Introduction

Orhan Pamuk's novel <u>My Name is Red</u> is set in the late 16th century in Istanbul, Turkey.   With its fantastically intricate plot and use of multiple narrators in each chapter, it takes the form of a postmodern detective novel.   The experience of reading this novel is literally like that of piecing together a jigsaw puzzle.   The reader is lured into different threads of the story by the various voices, which seem to be speaking directly to him or her; he/she will be trying to make sense of the logic that motivates each voice, on the way toward uncovering the ultimate truth lying behind the several layers of this vast Chinese box of a text.

Pamuk's multiple-narrator design is then a very important feature of his novel. While the encompassing plot maintains a certain degree of consistency and focus throughout, each narrator can speak in different "tones" in different chapters, and each has his or her own very vivid, even peculiar personality.   This is because each has a fairly limited knowledge of the "whole" as well as a particular social rank.   One way to look at this multiplicity of narrative voices would be in terms of M. M. Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, which for him is an essential and definitive characteristic of a "novel": "Diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system.   This constitutes the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre" (300).

To read <u>My Name is Red</u>, with its idiosyncratic first-person narrative in each chapter, as exemplifying heteroglossia thus implies, in Bakhtin's view, both diversity and unifying structure.   Each of the novel's narrators/characters is allowed to "speak," and yet all of them are in some sense projections of the author, or "fragmentations" of the authorial voice.   Bakhtin also says that "consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it, it

chooses, in other words, a 'language'" (295), yet once again this idea that consciousness, and the language it "chooses," occupies "a position for itself *within*" heteroglossia can be taken in two different ways. It can refer to the individual consciousness and language of each separate voice, but it can also point to the possibility that, while the multitude of narrative voices may seem to "disperse" any single, central authorial voice as the fragments or projections of that voice, nonetheless the many are still a one, there is still one central consciousness and thus one central language.

Of course, the latter notion can also be taken two ways, which brings us back to the initial ambiguity: Is this central consciousness/language "behind" all the others or in some other way "prior to" them, or is it rather simply the invisible, all-pervasive unity of all those separate languages/consciousnesses? Bakhtin's following passage can be read both ways:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types[*raznorečie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speech of the narrator, inserted genres, the speeches of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorečie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (Bakhtin 263)

The separation, dispersion or diversity of voices is clear enough here, and yet even if "authorial speech" and "the speech of the narrator" are brought in alongside "inserted genres" and "the speeches of characters," we still have a single "novel" (written in

fact by a single author) that "orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it."   Again the inevitable ambivalence: it can only "orchestrate" into a harmonious unity the diversity of voices because there *is* this diversity of voices (sounds, noises) to be orchestrated.

However, the extremely unexpected, discordant way in which Panuk's author (his authorial voice) can *intrude* at various random points—that is, can interrupt the voices of "other" voices (those of narrators and characters)—suggests a move beyond the limits of Bakhtinian theory into a much more contemporary or more "radical" postmodernism.   Pamuk goes to the extreme with this technique: the author himself, using his own first name, Orhan, appears explicitly and thus plays a crucial role in the novel.   The highly creative Pamuk also takes very postmodern "liberties" with his multitude of narrative voices: supernatural figures, animals, inanimate objects, even colors—the color red, Satan, a tree, a gold coin, a horse—have their own voices, so that in effect the "unspeakable" is allowed to "speak."   It is also difficult for the reader to maintain a fixed "distance" from the text and its multiple first-person speakers.   These speakers-narrators-characters may sometimes appear to the reader as very honest and sincere, inviting the reader right into his or her mind; yet at another time the same first-person speaker-narrator-character may also be perceived as obviously deceitful, as clearly concealing something from the reader.   This is largely a function of the different tone adopted by the speaker, for the tone may range from sincere to teasing and unreliable.

Thus Brenda K. Marshall claims that "The question 'who is speaking' is a consistent postmodern refrain, often meaning, 'from what position of power or authority, as producers (or interpreters) of texts, do we speak?" (152)   Yet this uncertainty of the power-hierarchy or "authorial" hierarchy (rank order of "authors"

or "authorities") ties back to the Bakhtinian heteroglossia, the sheer multiplicity of socio-cultural voices in the novel.   For these conflicting voices of the various narrators and characters also serve to emphasize the novelistic *theme* of socio-cultural conflict.   Above all we have, in this novel set in Istanbul (the crossroads of Europe-Asia), the theme of traditional East versus modernizing West.   Thus on the one hand the pure horizontal multiplicity of equally-weighted voices fits the theme of cultural conflict which runs through the whole novel.   On the other hand the vertical power-hierarchies of voices suggests a different dynamic, one which perhaps promises the possibility of some ultimate truth back "behind" or up "above," which could be either East or West or perhaps some other term.

Therefore, as postmodern puzzle and game, the novel constantly challenges its readers, testing the limits of their rational minds and provoking in them a series of unsettling confusions.   The confusion in fact begins with the novel's title, since we never actually know for sure what it means.   That is, *whose* name is Red, and what does the name mean?   John Updike admits:

> I was unable to detect what the title referred to.   Murat III, my independent researches discovered, had "a long red beard," but the most likely source within the novel is the coffee house monologue supposedly delivered by the color crimson, a large pot of which is used to commit the second murder.   The color of blood, it boasts, "As I bring my color to the page, it's as if I command the world to be!   Yes, those who cannot see deny it, but the truth is I can be found everywhere."   The world's name, in other words, is Red." (95)

Actually, there are only a few clues in this novel as to the meaning of the color red. For one thing there is the pot which Updike just mentioned, a "three-hundred-year-old

Mongol ink pot . . . It's for red" (<u>MNR</u> 164).[1] This is used by the murderer to commit the second murder, namely the killing of Enishte, a representative figure who ardently endorses the westernization of traditional Turkish painting. And while Enishte is being murdered he says, "I could see no one color and realized that all colors had become red. What I thought was my blood was red ink; what I thought was ink on his hands was my flowing blood" (<u>MNR</u> 173). After Enishte's death he becomes an ascending spirit and announces that "within a short period, red imbued all, the beauty of this color red suffused me and the whole universe" (<u>MNR</u> 230). Indeed, while we are not sure what red actually *means* (though blood and ink are two of its senses), the ubiquity of this color is repeatedly mentioned in the novel. And when red is granted a voice it proudly announces, "Verily and Truly, I've been everywhere and am everywhere" (<u>MNR</u> 185). Of course, one reason the theme of redness pervades the novel is no doubt that redness symbolizes violence. The murder says ironically:

> A city's intellect ought to be measured not by its scholars, libraries,
> miniaturists, calligraphers and schools, but by the number of crimes
> insidiously committed on its dark streets over thousands of years. By
> this logic, Istanbul is the world's most intelligent city. (<u>MNR</u> 101)

Combining the symbolic "violence" of the color red carries and with this color's self-proclaimed ubiquity in the text, we have the idea that the novel's color is truly red because it is a murder mystery, a novel of mysterious violence. Also, in the first chapter, "I am a Corpse" (<u>MNR</u> 3), a dead gilder named Elegant says, "My death conceals an appalling conspiracy against our religion, our traditions and the way we see the world" (<u>MNR</u> 5). This final statement of a dead man arouses readers' curiosity at the outset, as if foreshadowing an astonishing truth that is waiting to be

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[1] <u>MNR</u> stands for the full title of the novel, <u>My Name is Red</u>, in this thesis.

uncovered.   And Elegant's words also reveal that his murder is connected to the threat from "outside" (we assume from the West) faced by the Islamic religion, traditional culture and lifestyle, and also reveal the theme of the whole novel.   Thus the pervasive redness of violence is directly tied to the pervasive theme of cultural conflict, traditional East against modern West, briefly mentioned above.   In a sense it is *this* conflict—social, cultural, political, historical—which generated all of the following murders, that is, all of the novel's violence, its redness.

Pamuk's masterpiece deals with the collision between East and West on several levels, thus bringing into play numerous binary oppositions that tie back to this East-West opposition.   In addition to the central conflict which is based on opposed views of style and technique in painting (red ink again, and also blood), the author also discusses differences in the Eastern and Western lifestyles: different attitudes toward the habit of coffee-drinking, for instance, and different ways of treating dogs. All of the novel's conflicts, all of its voices, the novelistic "state" of heteroglossia and of conflict can be seen as embodying and perhaps intensifying the conflicted, confused, paradoxical "state" of Turkey at the time where the story takes place (the 16th century).   We then could see the pervasive "redness" as the dilemma of a specific (complex) culture at a specific (complex) point in history—that is, as a cultural dilemma, one in which every single character in this story is caught, by which he/she is perplexed, within which he/she is struggling.

However, it would be more precise to call this dilemma which traps every character in <u>My Name is Red</u> a geographical one, rather than simply a cultural one, since the story is set in Istanbul, a city which embodies the conjunction of two continents and thus one where two major forces of culture and lifestyle collide with one another.   Orhan Pamuk, the author of this novel, in fact often utilizes this local

motif as the fundamental basis of his several books:

> Pamuk portrays an extremely localized creative consciousness.   With
> respect to the contemporary critical and theoretical concerns of Anglo-
> phone scholarship in the humanities, this localization of imagination
> enables a re-evaluation of the understanding of East-West relations . . .
> Similarly, he has celebrated the view from the middle of Bosphorus
> Bridge, the bridge between two continents, noting that it situates the
> viewer neither in Europe nor Asia, yet connects him with both . . .
> Beyaz Kale (1985; The White Castle 1990), which first established
> Pamuk as a writer of international importance, and the subsequent novels
> The Black Book and Benim Adim Kirmizi[2] (1998; My Name is Red
> 2001) all place Istanbul at the center of their fictive worlds; all three, in
> their different ways, also stage aspects of the East-West encounter.
> (Bayrakceken & Randall 191-92)

 And in Wendy Smith's words:

> But it's also true that Pamuk is better known to readers of fiction for a
> series of novels, that while they often explore the tension between
> traditional Islamic values and the Westernizing policies of the modern
> Turkish state, are just as notable for their complex, modernist narrative
> structure and their concern with such existential matters as the nature of
> consciousness. (34)

Being an extremely localized novelist, Orhan Pamuk not only utilizes the East-
West motif but also offers readers a panoramic view of Istanbul.   Indeed, he
successfully renders this real and imagined city, like Joyce (in Dubliners) giving his

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[2] Beyaz Kale and Benim Adim Kirmizi are the original titles in Turkish.

readers a sense of the solidity, the reality of this "local" city.   Indeed, due to his

powerful use of local color, Margaret Atwood once commented that Pamuk is

"narrating his country into being" (4).   In fact, Orhan Pamuk is not only erudite with

regard to his own culture and art, as evidenced by his introduction of traditional

Turkish painting in <u>My Name is Red</u>; he is also highly aware of the inevitable fusion

of the newly-imported European culture and his native culture.   And therefore, by

telling a story of illustration and painting, as the background, Pamuk ultimately tries

to expound and explore the relation between East and West, as well as between

tradition and innovation.   Updike points out how this "murder mystery set in

sixteenth-century Istanbul . . . uses the art of miniature illumination, much as Mann's

'Doctor Faustus' did music, to explore a nation's soul" (92).

On the one hand, then, Pamuk clearly acknowledges his own history; on the

other, he also recognizes the inexorable reality of westernization.   In a sense reading

Pamuk's novel is somewhat like reading a travel novel, because there is always a

contrast and even collision between the local and the alien elements in his novel.

Thus Bakhtin says:

> First and foremost we have at the center of the travel novel's world the
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> author's own real homeland, which serves as organizing center for the
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> point of view, the scale of comparison, the approaches and evaluations
>
> determining how alien countries and cultures are seen and understood.
>
> (103)

This is like Calvino's <u>Invisible Cities</u>.   Readers of Pamuk must always be aware of

time and space, for the viewpoint keeps shifting quickly and this emphasizes the

dissimilarity, the differences between and among different cultures.   However,

readers of <u>My Name is Red</u> will likely come to agree that universal westernization is

finally inevitable.   Esra Akcan argues that, "Ideologies of Eurocentrism imported to Turkey during the process of modernization caused the idea of the 'western' to be perceived as the 'ideal' norm for humanity, its cultural productions as the inescapable 'universal expression'" (42).

One can of course attribute the familiar phenomenon of cultural invasion, the irrevocable westernization of a non-western local culture in Pamuk's <u>My Name is Red</u> to what Marxist and Neo-Marxist scholars would call the hegemony of a Eurocentric (or European-American) ideology, the ideology of what now, at the beginning of the 21st century, is called "globalization."   Thus Pamuk's work may also serve as a warning by reflecting the "brute reality" (Said 1994).   Here of course, with the westernization of Turkey, we also confront the problem of what Edward Said calls "Orientalism": "Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself *vis-à-vis* the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text" (2006).

Again, Pamuk does not merely locate himself within the Orient but also invites his readers, through his many narrator-characters or "personae" who directly address them, into his own imaginative world, a world created by his language.   Therefore reading Pamuk *via* these numerous first-person narrators is somewhat like embarking on an amazing journey into an imagined or imaginary Turkish culture.   Following the logic of each character's narration, penetrating deeply into each character's mind, gradually opens up for the reader a broader picture of the world as a whole, one created by the author.   As D. D. Clark puts it, "Although there is great power, discovery, melancholy, atmosphere and wonderment in reading Pamuk, one is never drawn away from but rather constantly enraptured by this imaginative skills" (4).

And Pamuk, in his own essay, also states:

> Novels are held together by the little pieces of daydreams that help us, from the moment we enter them, forget the tedious world we long to escape. The more we write, the richer these dreams become; and the more we write, the second world inside the basket becomes broader, more detailed, more concrete . . . For novels are new worlds into which we enter happily through reading, or even more by writing. (22)

Surely Pamuk is very skilled at pulling readers directly into his world of words. And his skills can be explicated, at least up to a certain point, in terms of specific postmodern techniques. It is this connection that this thesis will explore. More specifically, since this novel is basically composed of a multitude of voices, it would be appropriate to analyze it in terms of these voices. To analyze the polyphony and dialogic oppositions of these voices it will be useful to turn to Bakhtin. However, in moving to a deeper discussion of the voices of the author's personae, and finally of the voice of the "intruding" author himself, it will be helpful to turn to those postmodern, self-reflexive narrative techniques which to a certain degree extend beyond the scope of Bakhtin.