



Persian Myth and Miniatures in Orhan Pamuk's Novels *My Name is Red* and *The Red-Haired Woman*

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Abstract

The Nobel laureate and Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk explores the Turkish cultural settings in his literary works by skillfully incorporating the Persian myths. This article attempts to trace myth's existence as a potent storytelling tool that cuts across time and place to examine the varied functions that myth plays in Pamuk's works. It also explores how myth functions as a prism through which characters negotiate the complexity of modernity, confronts existential questions and struggle with their identities in Pamuk's "My Name is Red" and "The Red-Haired Woman". It explores Pamuk's skilful fusion of Western literary allusions with customary Turkish folklore by providing a hub on the meeting point of East and West. It emphasizes Pamuk's adept use of myth to ponder the changing nature of Turkish society and look into the human condition through a close reading of a few chosen passages and thematic patterns. Pamuk's use of myth is both a literary delight and a deep analysis of universal issues that intersect all ages and civilizations. Pamuk's work is not just a plot but also a philosophical idea that is deeply rooted in the cultural records of the characters and their literary predecessors. His protagonists' experiences are a mix of unfastened will and determination that are very similar to the heroes of ancient myths. Pamuk's use of myth allows him to discover the apprehension among these ideas by encouraging the readers to understand what controls their lives. Hence, this article makes a study on the miniatures of Persian myths in Orhan Pamuk's "My Name is Red" and "The Red-Haired Woman"

Keywords: Persian Myth, Orhan Pamuk, *The Red-Haired Woman*, *My Name is Red*.

Introduction

Myth is a cultural treasure of the past and is transformed into the present by becoming concrete forms of motifs in a range of human pursuits and goals. Orhan Pamuk is one of the notable writers who used myths as the source of his works. Several myths from Persian mythology are used in the novels *My Name is Red* and *The Red-Haired Woman*. They establish their cultural and ideological lives through the characters that are mirrored in their actions. Through unconscious memories, mythology directs the people in everyday chores. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines myth as "A story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people; something that many people believe but that does not exist or is false" (Wehmeier ed. 842). *Webster's Universal Dictionary* tells about myth as "word, speech, tale, legend, etymology. Generally an imaginary fictitious person, event or thing" (Wyld, Eric and Patridge eds. 920). M.H.Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* makes a distinction between the classical and modern conception of the term myth:



In classical Greek, “mythos” signified any story or plot whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology – a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions of the rules by which people conduct their lives. (Abrams vol. 122)

Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* explores the themes of fate, future and mythological stories by merging these elements into a narrative story. Many critics have frequently connected Pamuk's works to a broader philosophical research into the dualities of will and fate. They also highlight how historical myths have an impact on the human expertise of destiny in his plays. In *The Red-Haired Woman*, Pamuk draws his source from the Persian epic *Shahnameh* to explore the tale of Rostam and Sohrab. This represents a battle between a father and son who unknowingly combat each other and ends with tragic irony. Several scholars have pointed out Pamuk's use of mythology as a manner to look at modern-day life. In *My Name is Red*, Pamuk explores the war between East and West and the way of life and modernity through the view of Persian literature. It symbolizes the tension between illustration and abstraction. In *The Red-Haired Woman*, mythological themes are posed with the questions of identity, love and the inevitability of fate. Pamuk interrogates how these myths convey our perceptions of truth through a set of stories which people apprehend their lives. *The Red-Haired Woman* represents the archetype of the Fatal Female whose presence alters the lives of those around her. This literary depiction of the lady disrupts the path of the hero and leads the hero to tragic effects. Pamuk aligns her with mythological heroines like Tahmina from *Shahnameh* who via her love for Rostam shapes the fate of their son Sohrab.

Review of Literature

Kirca's article offers a reading of Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* as a reimagination wherein visual representation turns into the focus of the novelist's exploration of 16th-century miniature art and Renaissance. The primary mode of expression within the novel is manifested via the inclusion of characters drawn from Ottoman and Persian stories that present private reflections on specific illustrations and have a strong connection between art and reality. The novel style is portrayed as being towards representing reality and at the same time, Islamic miniatures aim to bring the absolute to depict the character. Pamuk's text metaphorically reworks the East-West dichotomy by encouraging an evaluation of the binary opposition between those two visible artwork forms and their different approaches to representing present-day facts. The novel reinterprets the dynamics between the “self-picture” which shapes home and country-wide identification, and the “hetero-image” which characterizes the so-referred terms connected to the Europeans.

Feride argues that Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is the centre of discussion not only in Turkey but had an impact in the international arena. It story ponders into the scenes of sixteenth-century Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The novel is rooted in modern-day problems. It explores the culture of Ottoman works and additionally engages with Western practices. *My Name is Red* is a detective and love story beginning with a murder and unravelling the thriller in a manner that is normal to the genre. This novel is set apart because of the significant position played between creative traditions like Western and Islamic and the interaction between “word and image”. In both the love story and the decision of the mystery is the primary motif. The tradition of miniature portrayals regularly observed and illustrated narrative texts that served to legitimize itself. Unlike Western art, Islamic illumination



emphasizes the internal by portraying an "inward" motion in the direction of personal fact in preference to reveal the identity.

Esra Almas says that The idea of a "masterpiece" isn't merely a value ascribed to *My Name is Red.*, However, the novel has an intrinsic detail of the radical thoughts in itself. It was set in Istanbul in the course of the 1590s. The narrative is centred upon homicide and romance-centered scenes. This novel intends to portray the sultan's dominance over both the Eastern and Western worlds and requires it to be written within the European style by reflecting the fusion of artistic and cultural impacts.

Elham Mohammadi Achachelooei examines Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* (2017) through Puleo's ecofeminist perspective. It focuses on the character of Gülcihan and portrays her as a cultural parent who transcends the traditional way of life. Gülcihan's role is depicted as fostering of nice interaction with the male-dominated world by symbolizing the capacity for lifestyle. The novel explores Turkey's modernization by juxtaposing the antique and new, the use of mythological references to Oedipus Rex and Rostam and Sohrab to spotlight subject matters of patricide. These references replicate the cultural tension between Eastern and Western factors of Turkish identity. While many interpretations view those references as pessimistic representations of the erosion of ancient Turkey and its culture, this paper argues that *The Red-Haired Woman* gives an alternative perspective.

Ersöz says that Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* explores the narratives of King Oedipus and Rostam and Sohrab within the cloth of the textual content by connecting them to the protagonist's views. This method also highlights the inescapability of fate as myths appear in truth. Pamuk's narrative method allows coincidence to take on big that means, echoing beyond occasions. The theories of Carl Gustav Jung such as collective unconscious and archetypes offer insight into how Pamuk's characters are inspired using human life stories. He asserts that the collective subconscious, characterized by way of its primitive and conventional nature, emerges in desires and myths, subtly shaping the human mind and behaviours. Cem Çelik, the protagonist of *The Red-Haired Woman*, exemplifies this holistic effect by specifically concerning the father-son dynamics. Therefore, this paper seeks to make clear Pamuk's incorporation of myths and the issues of patricide and filicide in *The Red-Haired Woman* through a Jungian perspective.

Theoretical Framework

To know the role of fate in *The Red-Haired Woman* and *My Name is Red*, it is important to approach in mythological viewpoint. This theoretical method will give a chance to view the narrative as a contemporary retelling of historical myths in which the characters' actions are influenced by way of archetypal forces. The theories of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell argue that mythological archetypes shape the collective subconscious and mirror the common human experiences. In such a way, this framework can display how Pamuk uses archetypes to explore essential questions about human life.

In Jungian terms, the red-haired female represents the anima. It is an archetypal female figure that shapes the internal psychic level of the male protagonist. Her mysterious charm and tragic fate symbolize a war of words with the unknown. This is usually found in lots of mythological narratives. Similarly, the story of Rostam and Sohrab acts as a structural metaphor for the novel's exploration of the future and the intergenerational transmission of identity. The father-son conflict in *Shahnameh* symbolizes the fate that comes upon predetermined means of each lineage and the Gods mirroring the fateful encounters in Pamuk's novel.

Structuralism gives another dimension to understanding the unconventional



engagement of fantasy. Claude Lévi-Strauss's evaluation of delusion posits that myths feature as a type of cultural language, embodying fundamental binary oppositions that include destiny as opposed to free will, love vs betrayal and existence vs demise. Pamuk's narrative exploits those structures by contrasting characters' selections with their inevitable fates. The interaction between myth and truth in *The Red-Haired Woman* highlights the ways people's lives are formed by the cultural narratives they inherit from their culture even while they try to assert their traits.

Postmodern intertextuality allows Pamuk's novels as a mix of ancient, cultural and fictional narratives. Pamuk hazes the boundaries between the ancient fable and the novel's truth and makes the readers impeach the nature of truth and storytelling. By referencing *Shahnameh* and integrating elements of Persian miniatures, Pamuk engages in communication with the beyond by exploring how mythological subject matters resonate with revolutionary issues of identity and destiny. It also reflects the complexity of Turkish cultural identity.

Feminist literary criticism portrays the pink-haired woman as a female victim. Even though she embodies a conventional trope often seen in male-centred narratives; Pamuk complicates this archetype by giving her a clean archetypal shape. Her choice to become a redhead signifies a conscious preference to form her identification in place of simply being a passive parent of fate. This perspective shows the reconsideration of the ways that women's roles in the literature replicate broader societal anxieties about women's independence and power.

In *The Red-Haired Woman* and *My Name is Red*, Pamuk skillfully interweaves historical Persian fantasy and modern-day Turkish life by developing a narrative that examines the tension between fate and will. By using mythological and structuralism frameworks, readers can discover the depth of Pamuk's engagement with questions of the future, identity and the captivating narrative style. This framework will help to understand the role of myth and its influence in the chosen works of Orhan Pamuk.

Outline of the Novels

Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is a historical novel set in 16th-century Istanbul during the Ottoman Empire. It revolves around the world of myths illustrating a secret book commissioned by the Sultan. The novel explores themes of art, identity, religion and individualism within the context of Islamic and Western artistic traditions. The story begins with the murder of Elegant Effendi, one of the Sultan's men, whose body is thrown into a well. The novel shifts perspectives between different characters, including the murdered miniaturist, other artists, and even inanimate objects like a coin. The central characters include Black, an artist who has returned to Istanbul after years of exile and his love. Shekure is caught between her devotion to her missing husband and her desire to move forward with her life. The novel's narrative is complex and is an alternation between a murder mystery and philosophical discussions about the role of art in representing the world. A key conflict is between Eastern miniature painting which values tradition, anonymity and the depiction of the world from God's perspective and Western art which emphasizes individualism, perspective and realism. As the characters try to solve the murder, they also grapple with the implications of cultural tensions between tradition and modernity. Pamuk ties together love betrayal, artistic rivalry and philosophical reflection by presenting a rich narrative that questions the nature of art, culture and individual identity in a fast-changing world.

Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* is a novel set in Turkey blending elements of myth, family drama and politics. The story is told from the perspective of Cem Çelik, a



young man who becomes fascinated by a red-haired actress during his formative years. Cem's relationship with the red-haired woman is brief but deeply impacts his life. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part is set in the 1980s. Young Cem works as an apprentice to Master Mahmut, a traditional well-digger. While digging a well outside Istanbul, Cem becomes obsessed with the idea of fatherhood. He becomes close to Mahmut who serves as a surrogate father figure to him. Cem's encounter with the red-haired woman, an actress in a travelling theatre company leads to an impulsive romantic affair. This affair culminates in a tragic accident when Cem accidentally causes Mahmut's death and leads him to flee from his guilt. The second part of the novel follows Cem as he grows older becomes a successful businessman and marries. However, he remains haunted by the memory of Mahmut and the red-haired woman. He becomes fascinated by ancient myths, particularly the stories of Oedipus and Rostam and Sohrab, which portray the themes of patricide. These myths serve as allegories for Cem's unanswered feelings about fatherhood and responsibility. In the final part of the novel, Cem's past catches up with him when he learns the truth about the red-haired woman and the long-lasting consequences of his actions. The novel concludes with a shocking revelation by blending myth with contemporary reality and the questions of fate, guilt and the complex relationship between father and son. In *The Red-Haired Woman*, Pamuk uses mythological references to explore deeper themes of identity, tradition and modernity and creates a novel that engages with Turkey's cultural heritage and addresses universal human emotions and conflicts.

Myth and Miniatures in Orhan Pamuk's Novels

The Red-Haired Woman revolves around the idea of fate and its unwavering control over the lives of its characters. By comparing the events of the protagonists with old tales, Pamuk investigates the idea of fate through the prism of myth. The redhead personifies the concept of the femme fatale, a character frequently seen in legendary stories. Her enigmatic demeanour and enigmatic appeal highlight the idea that fate is an unavoidable force that moulds the lives of people it comes into contact with. The most significant themes of Persian miniatures that are frequently referred to in the novel are the stories of Rustem and Sohrab.

Pamuk brings in the love story of Rostam and Sohrab where the heroine is intelligent and beautiful. Pamuk refers to the love between handsome Rostam and beautiful Tahmina who wants to bear the clever and famous hero's child. "It was Tahmina, daughter of the shah of Turan; she'd spotted the handsome Rostam at the feast and had now come to declare her love" (Pamuk RHW 139). Tahmina is Shah's daughter who is tall and slender. She has shapely eyebrows, delicate lips, and luscious hair. Rostam is attracted by her intelligence, sensitivity, and her charming beauty. They both make love and the next day morning, Rostam leaves a bracelet for the unborn child because he knows they have conceived and he returns to his own country. Tahmina names her son as Sohrab. The son loves his father and wants to help his father put him back in his place by deposing the cruel Shah Kay-Kavus but destiny changes his plan.

Throughout *My Name is Red*, Pamuk incorporates various mythological motifs that resonate with cultural and historical significance. The character of the miniaturist, for example, embodies the archetype of the artist as a conduit between the mundane world and the realm of the gods. His quest for artistic perfection mirrors the hero's journey found in mythological narratives, as he grapples with questions of identity, creativity, and the nature of beauty. *The Red-Haired Woman* features as one of its primary topics the blurry division between myth and truth. Pamuk urges readers to consider the nature of reality and the influence of narrative on how one perceives the world. The narrative style of the novel, which



weaves across several levels of illusion and truth, is a reflection of the intricate web of myth and history that makes up Turkish culture. Pamuk encourages the readers to consider how myth enters our lives and changes our ideas of reality by blurring the gaps between fact and fiction.

Shahnameh, or the *Book of Kings*, is an epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi in the 10th century. It recounts the mythical and historical past of Iran, celebrating the heroic deeds of legendary figures such as Rostam and Sohrab. The influence of *Shahnameh* is palpable throughout *The Red-Haired Woman*, as Pamuk draws upon its themes of heroism, fate and the struggle between good and evil. The character of the red-haired woman herself embodies the archetype of the tragic heroine, echoing the spirit of *Shahnameh*'s legendary female figures.

Both *Shahnameh* and *The Red-Haired Woman* are about the themes of fate and destiny. In *Shahnameh*, the concept of fate looms large as characters grapple with their predetermined roles in the cosmic order. Similarly, in *The Red-Haired Woman*, the characters are swept up in the currents of fate, their lives shaped by forces beyond their control. Pamuk explores the tension between fate and free will, inviting readers to contemplate the mysteries of human existence and the inexorable march of destiny.

In the novel *The Red-Haired Woman* Pamuk describes Ms. Gulcihan, the Red-Haired Woman entirely in part three which is the last part of the novel where she speaks to the readers and explains her Red-Hair. In her theatre group, another woman with red hair appears and everybody comments on the remarkable coincidence of having two redheads among them: "What are the odds and debating whether we were harbingers of good luck or of some other kind, when suddenly the red-haired woman at the far end of the table declared: "I'm natural redhead." She seemed at once apologetic and proud. "Look, I have freckles on my face and on my arms. My skin is fair, and my eyes are green." (Pamuk RHW 223). When everyone expects her response, she responds, "You may have been born a redhead, but I chose to become one. God blessed you with red hair; what was destiny for you was a conscious decision for me" (Pamuk RHW 228).

She doesn't want to say that she is guilty and her hair colour is fake. She asserts herself because she doesn't want others to come to the wrong conclusion about her character and wants to stop them from labelling her as an imposter with unsophisticated aspirations. The Red-Haired Woman says, "For those of us who become redheads later in life, choosing the colour is equivalent to selecting a personality. After becoming a redhead, I spent the rest of my days trying to stay true to my choice" (Pamuk RHW 228). In her mid-twenties, she is active in reviving the open-air folk theatre tradition for modern audiences. Her lover at the time is a handsome militant ten years his senior. After three lasting secret affairs, her lover leaves her. However, she still remembers their sweet love, "Oh, how romantic, how blissful, we'd felt all those hours we'd spent poring over books together!" (Pamuk RHW 228). She is angry with him for leaving her but she cannot blame him. Their affair has been discovered and their comrades don't support and insist that the romance may poison the group. Her old lover Akin goes back home to his wife, his son, and his Pharmacy.

In *My Name is Red*, the Persian miniatures appear to be a key theme, despite the work being variably understood as a murder mystery or as being focused on the battle between East and West. The character Bihzad says, "In Persia and Arabia, in every Muslim book arts workshop where illustrations are made, they've said this about me for hundreds of years: It looks real, just like the work of Bihzad" (Pamuk MNR 450). The term Persian miniatures refers to the painting style that emerged in pre-Islamic Persia, which leaned towards the



stylized and symbolic rather than the realistic, with characters in court appearing to hunt and battle more against elaborate, panoramic backgrounds. “This is the age when master miniaturists attain blindness, or the darkness of Allah, the age when they involuntarily achieve a style, while freeing themselves of all intimations of style” (Pamuk MNR 448). Here Persian mythology serves as the foundation for a large body of lyrical poetry and storytelling.

Conclusion

Orhan Pamuk crafted a story that is both deeply rooted in tradition and remarkably modern by drawing on the rich literary and cultural legacies of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* and Rostam and Sohrab and the Persian miniatures. Love, grief, and the pursuit of meaning are universal themes that Pamuk masterfully combined with Persian mythology and literature to produce a work of art. Readers get pulled into the world of *The Red-Haired Woman*, where the epic poetry of Ferdowsi and his *Shahnameh* reverberates with everlasting resonance and the past and present meet. Both novels depicted the beauty of Persian Mythology and Miniatures in the writings of Orhan Pamuk.

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