



The White Castle

Orhan Pamuk , Victoria Rowe Holbrook (Translator)

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From a Turkish writer who has been compared with Borges, Nabokov, and DeLillo comes a dazzling novel that is at once a captivating work of historical fiction and a sinuous treatise on the enigma of identity and the relations between East and West.

In the 17th century, a young Italian scholar sailing from Venice to Naples is taken prisoner and delivered to Constantinople. There he falls into the custody of a scholar known as Hoja--"master"--a man who is his exact double. In the years that follow, the slave instructs his master in Western science and technology, from medicine to pyrotechnics. But Hoja wants to know more: why he and his captive are the persons they are and whether, given knowledge of each other's most intimate secrets, they could actually exchange identities. Set in a world of magnificent scholarship and terrifying savagery, **The White Castle** is a colorful and intricately patterned triumph of the imagination.

The White Castle Details

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Author : Orhan Pamuk , Victoria Rowe Holbrook (Translator)

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From Reader Review The White Castle for online ebook

Mattia Ravasi says

Video review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po4dQ...>

Featured in my Top 20 Books I Read in 2017

It'll make you feel wonderfully sinister. A dreamy, absorbing novel that's very dense but immensely captivating - on par with the weirdest fiction of Calvino, Borges or Hoffmann.

Jelena says

Well, this was unexpected. And, to be honest, I had no valid argument to expect what I expected, but still... Somehow I thought this would be a plot-based story or a novella focusing on a particular, specific event. Maybe the beginning just slightly reminded me of "Devil's Yard" (I. Andri?).

In the 17th century, after a pirate raid, a young Venetian intellectual is brought to Istanbul as a prisoner and begins living in a Hoca's home shortly after that. The nature of his captivity though is not to be a servant or slave, but a scientific and scholarly exchange between the Hoca and the foreigner from the West. Apart from two or three breakpoints, that is about as much as there is to palpable events. Still, the novel is very dense and rich in substance, even to a point that it reads somewhat dragging and slowly, demanding high focus and attention.

Believing himself surrounded by ignorants and idiots, the Hoca wants to learn about Western discoveries and achievement. He is vain and ill-tempered. The Venetian, the narrator of this story, is arrogant, holier-than-thou, pretentious. And that is quite a coup. Both of the protagonists are highly irritating and unlikable, thus preventing an emotional connection, an alliance between reader and character. The emphasis is on their interaction, their differences and the distance between them, their link as Doppelgänger and their pouring into each other. The motif of the identical twin represents their relation quite poignantly: How valuable and how safe is one's own identity? What is identity at all? What makes you who you are and what would make you give that up? How is it possible you steadily flow into someone else? And when you realise a change occurring in you, do you hang on to what was previously there or do you let yourself glide with the new condition, trade places, become your own alter ego? And what if you can no longer tell yourself and your twin apart, but someone else still can? And maybe the most essential dilemma in this novel: For how long will you be able to distinguish with certainty that your own self is still yours and what your self was to begin with?

This is not the first time that Pamuk tackles the question of identity. The matter of originality and canon in art in "My Name is Red" eventually comes down to identity as well. And the relation between East and West, Orient and Occident, is not a novelty either. But this time there is barely a broader context, the social, political, historical basis is merely a setting. If I was to visualise "The White Castle", I could easily reduce it to a single scene of two people sitting in a dark, candle-lit room with the door and window-shutters closed. This definition, loss, trade and gain of identity is about as personal as it gets. And, interestingly enough, equally unemotional and detached.

??? ????

Paola says

Warning: you have to relax to read this book, just let go and let it take you where it wants.

This is a novel on identity: the plot really does not matter (is this the defining feature of good literature?), the crucial point is how two individuals actually become one, to the point that we no longer know ourselves who is whom.

Is the Italian slave really taking the place of his "hoja" (i.e. master, according to Adam Shatz in the London Review of Books), are they really swapping lives as previously fantasised?

Or is this really a fantasy in itself, of the Turk, the Hoja, so disappointed with his fellow Turks, so disgusted with their intellectual inferiority, with their passiveness, with their lack of imagination, so much craving for the intellectually stimulating life that he can just barely perceive through the bearing, knowledge and stories of his learned slave, that he decides to live this swapped fantasy himself, willing himself to believe that he is no longer the Hoja, but the Italian former slave?

The conclusion I want to believe is the latter - it is the Italian that really flees the siege of the White Castle, and who knows whether he ever reached his native land - and maybe good for him if he did not, what could have come out of such an impossible readjustment? Or maybe, it is Hoja himself who killed him on that fateful night, with such quintessentially unreliable narrator we will never really know.

But I like to think that having finally reached that zenith he had been aspiring too for so many years, accepting the inevitable debacle was too much to bear, and finding comfort in living a dream nobody could take away from him almost unescapable.

A great read.

Reem Ghabbany says

"He did not want to think about how terrible the world would be if men spoke always of themselves, of their own peculiarities if their books and their stories were always about this"

I don't know how to write a review for such a book!

I'm sure it deserves more than 3 stars cause it's a unique and one of a kind story but I haven't enjoyed it that much

The ending was vague as were the characters

sometimes I thought the character Hoja was mentally disturbed and sometimes I thought he was a genius. as for his look alike, the slave who actually the story was about. he was brilliant. sometimes driven by his own emotion but he had something about him that made him superior to Hoja. perhaps it was his honesty. this book left me with mixed emotion.

it's basically about a Turkish Muslim Scholar and his Christian Italian Slave who refuses to convert to Islam. The Master and his Slave look exactly alike!

they spend all of their time together. they develop a weird bond between friendship and brotherhood.

"I loved him, I loved him the way I loved that helpless, wretched ghost of my own self I saw in my dreams, as if choking on the shame, rage, sinfulness, and melancholy of that ghost, as if overcome with shame at the sight of a wild animal dying in pain or enraged by the selfishness of a spoilt son of my own. and perhaps most of all I loved him with the stupid revulsion and stupid joy of knowing my self"

Al Bità says

It is almost impossible to talk about this book without revealing its ending (or at least what one might consider to be its ending). This strange work purports to be a 17th century manuscript found by one Faruk Darvinoglu in 1982. We find that in the manuscript we are about to read, '... some events described in the story bore little resemblance to fact', although the 'truth' of the general knowledge of the period seemed to be accurate (p.2). On page 3 Faruk reveals that a professor he had consulted tells him that 'in the old wooden houses on the back streets of Istanbul there were tens of thousands of manuscripts filled with stories of this kind'. Faruk tells us that the manuscript we are about to read is his own rendition into contemporary Turkish. He then writes: 'Readers seeing the dedication at the beginning may ask if it has a personal significance. I suppose that to see everything as connected with everything else is the addiction of our time. It is because I too have succumbed to this disease that I publish this tale.' The dedication he refers to is: 'For Nilgun Darvinoglu/ a loving sister/(1961—1980)'. One presumes, therefore, that this dedication is by Faruk, not Pamuk (or is it?). In between this dedication and Faruk's Preface is a quotation allegedly from Marcel Proust (with no reference as to where in Proust's work this quotation is to be found) but with the qualification 'from the mistranslation of Y. K. Karaosmanoglu'. All this is in the beginning before the actual story itself... We are obviously in some murky territory here...

The manuscript itself is a rather straightforward telling of a strange tale, told by an unnamed Italian narrator about his capture by Turks, and his adventures in Istanbul where he becomes the servant of/collaborator with one Hoja (a name which apparently means 'master') who is a few years older than him, but who apparently looks exactly like the narrator. The first ten chapters details almost obsessively the relationship between the narrator and his 'double', a kind of love/hate relationship, where gradually the differences between the two men become indistinguishable, until, at the end of chapter ten, when the assault on the Polish Doppio Castle (the White Castle of the Title) fails, and Hoja dons the narrator's clothes and identity and disappears from the story. Hoja becomes the Italian; the Italian becomes Hoja. It is from these ten chapters that all the 'discussion' about self-identity, self/other distinctions, slave/master relationships, and even the relationship between East and West derive from: but I would suggest that these come more from the readers than from the novel itself. By the way, is it just a 'concidence', or merely an example of seeing everything connected to everything else, that the name of the White castle is 'Doppio' (the Italian word for 'double')?

It is really only in the final chapter (Chapter eleven) that one becomes embroiled in the complex literary trap that this novel really is, for it is here that the distinctions between the two men are, I believe, deliberately blurred, so that in the end one is no longer sure who is who. Stories of 'Hoja' as the Italian are referred to; narratives by the Italian, which point out his ignorance of Italian cities are cited; 'Hoja' is referred to as He and Him (with capital letters), and the sultan refers to Him as being the Italian captive while he is talking to the Italian (believing him to be Hoja) — or does he? The narrator, whoever he is, also seems to think his Childhood memories, exchanged with Hoja earlier, are indeed his own. There are numerous puzzling associations and confusions in this final chapter, and they all resonate with the general undermining of the narrative provided in the Preface by 'Faruk'.

A complex example is provided on page 141 of my Faber 2009 paperback edition: The Italian (?) narrator is wishing that he might once more dream of 'my childhood in Edirne' (which is supposed to be Hoja's childhood) '... of the first time I saw Him (Hoja(?)) unbearded at the pasha's door, of the chill down my spine.' Going back to the beginning of Chapter two, we are told that 'The resemblance between myself and the man [Hoja] who entered the [pasha's] room was incredible! It was *me* there...'; then later in the paragraph: 'Then I decided he didn't resemble me all that much, he had a beard;...' So there is no way, really, that we can even say that the overriding images of the similarity of the two men more or less insisted upon

throughout nine chapters is anything more than a delusion of the narrator... or if not, is Hoja bearded or unbearded? Any attempt to unravel the unravellable is bound to frustration. There is no way anyone will be able to find out. The novel resolves itself into a trick which, because of its paradoxical nature, cannot be resolved: so many of the images of the novel remain in the mind, never finding any peaceful resolution. This also means that any arguments about self/other, slave/master and East/West are also not able to be resolved. Whether this is a good thing is not is problematical (precisely because of its internal paradoxes).

The final image of an old man, looking out through a window to his garden, remembering, is perhaps the best image to rest on at the end. It is a sad image, a suggestion that our memories are only what we make of them, of the narratives we tell ourselves — these are what ultimately provide us with meaning, regardless of whether they are true or not.

7jane says

This book starts with a foreword from a (made-up) finder who found the story in an archive - and who gives the book its 'dedication to-'.... I kind of like books that start like this. Anyway, the story seems to be partly fact, partly fiction, a story of 1600s Istanbul where two similar-looking men form a strange friendship. The author is the one half of this, remaining nameless throughout, an Italian who was captured and sold to slavery by pirates, finally owned by Hoca (a title, no real name for him is given, either), an 'insufferable genius' with constantly-changing temper and high opinion of himself; the writer is more like opposite: an observer, calm-tempered, worrier...

A bond forms, firstly in that they learn from each other, not just knowledge, but of their lives, though Hoca keeps the information of the latter more secret. Helping each other, they finally gain the attention and trust of the young sultan (we follow the story from sultan's late childhood on, to youth, to manhood), through stories, interesting books, guessing the future cleverly, and finally by a promise for a great weapon for battle. (view spoiler)

There's many things to think about in this story, many elements. Like the writer, we can wonder about why Hoca is like he is, why he needs the division between himself and 'them', why he fears vulnerability, the reason for his temper? There is the question about identity: the two main characters are similar, and the information-sharing makes the line between them blur. In the end, I feel that the one who (view spoiler) In a way, it feels like the sultan learns some of his mind-games skills from Hoca, as he (view spoiler).

The book has a plot, but I feel it's more of a musing-piece on indentity, on belonging, on 'what is genius?' Hard to pinpoint exactly. Yet I feel it's a book I want to reread, and I feel it was good to start reading the author from here; well worth it.

Mevsim Yenice says

Benim aç?mdan tek kelimeyle “kusursuz” bir okuma deneyimi oldu Beyaz Kale. Orhan Pamuk’a olan hayranl???m bir kat daha arttı?. O kadar derinlikli tarihsel detaylar?n içinde zaman atlamalar? yaparak kurgu yaratma cesareti, kabiliyeti, ba?ar?s?, sonunda ya?anan dönü?üm, hatta öyle bir roman ki bana kal?rsa sonunun da çok önemli olmamas?, sona gelene kadar içsel tüm gerginli?i, çözümlemeyi yol boyunca yapt?rm?? olmas?, ve ve ve benim için en haz verici olan k?sm? “ya?att??? his” inan?lmazd?!

Söze böyle girdikten sonra gelelim içeri?e.

Beyaz Kale birçok farklı şekilde okunabilecek bir roman. İlk akla gelen, Osmanlı dönemine dair bildiğimiz, araştırmamızda bulabileceğimiz bilgileri içinde barındırması olmasa gerekçesiyle “tarihi roman” olurdu. Orhan Pamuk romanın en sonuna uzunca bir not düştü. “Beyaz Kale tarihsel bir roman değil” demiş. Hikaye olarak tarihin içinde konumlanmış, dopdolu, yenilikçi bir roman dememiz daha doğru o halde Beyaz Kale’ye.

Romanın kahramanları, Osmanlıya esir düştü Venedikli bir tüccar ve kendisine fiziksel olarak çok benzemesine karşın karakter olarak tam zıt olan Hoca. Olaylar gelir ve Venedikli tüccar köle olarak Hoca’ya satılır. Ülkede veba salgını baş göstermiştir. Kilimiz veba yenmek için bilimsel araştırmalar yapmaya çalışırken aslında esas bulmaya çalıştıkları şey, “insanın sahiden kim olduğunu”. Yer yer birbirlerinin içine geçmi kadar yakınlaşmış benzermelerine, yer yer de birbirlerinden ölesiye tiksinipl öldürmek isteyecek kadar yabancılaşmalarına tanık oluruz tüm bu tarihsel karmaşanın içinde. Uzaklaşmak yakınlaşmaya, benzemek benzememeye eşdeğer olur, dans eder durur zihnimizde tüm zıtlıklar. Bu ikili arasında geçen psikolojik savaş anlatır tüm roman, arka fonda da 1600’lü yılların ikinci yarısındaki IV. Mehmet padişahındaki Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve savaşın gerçek fiziksel boyutları vardır.

Son söz olarak da, Orhan Pamuk umarım en kısa zamanda bu tadı, hissi verecek, her yönden doyurucu bir romanla okuyucunun karşısına çıkar.

10/10

Gözüm kapalı tavsiye ediyorum!

Yehya Çalî says

If you want To know the differences between a Western mind and an Ottoman mind read this book
Maybe this is the reason of our backwardness in east

Lavinia says

Pamuk’s talent for storytelling is definitely unquestionable. Well, OK, you can disagree, I don’t care. I loved the setting; it was basically the main criteria for choosing the book (I’d probably need to mention the reader-friendly length, as well). I loved the plot (the double / the identical twin, the capacity of exchanging not only identities, but also memories, ideas and beliefs), the framing device, the (unreliable) 1st person narrative, the mind games and the twisted relationship / brutal conflict / love between Hoja and the slave and the cultural confrontation (West VS East).

I definitely loved Luminita Munteanu’s translation. She’s the exclusive translator of Pamuk’s books in Romanian and she’s done an incredibly good job, not only translating, but also offering a huge deal of Ottoman background – for My Name Is Red, at least – and explanatory footnotes. It rarely happens that I really appreciate translations, but when I read a book that sounds so naturally Romanian to me, it’s a good translation, don’t you think? Well, all those words of Turkish origin that we have in Romanian helped a lot, as well. Actually, thank goodness for all the influences Romanian has got over the years – I would never, NEVER read a Russian (or other Slavic language), Hungarian or Turkish book in English if the Romanian version was available. OK, I’m getting weird, let’s move on.

So, apparently, I liked the book; a comparison to My Name Is Red seems inevitable, hence the 3*. I’m not sure if it was the slow pace or something else, but somewhere after the middle I felt Pamuk lost me, the book

was getting nowhere and I was tempted to abandon it. The reader is actually advised to do so, but I think it's just a trick Pamuk uses in order to keep his reader curious, only to leave him with a dilemma at the end. Hmm.

So in order to feed my recent interest in Turkish culture, I think my next Pamuk will be something quite different. Something that focuses on modern Turkey / the conflict between traditional and modern, old VS new etc. And I need some films, as well; I feel Fatih Akin's are not enough.
