

An Interview with Orhan Pamuk

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- Born on 7 June 1952 in [Istanbul](#), Turkey
- Novelist, screenwriter, Professor of Comparative Literature and Writing ([Columbia University](#))
- **Interviewer: Horace Engdahl, the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish academy**
- **Interviewee: Mr Orhan Pamuk, the literary Nobel Laureate of the year 2007.**

Notable works

- *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*
- [*The White Castle*](#)
- [*The Black Book*](#)
- [*The New Life*](#)
- [*My Name is Red*](#)
- [*Snow*](#)
- [*Istanbul: Memories and the City*](#)
- [*The Museum of Innocence*](#)
- [*A Strangeness in My Mind*](#)

- His first book *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*.
- His book *Istanbul* is half an autobiography, half an essay about the town.

In this interview he talks about his experience of research, intertextuality, representation of different voices, experimentation, creative writing and publishing.

- He shares the experience of a non-resident person coming through main cultural centres of western civilisation, (Paris, New York) and then having a sort of an anxiety about his cultural identity. He experienced the immense richness of American libraries and culture. At the age of 32 he began to read old Sufi allegorism, the whole classic texts of Islamic mysticism, most of them are classical Persian texts.

- After the heavy influence of 19th century novel, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Proust and Nabokov and Faulkner, Borges and Calvino opened a way to look at, a secular way of looking at classic Islamic heritage.
- He talks about an influence of *Arabian Nights* or as the Turks call it *One Thousand and One Nights*. This book comes from Indian tradition going through Arabic and Persian influences, and then as a sort of a text, an ocean of stories, which was given a shape and an understanding and elevated to a higher stature by the French and English.

- About the structure of *The Black Book*, he says that he has put together whatever he found interesting about Istanbul, its old book shops, its stories, its mysteries, the chemistry of its streets, and what he has lived and loved. He has tried to see the city as a sort of a place where layers of layers, things and images, history and myth combined, and combine this with experimental post modern European avant gardism, all together with a classical Sufi text.

- He strongly believes that creativity in literature comes from first an understanding that you have to put together two things that have never been put together.
- Dadaist taught us that the art can be putting first an attempt to put together things that never came together, the beginnings of good art or different art is a Dadaist idea.

- We have to see hidden depths or hidden characters in us, but on the other hand believe that we have to search for these dark places deep inside us, rather than thinking flatly that they will not come together, that east and west will not come together, that harmony between peoples or cultures are impossible.

- Montaigne invented the idea of a solitary person who reads books on his own, passes judgement on his own, who believes his idea and his reasoning and then has a deep conviction of brotherhood of humanity.

- Montaigne paved the way for not only the enlightenment and glorification or proliferation of western thoughts but this idea of the solitary person who at the back of his room reads, writes and produces something that had never been thought before entirely, that is the beginnings of perhaps the uniqueness, and the consequence of these thoughts are style, style in literature.

- Pamuk's idea of a writer is not a person, a social person, a person who expresses himself in society or in a community but a person who leaves the community, the society, the group, the tribe, the nation or that he or she belongs. He goes to a room and writes there. There he explores perhaps first the inner depths of his soul but then comes out with something new which will address to all humanity.

- It's very interesting to understand the other.
- It is a great invention, which is the beginnings of the art of the novel. What makes the art of the novel continue with all its glory is that it is about compassion, understanding others, people who are not like us, it is about the human beings' desire to put itself, himself, herself in the place of the other that's strange. We read novels thinking that here is a representation of an other, say a man is writing about a woman.