole new way of looking into the represented speech in fiction. Based on Bakhtin’s point of view, I will point out five identified five different types of fictional hybrids—by no means exhaustive. It should be remembered that this sort of analysis goes beyond a first-level, naïve reading practice, and looks into the logical structure of linguistic patterns. It will naturally frustrate the usual expectation of exegetic illumination in criticism. My aim within the limitations of the space I have here is to show how the East-West binarism is deconstructed within the fictional hybrids themselves, which reflect the overall pattern of *The White Castle*.

1. *Pseudo-objective motivation*

[The Venetian narrator relates his first encounter with the Ottoman pasha]

He began to describe his situation in such a way that I was forced to conclude that it was a rare illness which had stricken only the pasha of all the men on the face of the earth, *because his enemies had deceived God with their calumnies.* (18)

Paşa derdini anlatmaya öyle bir başladı ki, bunun, düşmanları iftiralarıyla Allah’ı kandırdıkları için yeryüzünde bir tek Paşa’nın yakalandığı özel bir hastalık olduğunu düşünmek zorunda kaldım.
(17)

In this hybrid construction it is not clear whether the expression “because his enemies had deceived God with their calumnies” belongs to the narrator or to pasha. Here we have what Bakhtin calls “pseudo-objective motivation” within authorial speech. Pseudo objective motivation is characteristic of novel style and it is one of the many forms for concealing another’s speech in a hybrid form. The Logic motivating the sentence seems to belong to the narrator but it actually lies within the subjective belief system of pasha himself. The narrator seems to adopt pasha’s point of view as regards the involvement of Allah (not God in the original text) in this mysterious illness, which turns out to be ironic when it is understood that pasha’s illness is only common cold. In this double voiced hybrid we hear the voice of a Westerner drawn into the Easterner’s logic in explaining the unlikely cause of a common illness.

2. Unintroduced citation (echoing)

[The narrator relates his first reception at the Ottoman court]

In a sudden moment of courage, I said I would not change my religion, and the pasha surprised, called me a fool. *After all, there was no one* around me whom I would be ashamed to tell I had become a Muslim. (29)

Bir cesarete kapılarak, dinimi değiştirmeyeceğimi söyleyince, Paşa şaşırıldı biraz, sonra, aptal olduğumu söyledi. Dinimi değiştirdim diye yüzüne bakamayacağım kimse yokmuş ki çevremde. (29)

In the Turkish version the last sentence is a novelistic hybrid that clearly reflects pasha’s words as un-introduced citation within the narrator’s discourse. The marker–“mish” makes it clear that this sentence is indirective, and it reflects pasha’s ideology. However, the adverbial “after all” creates a totally different hybrid in the English version. It is not clear whether these words belong to pasha or to the narrator. In the Turkish version, this hybrid has reportive function, whereas in the

English rendition it blurs the lines of the Easterner's and the Westerner's attitude towards religious conversion.

3. Parodic stylization

[The narrator explains Hoja's and his own attitude against the plague]

Like me he did not deny that the disaster was God's will, but only indirectly; for this reason even we mortals could take stock and act to protect ourselves without offending God's pride. *Hadn't the Caliph Omar, the Rightly Guided, recalled General Ebu Ubeyde from Syria to Medina in order to protect his army from the plague?* (90)

O da benim gibi, Allah'ın felakete olan ilişkisini inkar etmiyordu, ama dolaylıydı bu ilişki; bu yüzden, biz ölümlüler de, paçaları sıvayıp felakete karşı birşeyler yapabiliydik ve bu, Allah'ın gururunu hiç incitmezdi. Hazreti Ömer de, Ebu Übeyde'yi, ordusunu vebadan korumak için, Suriye'den Medine'ye çağırılmamış mıydı? (100)

In the last sentence of this quotation we have the parodic stylization of moral-didactic Islamic discourse. The recalling of a historical/religious anecdote involving Islamic elders to set an example for the present issues is characteristic of Eastern culture. On the other hand, from an Easterner's viewpoint, it would be heretical to think that Allah (God) has pride, and a subject is capable of offending it. It is not clear to what extent the narrator agrees/disagrees with the Easterner's attitude in the last hybrid that is marked with italics above. If we pass beyond the act of naive reading, we can say that it is not clear whether the ideas in this whole passage belong to Hoja or to his slave. In the rest of the passage as well, Pamuk makes his narrator use the first person plural and third person singular alternately, thus he blurs the lines of thought between the two characters.

4. *Multi-voiced reporting*

[Narrator talks about a meeting of Hoja and the child sultan]

Although among his retinue there were those who said that to make war on the plague was to oppose God, the sultan paid no attention; and later he asked about his animals; would the plague-devil harm his falcons, his hawks, his lions, his monkeys? (92)

Çevresindekilerden, vebayla uğraşmanın Allah'a karşı gelmek olduğunu söyleyenler çıkmışsa da, aldırmamış Padişah; sonra, bir de hayvanlarını sormuş; şahinlerine, doğanlarına, aslanlarına, maymunlarına veba şeytanı ilişir miymiş? (102)

Did we understand 'defeat' to mean that the empire would lose all of its territories one by one? We'd lay out our maps on the table and *mournfully* determine first which territories, then which mountains or rivers would be lost. Or did defeat mean that people would change and alter their beliefs without noticing it? We imagined how everyone in Istanbul might rise from their warm beds one morning as changed people, *they wouldn't know how to wear their clothes, wouldn't be able to remember what minarets were for*. Or perhaps defeat meant to accept the superiority of *others* and try to emulate them. (109)

Yıkımdan imparatorluğun elindeki ülkeleri bir bir kaybetmesini mi anlıyorduk? Haritalarımızı masanın üzerine yayar, önce hangi ülkenin, sonra hangi dağlarla hangi nehirlerin elden çıkacağını *hüzünle* saptardık...Bütün İstanbullular'ın bir sabah sıcak yataklarından başka birer insan olarak kalktıklarını düşlerdik; elbiselerini nasıl giyeceklerini bilemiyorlar, *minarelerin neye*

yaradığını hatırlamıyorlardı. Belki de yıkım, ötekilerin üstünlüğünü
görerek onlara benzemeye çalışmak demektir. (122)

Here again, in the Turkish version the marker –“mish” makes it obvious that this scene is related to us indirectly by the slave through Hoja’s viewpoint, but in the English version the narrator narrates the whole passage as if he has witnessed what had taken place between the sultan and Hoja. The idea that “to make war on the plague is to oppose God” can reflect the actual wording of the Sultan’s retinue, Hoja, or the slave. Similarly, the question “would the plague-devil harm his falcons, his hawks, his lions, his monkeys?” can reflect the Sultan’s, Hoja’s or the slave’s words, especially because we know that the idea of devil appearing in the form of a plague is instilled in the young sultan’s mind by Hoja in the previous passage.

5. Internal hybrid

[Narrator’s views on the military defeat against the West]

This last type of hybrid that I will talk about can only be explained with reference to the content of the novel as a whole. Here, the parts written in italics reveal that the western slave mourns for the loss of territories of the Ottoman empire along with his eastern master. He even does not seem to rejoice in the fact that there is a possibility of defeating Islam altogether for the West. The word “others” here implies Westerners from the viewpoint of Easterns. The slave, who is expected to rejoice in the fact that the loss of cultural memory for the Ottomans would bring about the Empire’s downfall, feels the pang of psychological defeat together with his master long before the onset of material defeat. This extract is authorial speech, judging by its syntactic markers; however its entire emotional and cultural overtones belong to Hoja himself.

As we have seen above, internal dialogism in the novel can be a complex combination of syntactic and semantic variations in language. Bakhtin’s idea of polyphony (heteroglossia) is often mistaken for a dramatic dialogue of different voices in a novel. Rather, it is a mixture of various stylistic components within the

speech that “belongs” to a certain persona. In *The White Castle*, the polyphony of the stylistic hybrids play upon our stereotypical images of the West and the East. The hybrid nature of the discourse in this novel is directly related to the erasure of unified identity on the plot level. As we have seen, Bakhtin’s approach to the novelistic language makes it possible for us to see the interplay of form and content in a novel,

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