

TRACES OF PARODIC ELEMENTS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ORHAN PAMUK

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Abstract

The idea of identity-swapping is found more than once in the novels of Orhan Pamuk, which made the researcher interested in getting into the probable reasons why the writer has incorporated such ideas repeatedly. Three of Pamuk's novels have been taken for this study, wherein the researcher has tried to look at them in the light of postmodernism. Parody, one of the metafictional elements, is found to be an important reason behind this swapping of identities.

Key Words: Identity, Metafiction, Parody, Postmodernism

Orhan Pamuk, one of the few internationally recognised authors in the field of Turkish fiction, is the winner of 2006 Nobel Prize for literature. He is being celebrated as Turkey's new literary genius. While his contemporaries are still working out for the success formula of a well-made modern novel, Pamuk has already excelled in the field of postmodernism. By employing metafictional techniques such as frame breaking, fact and fiction, narratorial intrusion, self-reflexivity, subjectivity, and use of parody, Pamuk problematizes the ontological status of the

text and the identities of author, narrator and characters. Pamuk shatters the illusion of realism, according to which a literary work simply reflects the world as it is.

Metafiction may be concerned with particular novel conventions to show their construction process. It may comment on a particular work or fictitious style in the form of parody. In Pamuk's novels, shifting of roles takes place as if it is so easy. This seems to have adopted the tradition of parody. Pamuk has, undoubtedly made use of doppelganger theme in excess. Many of his characters take the identity of someone else in some way or the other. They do it as if it is the easiest thing to do in the world. Mere exchange of clothes or identification cards makes a character become the other. Laurence J Splitter has expressed his ideas about 'identity' in his work *From Identity and Personhood*. He is of the opinion that identity is a concept that presupposes a dialogical recognition of the other; it is a relational concept. But it is also a concept that presupposes identification in the sense that individuals recognise attributes or properties in each other that are construed as identical or at least similar. These properties, then, are used as an index of individual position and disposition. Identity is therefore a concept not so much of uniqueness or distinction as of resemblance and repetition.

The White Castle begins exactly like a fairy tale, fantastically, with pirates and kidnapping, slaves and pashas. It proceeds into a dark, almost hallucinatory maze of self exploration in which the narrator nearly lapses into solipsism. It ends, wistfully, with Hoja and his slave – who have become like brothers – perpetually severed. Though Pamuk is very much obsessed with narratives that do not show in his formula-like description, Pamuk is being ironic by mixing up several sub genres of the novel; a fairy-tale, a gothic thriller and a tragic romance. Perhaps he is mocking the classifications like the bildungsroman, gothic and picaresque or the

realistic. As many of his contemporaries have been emphatically attacking such straight jacketting of the narrative, Pamuk too perhaps undermining the generic boundaries in his own fashion and turning the narrative self-reflexive here.

The White Castle parodies the conventions of realism. The narrator in *The White Castle* describes how identity swapping takes place. The two characters exchange clothes and eventually one becomes the other.

We exchanged clothes without haste and without speaking. I gave him my ring and the medallion I'd managed to keep from him all these years. Inside it there was a picture of my grandmother's mother and a lock of my fiance's hair that had gone white; I believe he liked it, he put it around his neck. Then he left the tent and was gone. I watched him slowly disappear in the silent fog. It was getting light. Exhausted, I lay down in his bed and slept peacefully. (TWC 130)

The same idea is also found in the novel *The Black Book*. While one customer advises Bedii Usta, he talks about the people of Turkey: "He wants a coat worn by a new beautiful creature from a distant unknown land, so he can convince himself that he, too, can change, become someone new, just by putting on this coat" (TBB 61). In chapter Twenty of *The Black Book*, Galip becomes Celal: "A great deal of time passed before he felt his way into Celal's bedroom. As he took off his clothes and stepped into Celal's pajamas . . ." (245). When Galip is taken to play the role of Celal before the English journalists to give an interview, Iskender, Galip's friend says: "Our famous journalist – our columnist Celal Salik – stands before you in person!" (414).

The novel *The New Life* has also such renderings. In chapter Nine of *The New Life*, Dr Fine says, “Become my son. Take his place. Carry on my work after me. I am growing old, but my passions have not in the least abated. I want to be sure that the movement will survive” (TNL 136). Osman explains how Mehmet changed his personality after the accident and started a new life:

He had picked the identification card out of the packet of this youth whose name was Mehmet and appropriated it. When the bus began to go up in flames, he got out. After the fire had down, he had this bright idea. He slipped his own identification a card into the packet of the burned body and moving it into his own seat, he fled away to his new life. (226)

Janan says thus to Osman after getting the identification cards from the couple, who have just died: “In our new life together, your name is Ali Kara,” she said, reading the identification cards in her hand, “and mine is Efsun kara. We even have a marriage certificate” (85).

In all these occasions, assuming someone else’s identity happens so very smoothly as if it is the easiest thing in the world. Metafiction is a style of writing that is parodic, playful and deceptively naive. Parody is considered inward-looking and decadent in metafiction. Patricia Waugh says thus in her work *Metafiction*:

In fact, parody in metafiction can equally be regarded as another lever of positive literary change, for, by undermining an earlier set of fictional conventions which have become automatized, the parodist clears a path for a new, more perceptible set. The problem arises because parody is double-edged. A novel that uses parody

can be seen either as destructive or as critically evaluative and breaking out into new creative possibilities. (65)

In Pamuk's novels, one can find the earlier set of fictional conventions with regard to 'identity' is being undermined. The theme of identity is given a new dimension in his novels. One's identity is no longer fixed. The readers are forced to revise their rigid preoccupations of the concept 'identity'. Patricia Waugh further says:

Metafictional parody reveals how a particular set of contents was expressed in a particular set of conventions recognized as 'literature' by its readers, and it considers what relevance these may still have for readers situated at a different point in history. It exploits the indeterminacy of the text, forcing the reader to revise his or her rigid preconceptions based on literary and social conventions, by playing off contemporary and earlier paradigms against each other and thus defeating the reader's expectations about both of them. (67)

Thus, literature can be seen as inherently self-conscious, because laying bare the device results in self-conscious parody when applied to the literary work itself. A literary dynamism means the idea of making strange or defamiliarization: things cannot remain strange. Patricia Waugh says: "Metafiction parodies the structural conventions and motifs of the novel itself or of particular modes of that genre" (74). Pamuk, like his characters is obsessed with narrative. "Wasn't inventing and listening to diverting stories the pleasantest part of life?" his narrator asks near the end of the novel (*TWC* 137). He understands the ideal shape of a good story. In fact, Hoja and his slave at one point discuss "how the ideal story should begin innocently like a fairy-

tale, be frightening like a nightmare in the middle, and conclude sadly like a love story ending in separation” (82).

In a lot of metafiction, the reader is left with the impression that since all fiction is a kind of life parody, no matter how verisimilar it pretends to be, the most authentic and honest fiction could well be the one that most freely recognizes its fictionality. There are often characters in the works of parodists, who are mindful of their role as fictitious beings. Instead of restricting the scope and significance of these works, this tool is linked to what has been termed a process mimesis: the imaginative activity involved in the creation of ontological identity is central in the text, as in life. Throughout metafiction, identity itself is always an artistic construct, whether it is the reader’s own or that of characters.

Why do Pamuk’s characters have such ideas or swap their roles? What does the term ‘identity’ actually mean? Is identity then such an attribute like clothing that one can discard at one’s will and don a new, different one anytime? Is it really possible to assume a different identity so totally for any person? If such an exchange in reality is impossible, then what for does Pamuk repeatedly use such a pattern in his novels? These are the questions taken for this study. One’s own identity is an ongoing transaction with others. Identity is fluid, it is never fixed and it always changes. Identity is always in a constant flux: the acquisition of knowledge and the experiences that an individual undergoes keep his or her identity constantly transforming. Pamuk’s novels, in one sense parodies the structural conventions and motifs of the novel itself.

This research paper advances the finding that ‘one becoming the other’ is just an impossibility. One cannot assume identity. Assuming somebody else’s identity is a joke played

on the readers. Identity swapping is impossible. However, an individual's identity can change with the acquisition of varied knowledge and experiences, since the concept 'Identity' is always fluid and it is never fixed. Being a postmodern writer, Pamuk has employed parody effectively to drive this point home.

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