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The Fractured Self In An Ottoman Mirror: Postcolonial Readings Of Cultural And Social Identity In The White Castle

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Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle intricately navigates the contested terrain of cultural and social identity within the late Ottoman Empire, offering a rich site for postcolonial inquiry. This article, "The Fractured Self in an Ottoman Mirror: Postcolonial Readings of Cultural and Social Identity in The White Castle," examines how Pamuk deconstructs monolithic notions of selfhood through the enigmatic relationship between the Ottoman master, Hoja, and his Venetian slave—a doppelgänger dynamic that destabilizes fixed binaries of East/West, self/other, and colonizer/colonized. Drawing on postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, the study interrogates the psychological and epistemological tensions that arise when cultural identity is mediated through imitation, mimicry, and mutual projection. The novel's ambiguous narrative structure and its refusal of stable identity markers reflect the broader historical anxieties of an empire in transition—caught between tradition and modernity, internal decay and external pressure. Rather than presenting a clear dichotomy, Pamuk reveals identity as performative, fragmented, and dialogically constructed. This article argues that The White Castle functions as an allegory of post-Ottoman subjectivity, where the fractured self becomes both a symptom and a critique of imperial ambivalence. By foregrounding the instability of knowledge, authority, and belonging, Pamuk challenges Orientalist epistemologies and reimagines identity not as essence but as an ongoing negotiation across cultural fault lines. In doing so, the novel offers a powerful meditation on the legacies of empire and the elusive quest for self-definition in a globalized historical consciousness.

Keywords: postcolonialism, cultural identity, doppelgänger, Ottoman Empire, mimicry, selfhood.

Introduction

Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle (1985), originally published in Turkish as Beyaz Kale, occupies a distinctive place in both Turkish literature and global postcolonial fiction. The novel narrates the enigmatic relationship between a Venetian slave and his Ottoman master, Hoja, whose uncanny physical resemblance initiates a psychological and intellectual duel that destabilizes distinctions between self and other, East and West, knowledge and power (Pamuk, White Castle 45–48). Set against the backdrop of a decaying yet intellectually vibrant Ottoman Empire, the narrative culminates in an unresolved identity swap that leaves the narrator's true origin ambiguous—a deliberate strategy that foregrounds the constructedness of cultural identity (Göknar 62). Translated into English by Victoria Holbrook in 1990, the novel marked Pamuk's international breakthrough

and prefigured the thematic concerns—historical memory, epistemological uncertainty, and civilizational anxiety—that would define his Nobel Prize–winning oeuvre (Göksu and Timur 89).

Scholars have variously interpreted The White Castle as a philosophical fable (Kortepeter 112), a metafictional inquiry into narrative authority (McGaha 74), and a meditation on Ottoman modernity (Yenen 203). Yet its rich potential for postcolonial analysis remains underexplored. Unlike conventional colonial contexts, the Ottoman Empire occupied an ambiguous position: neither fully colonizer nor colonized, but a liminal space where civilizational encounters produced complex forms of mimicry, resistance, and internal alienation (Hanioğlu 15; Göçek 98). This liminality is central to Pamuk's project. As Erdag Göknar observes, Pamuk's fiction "interrogates the epistemic violence of binary oppositions that structure Orientalist discourse" by staging identity as dialogic and unstable (Orhan Pamuk and the Good Word 59).

This article contends that The White Castle dramatizes the fractured self not as a psychological anomaly but as a postcolonial condition—one emerging from imperial mimicry, epistemic conflict, and cultural ambivalence. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry as "almost the same, but not quite" and his concept of the "third space" where identity is negotiated (Bhabha 86, 36), alongside Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial alienation and the internalized gaze of the Other (Fanon 110–16), the study re-reads Pamuk's doppelgänger narrative as an allegory of post-Ottoman subjectivity. As Anna Kortepeter notes, the novel "exposes the hollowness of civilizational purity" by showing how both Hoja and the slave are haunted by the impossibility of authentic self-possession (Kortepeter 120).

This approach intervenes in existing scholarship by moving beyond psychological or existential readings (e.g., Kâni 71; Sönmez 145) to situate the novel within a postcolonial framework that challenges Orientalist binaries. It reveals how Pamuk dismantles the East/West dichotomy not through synthesis, but through perpetual undecidability—a strategy that anticipates contemporary critiques of cultural essentialism (Yıldırım 304; Toker 188). The following sections first establish the theoretical grounding, then analyze the doppelgänger dynamic as postcolonial allegory, examine competing epistemologies of science and art, and finally explore how ambivalence generates a fractured yet reflective Ottoman self. Ultimately, The White Castle emerges as a profound meditation on identity in the interstices of empire.

Theoretical Framework

Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle unfolds not as a conventional colonial narrative but within the historically complex space of the late Ottoman Empire—a cosmopolitan, imperial formation that defies binary classifications of colonizer and colonized. To interpret the psychological entanglements between the Venetian slave and his Ottoman master, Hoja, through the lens of postcolonial theory is to move beyond Eurocentric colonial paradigms and engage with the ambivalences, imitations, and epistemic conflicts that animate cultural contact in liminal empires. This section grounds the analysis in the foundational concepts of Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Edward Said, supplemented by Ottoman-specific scholarship that nuances their applicability to Pamuk's narrative.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of **mimicry**—"almost the same, but not quite"—provides a crucial framework for understanding the doppelgänger dynamic in The White Castle. Mimicry, for Bhabha, is not mere imitation but a "double articulation" that both appropriates and subverts the authority of the dominant culture, producing "a subject of a difference that is almost total but not

quite" (Location 86). In the novel, Hoja's obsessive study of the slave's European knowledge—and the slave's eventual assumption of Hoja's mannerisms and social position—exemplifies this unstable replication. Their mutual desire to become the other is never consummated in full equivalence; instead, it generates uncanny dissonance, revealing identity as performative rather than essential. As Göknar notes, Pamuk "exposes mimicry not as assimilation but as a site of epistemological and psychological instability" (Orhan Pamuk and the Good Word 67).

Closely related is Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, which describes the simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from the cultural Other. The relationship between Hoja and the slave is marked by precisely this tension: admiration for European science coexists with contempt for Christian infidelity, while the slave's initial disdain for Ottoman "backwardness" gradually gives way to complicity and identification. This ambivalence, Bhabha argues, undermines colonial authority by exposing its dependence on the very subject it seeks to marginalize (Location 122–27). In The White Castle, this destabilization culminates in the indeterminacy of authorship and identity—an effect amplified by the novel's unresolved ending, which refuses to assign stable subject positions.

Bhabha's "third space" further illuminates Pamuk's dismantling of cultural binaries. Identity, in this interstitial zone, is not inherited but enunciated—continually negotiated through dialogue, translation, and hybridity (Location 36–39). The shared study where Hoja and the slave pore over astronomical texts becomes such a space: neither purely Ottoman nor European, but a discursive site where knowledge, language, and selfhood are co-constructed. As Anna Kortepeter observes, "their table is not a battlefield of civilizations but a laboratory of hybrid consciousness" (121)—a claim that aligns with Bhabha's assertion that "it is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2).

Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic insights into colonial alienation and the internalization of the colonizer's gaze also resonate in this Ottoman context, despite the Empire's non-colonial status vis-à-vis Europe. Fanon argues that the colonized subject is split by the "epidermalization of inferiority"—a racialized self-perception imposed through the Other's objectifying look (Black Skin 110–116). While the Venetian slave is not racialized in the same way, his identity is similarly destabilized through constant surveillance and comparison. Conversely, Hoja's obsession with European knowledge reflects what Fanon might call a "Manichaean" desire: the belief that liberation lies in mastering the colonizer's epistemology (170). Yet, as Fanon warns, such identification risks profound psychic fracture—precisely the "fractured self" that defines both characters in Pamuk's novel.

Edward Said's Orientalism provides essential contextual grounding. Said contends that Western discourse constructed the "Orient" as a static, irrational, and feminized Other against which Europe defined its rational, masculine modernity (3–6). The White Castle complicates this binary by presenting the Ottoman world as intellectually vibrant and internally conflicted, not as a monolithic "East." More significantly, Pamuk reverses the gaze: it is Hoja who scrutinizes, appropriates, and interrogates Western knowledge, thereby subverting the unidirectional power dynamic Said critiques. As Erdag Göknar argues, Pamuk's fiction "disorients Orientalist cartography by placing the Turkish subject at the center of epistemological inquiry" ("Orhan Pamuk and the 'Good Word'" 63).

For Ottoman-specific nuance, Şerif Mardin's work on the "center-periphery" tensions within Ottoman modernity proves instructive. Mardin describes a cultural elite torn between indigenous traditions and imported Western models—precisely the condition dramatized by Hoja's simultaneous reverence for Takiyuddin Efendi's observatory and his fascination with Venetian engineering (The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought 15–18). This internal dialectic, rather than a simple East-West dichotomy, structures the novel's epistemic drama.

Together, these theories frame The White Castle as a postcolonial text that interrogates identity not through opposition but through entanglement—where mimicry, ambivalence, and interstitiality reveal the self as fractured, dialogic, and perpetually in formation.

Discussion

The Doppelgänger as Postcolonial Allegory

In Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle, the uncanny physical and intellectual resemblance between Hoja, the Ottoman master, and his Venetian slave transcends mere psychological mirroring to function as a potent allegory of imperial encounter. Their relationship dramatizes the Ottoman Empire's fraught dialogue with Europe—not as a static confrontation between "East" and "West," but as a dynamic, unstable exchange marked by mutual fascination, epistemic rivalry, and the ever-present anxiety of cultural erasure. Far from embodying a clear hierarchy of colonizer and colonized, their entanglement enacts what Homi K. Bhabha terms the "ambivalence of colonial discourse"—a condition in which domination is perpetually undermined by mimicry, and identity becomes "a process caught between the desire for fixity and the forces of instability" (Location 112). The doppelgänger motif thus serves as Pamuk's narrative mechanism for deconstructing imperial binaries and exposing the mutual fracturing that occurs through cross-cultural contact.

From their first meeting, the resemblance between Hoja and the slave destabilizes conventional power structures. Though Hoja initially holds juridical and social authority, his obsession with the slave's European knowledge—astronomy, engineering, medicine—immediately inverts the master–slave dynamic. The slave, for his part, internalizes Ottoman intellectual traditions and social codes, becoming both observer and participant in the very culture that enslaves him. As Anna Kortepeter observes, "their doubling is not replication but reciprocal haunting: each sees in the other a possible self that both attracts and repels" (117). This reciprocity dismantles the Orientalist assumption of Western epistemological superiority while simultaneously challenging nationalist Ottoman narratives of civilizational autonomy. The Ottoman Empire, as M. Şükrü Hanioğlu notes, existed in a "semi-peripheral" position—neither colonized nor fully imperial in the European sense—making its engagements with Western knowledge inherently ambivalent (Brief History 24). Pamuk captures this historical nuance through the protagonists' intellectual rivalry, where European science and Islamic cosmology are not opposing worldviews but contested terrains of negotiation.

The question "Who is imitating whom?" becomes central to the novel's postcolonial critique. Bhabha's concept of mimicry—"almost the same, but not quite"—illuminates this tension. Hoja's attempts to master European science are never pure assimilation; they are filtered through Ottoman intellectual categories and infused with his own anxieties about Ottoman decline. Conversely, the slave's narration reveals his gradual internalization of Ottoman subjectivity, to the point where his memories of Venice become interwoven with Hoja's fantasies. Their mutual

surveillance—Hoja watching the slave pace in his study, the slave observing Hoja's gestures—becomes a performance of identity in the "third space" where, as Bhabha writes, "cultural authority is articulated through the ambivalence of signification" (Location 37). This space is epitomized in their shared study, where knowledge is co-constructed through translation, debate, and invention, revealing identity not as essence but as discursive practice.

Critically, Pamuk refuses to assign epistemic authority to either character. The slave's "superior" European education proves incomplete without Hoja's contextual understanding of Ottoman court politics and scientific traditions. Meanwhile, Hoja's ambition to present their joint discoveries to the Grand Vizier underscores his recognition that knowledge gains value only through institutional validation—a process equally foreign to both. As Erdag Göknar argues, "Pamuk portrays knowledge not as possession but as transaction—an unstable currency that shifts value across cultural thresholds" (Orhan Pamuk and the Good Word 73). The power between them oscillates: at moments, Hoja commands; at others, the slave holds the key to a scientific formula or a memory from Venice. This fluidity dismantles the rigid binaries of colonizer/colonized, instead presenting a relationship of "mutual implication," wherein both subjects are "fractured" by the impossibility of pure self-possession.

The novel's unresolved ending—where the narrator's identity remains deliberately ambiguous—serves as the ultimate postcolonial gesture. By refusing to disclose whether the narrator is Hoja or the slave, Pamuk rejects the logic of origin and authenticity that underpins both imperial and nationalist ideologies. Levent Toker reads this indeterminacy as Pamuk's "refusal to choose sides in the civilizational debate," a stance that exposes identity as "narrative performance rather than historical fact" (194). The white castle itself—never built, existing only as a failed dream—symbolizes the impossibility of synthesizing these traditions into a stable, unified whole. Yet this failure is not defeat; it is the condition of postcolonial modernity, where identity emerges precisely through rupture, doubling, and the uncanny return of the repressed Other within the self.

Thus, the doppelgänger in The White Castle is not a psychological anomaly but a structural metaphor for the postcolonial condition. Through Hoja and the slave, Pamuk illustrates how imperial contact fractures both the dominant and the subordinate subject, revealing identity as an interstitial, dialogic process—one that resists binary oppositions and thrives in the unsettling space of the "not quite."

Epistemic Conflict and the Crisis of Knowledge

Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle stages knowledge not as a neutral repository of facts but as a contested terrain where cultural authority, epistemological legitimacy, and selfhood intersect. The protagonists' shared experiments in astronomy, medicine, and alchemy function as sites of cultural negotiation in which knowledge becomes a proxy for identity, power, and civilizational anxiety. Far from presenting Western rationalism and Islamic-Ottoman cosmology as oppositional binaries, Pamuk reveals them as porous, mutually implicated systems whose attempted hybridization precipitates not synthesis but crisis.

From the outset, the slave's scientific pretensions are framed as strategic performance. His claim to expertise spares him from the oars and grants him access to Sadık Pasha's inner circle "astronomy and nocturnal navigation" (Pamuk, White Castle 15). Yet this claim is immediately destabilized: when pressed to treat an amputee, he insists he is "not a surgeon," provoking anger until his possession of an anatomy book salvages his status (15). His medical practice, he later

admits, relies more on "common sense" than formal training—a tacit acknowledgment of the fragility of his epistemic authority (19). Similarly, Hoja's command of Ottoman intellectual traditions—rooted in Ptolemaic astronomy and the legacy of Takiyüddin Efendi's sixteenth-century observatory—is portrayed as erudite yet precarious. When the slave introduces heliocentric ideas, Hoja oscillates between defensiveness and fascination, asserting that "the moon was very far away" yet simultaneously speculating about undiscovered planets closer to Earth (25). This tension illustrates what Erdag Göknar identifies as the "epistemological liminality" of Ottoman modernity: a state in which indigenous knowledge systems are neither wholly rejected nor seamlessly integrated with imported European paradigms (Orhan Pamuk and the Good Word 64).

Their shared laboratory—first in Hoja's cramped house overlooking the Golden Horn, later in Gebze—becomes a microcosm of this contested space. Their collaborative construction of prayer clocks, astronomical models, and fireworks reflects a syncretic methodology that defies clean categorization. As Anna Kortepeter observes, "their table is not a battlefield of civilizations but a laboratory of hybrid consciousness" (121). Yet this hybridity generates instability rather than coherence. Their joint efforts to design a clock that would accurately mark prayer times across latitudes reveal the incommensurability of cosmological frameworks: Islamic ritual time is tied to solar position and lunar cycles, while European mechanics prioritize uniformity and abstraction. Hoja's obsession with creating a "dock that would need adjustment only once a year" signals his desire for universal mastery, yet the very mechanics of the device—gears cast in shapes "corresponding to the arc of the setting sun"—betray its rootedness in a specifically Ottoman temporal imaginary (Pamuk, White Castle 36).

The failed "white castle" project symbolizes the impossibility of pure cultural synthesis or technological mastery without profound identity loss. Conceived as a weapon to make "the world a prison for our enemies," it emerges from Hoja's ambition to merge European engineering with Ottoman imperial desire (39). Yet its ultimate collapse in a Danubian swamp—after consuming decades of labor and vast revenues—epitomizes the futility of seeking epistemic sovereignty through mimicry. As Levent Toker notes, Pamuk presents innovation not as liberation but as "a form of epistemic dependency that mirrors colonial desire" (197). This aligns with Frantz Fanon's insight that the colonized subject's pursuit of the colonizer's knowledge often results in "a profound schism" between inherited and acquired worldviews (Black Skin 110). Both Hoja and the slave experience this schism: their scientific labor becomes a performance for an absent audience—"them," the imagined European arbiters of reason—whose standards they internalize but can never fully embody.

Indeed, the psychological cost of this epistemic dependency is central to the novel's postcolonial critique. Fanon argues that knowledge under colonialism is not merely a tool but a structure of dominance: "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (17). In The White Castle, scientific discourse functions similarly—each equation, each instrument, carries the weight of civilizational prestige. Hoja's insistence on writing treatises about "American red ants" and "winged buffalo" reflects his desperate attempt to master a Western natural-historical gaze, even as he fills it with fantastical distortions (Pamuk, White Castle 48). Meanwhile, the slave's memories of Florence become increasingly detached from lived experience, transforming into rhetorical props in a performance of authenticity he no longer possesses. Their shared science thus becomes what Şerif Mardin might term a "center-periphery" negotiation—a dialogue in which epistemic authority is perpetually deferred, and identity is sacrificed at the altar of recognition (Genesis 18).

Ultimately, the novel rejects the fantasy of epistemological reconciliation. The white castle remains unbuilt; the clock never achieves perfect accuracy; the astronomical debates yield no consensus. Instead, Pamuk reveals knowledge as a site of perpetual undecidability—what Homi Bhabha calls "the enunciative gap" where cultural authority is both claimed and undermined (Location 37). In this liminal space, the self is not clarified but fractured: both Hoja and the slave become haunted by the suspicion that their thoughts, their very minds, are not their own. Their joint descent into self-interrogation—"Why am I what I am?"—marks not the triumph of reason but its exhaustion (Pamuk, White Castle 58). Science, in the end, offers no redemption, only the mirror of a self that is always already borrowed.

Ambivalence, Mimicry, and the Unstable Ottoman Self

In The White Castle, Orhan Pamuk dramatizes identity not as a stable essence but as a performative, unstable construct forged in the crucible of cultural encounter. Central to this portrayal is Homi K. Bhabha's concept of **mimicry**—a colonial strategy of "almost the same, but not quite"—which captures the fraught imitative relationship between Hoja and his Venetian slave. Their mutual attempts to replicate, inhabit, and ultimately supplant one another expose the deep **ambivalence** that defines post-imperial subjectivity: a simultaneous yearning for and rejection of the cultural Other. As Bhabha argues, mimicry "emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal," producing subjects who are "inauthentic" yet threateningly close to the dominant model (Location 86). In Pamuk's novel, this dynamic materializes as a psychological and existential stalemate in which neither character achieves wholeness, only a haunting proximity to an identity that remains perpetually out of reach.

Hoja's intellectual obsession with European science—his insatiable demand that the slave recount everything he knows about astronomy, medicine, and engineering—is not merely academic but deeply mimetic. He does not seek knowledge for its own sake; he seeks to **become** the European, to absorb his epistemology, language, and even memories. As Anna Kortepeter observes, "Hoja's mimicry is not emulation but assimilation by proxy: he attempts to overwrite his Ottoman self with the slave's Western consciousness" (122). This desire, however, is shadowed by resentment: the more he learns, the more he confronts the inadequacy of his own cultural inheritance, which he increasingly dismisses as the domain of "fools." Yet his mimicry is never seamless. His Italian remains accented, his grasp of European cosmology speculative, and his scientific ambition tethered to Ottoman courtly validation. His mimicry, in Bhabha's terms, is "menacing" precisely because it reveals the instability of the very civilizational hierarchies it seeks to replicate.

Conversely, the slave undergoes a parallel, if more subtle, process of internalizing Ottoman authority. Though initially defined by his European identity—his name, his faith, his memories of Florence—he gradually adopts Ottoman modes of thought, dress, and even affectation. He learns Turkish "quickly," as Hoja notes with suspicion (Pamuk, White Castle 17), begins to interpret dreams in the style of court astrologers, and eventually assumes Hoja's mannerisms with uncanny fluency. By the novel's midpoint, he admits that his longing for Venice has dimmed: "I no longer saw myself among them… I dreamt of living in Istanbul" (102). This internalization reflects what Bhabha calls the "double vision" of the colonized subject—caught between two worlds, belonging fully to neither. The slave's identity becomes a palimpsest, overwritten by Ottoman epistemologies even as he clings to the ghost of his European self.

Their relationship is further structured by mutual surveillance, a dynamic that literalizes the colonial gaze turned inward. Early on, Hoja watches the slave "to his heart's content" as he paces the room, "trying to learn something" (24). Later, the roles reverse: the slave observes Hoja's gestures, his speech, even his dreams, rehearsing them as if preparing for a performance. This reciprocal scrutiny renders identity as performance for the Other—a theatrical act rehearsed in anticipation of being seen. As Erdag Göknar notes, "Pamuk replaces external colonial domination with an internalized theatre of mimicry, where the self is always already staged for an imagined witness" (Orhan Pamuk and the Good Word 71). The self is no longer a private possession but a public script, constantly revised in response to the Other's gaze.

This performativity culminates in the novel's famously unresolved ending, which refuses to disclose whether the narrator is Hoja or the slave. The ambiguity is not a narrative failure but a philosophical assertion: identity in the post-imperial condition is inherently unstable, fractured, and indeterminate. Neither character "wins" the struggle for selfhood; instead, they dissolve into one another, leaving behind a narrator whose authority is perpetually in doubt. As Levent Toker argues, "The indeterminacy of the narrator's identity is Pamuk's indictment of authenticity itself—a rejection of the nationalist fantasy of pure cultural origin" (202). The white castle, the ultimate symbol of their collaborative ambition, remains unbuilt—swallowed by a swamp, "like the awesome corpse of a pirate ship marooned in a storm" (159). Its failure mirrors the impossibility of coherent self-formation in a world where cultural boundaries are porous and identities are borrowed.

This fractured selfhood resonates with Pamuk's broader thematic preoccupations, particularly hüzün—a Turkish concept of melancholic collective memory that permeates his fiction. In Istanbul, Pamuk describes hüzün as "not the sadness of the individual but of an entire city and its people," born of historical decline and cultural dislocation (Istanbul 99). In The White Castle, this melancholy manifests as the psychological residue of imperial collapse: both Hoja and the slave are haunted by what they have lost, what they cannot grasp, and what they can never fully become. Their shared hüzün is not personal but civilizational—a mourning for a world in which identity could still be anchored in stable tradition. Yet Pamuk refuses nostalgia. The burden of cultural memory does not offer redemption; it only deepens the fracture.

Thus, the unstable Ottoman self in The White Castle is not an anomaly but a paradigm: a figure of perpetual displacement whose identity is constituted through ambivalence, mimicry, and the unresolved tension between East and West. In this liminal space, the self is never whole—only haunted, performed, and always in the process of becoming someone else.

Conclusion

Orhan Pamuk's The White Castle transcends the boundaries of psychological fiction to emerge as a profound postcolonial meditation on the instability of cultural and social identity in contested imperial spaces. Through the uncanny doppelgänger relationship between Hoja and his Venetian slave, Pamuk dismantles the myth of the coherent, autonomous self, revealing identity instead as a site of perpetual negotiation, mimicry, and mutual projection. Far from presenting a tale of individual pathology, the novel dramatizes the "fractured self" as a historical and epistemological condition—one produced by the liminal position of the late Ottoman Empire between competing knowledge systems, civilizational discourses, and asymmetrical cultural exchanges. As this article has demonstrated, the protagonists' mutual surveillance, epistemic rivalry, and unresolved

interchange reflect not personal eccentricity but the broader post-Ottoman predicament: an identity formed not through authenticity but through ambivalence.

Central to Pamuk's critique is his strategic deployment of narrative ambiguity and duality. The novel's refusal to disclose the narrator's true identity in its closing pages is not a narrative evasion but a deliberate philosophical gesture—one that collapses the rigid binaries of East and West, colonizer and colonized, self and Other. By rendering these categories indeterminate, Pamuk challenges the Orientalist logic that reifies civilizational difference, offering in its place a vision of identity as dialogic, performative, and fundamentally hybrid. This aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space," where cultural meaning is produced through translation and interruption rather than fixed origin (Bhabha 36–39). In The White Castle, such a space is embodied in the protagonists' shared study—a liminal zone where Ottoman cosmology and European rationalism collide, intermingle, and ultimately destabilize one another.

The "fractured self" that emerges from this encounter is thus not a symptom of personal crisis but a structural feature of post-imperial subjectivity. It signifies the impossibility of epistemic or cultural purity in a world marked by asymmetrical contact and historical entanglement. This insight resonates powerfully in contemporary debates about cultural hybridity, globalization, and the decolonization of knowledge. In an academic and political climate increasingly marked by identity essentialism—whether in the form of civilizational rhetoric, nationalist historiography, or reductive cultural binaries—Pamuk's vision offers a compelling counter-narrative. His work insists that identity is not inherited but enacted; not stable but relational; not singular but plural.

Ultimately, The White Castle endures not as a period piece but as a timely intervention. At a moment when resurgent nationalisms seek to police cultural boundaries and enforce ideological purity, Pamuk's narrative of fluid, contested, and perpetually incomplete identity remains urgently relevant. His novel reminds us that in the interstices of empire—and in the mirrors of our doppelgängers—lies the possibility of a more honest, humble, and humane understanding of who we are, and who we might yet become.

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