Decentred Epical Hero in Orhan Pamuk’s ‘A Strangeness in My Mind’

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The decentred epic narratives are persistently dealing with the editing of history, deconstructing the ideas of heroism, glory and nationalism, and reconstructing the so-called "hero." This paper deals with Orhan Pamuk's postmodern epical story, *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2015) within the context of postmodernist literature and explores the novel as a postmodernist epic. The paper argues that *A Strangeness in My Mind*, raising the issues pertaining to fluctuating historical states of modernism(s) and postmodernism(s), can be read and reviewed as a textual parody of premodern and modern epics, and that Pamuk's narrative rewrites/reconstructs the cultural history of modern Istanbul from the perspective of the non-İstanbulite (and non-elite) central character. This paper, therefore, firstly explores how the picaresque narrative of Mevlut debunks the expectations from a conventional heroic epic-story, undermining the "classical" heroic traits and secondly, the paper analyse the way the decentred epical hero is revealed to deconstruct the modern(ist) epic heroes as well.

**Keywords:** postmodern epic, Orhan Pamuk, textual parody, A Strangeness in My Mind, parody, hero

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This paper deals with Orhan Pamuk’s postmodern epical story, *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2015) within the context of postmodernist literature. The paper argues that *A Strangeness in My Mind*, raising the issues pertaining to fluctuating historical states of modernism(s) and postmodernism(s), can be read and reviewed as a textual parody of premodern and modern epics, and that Pamuk’s narrative rewrites/reconstructs the cultural history of modern Istanbul from the perspective of the non-Istanbulite (and non-elite) central character, Mevlut, a passer-by, signposting a transparent agency for the postmodern mind of the implied author. Although epic writing is itself, by and large, inextricably linked to history, it either supersedes history emerging as an alternative to history, or it is interwoven into history. In fact, it is difficult to be cognizant of to what extent it is history, pseudo-history or fiction. Yet, the parody of the epic, as observed in various cases, is associated with history and historiography. This feature of the epic, particularly, is concerned with “parodisation,” one step further from sheer ridicule and bitter criticism. Both the epic and parody deals with memory, tracking across, roaming between and exploiting up, thereby blurring the boundaries between seriousness and humour, dignity and folly, tragic and comic, ambition and flaneurism, heroic deeds and cowardice, fact and fantasy, stability and mobility, past and future, and history and rewriting. Since one of the functions of postmodern parody is to conjecture a communal past, as Nünning stresses, postmodern writing provides “a double-coded dialogue between the present and the cultural past” and argues that it can also “serve as a means of highlighting the complex language and inventory of cultural memory” (130). So, it seems hardly possible to unfurl an umbrella that will bring together, unite, and reconcile the essential functions of parody but the decentred epic narratives are persistently dealing with the editing of history, deconstructing the ideas of heroism, glory and nationalism and reconstructing the so-called “hero.” Therefore, a postmodernist storytelling with an epical figure and story besides a historical panorama of Istanbul provide the reader not solely with the plot, content, and narrative technique of the work but also draws on the parody, irony, and deconstruction/reconstruction of conventional understanding of the hero. This paper, therefore, firstly explores how the picaresque narrative of Mevlut debunks the expectations from a conventional heroic epic-story, undermining the “classical” heroic traits. Secondly, the paper analyse the way the decentred epical hero is revealed to deconstruct the modern(ist) epic heroes.

**Mevlut as a Hero and Parody of Hero**

Portrayed in the narrative are “the adventures and dreams of Mevlut Karatas and his friends,” representing a sort of panorama of Istanbul covering 1969-2012, mostly from the perspective of Mevlut, the adventurous *boza* vendor. The initial paragraph exposes the contextual ingredient of the story, igniting the seemingly conventional elements of the epic, picaresque, and the bildungsroman. However, since postmodernism, as Bauman argues, is
associated with “a state of mind” reflecting upon itself, in the case of Pamuk’s hero, the state of mind reveals itself to be a postmodernist consciousness, embodied through boza, bringing together a traditional background, modern popularity and postmodern perspective. The naïve and sentimental mind as represented in Mevlut accords with Bauman’s idea of “pensive mood:”

Postmodernity is all these things and many others. But it is also—perhaps more than anything else—a state of mind. More precisely—a state of those minds who have the habit (or is it a compulsion?) to reflect upon themselves, to search their own contents and report what they found: the state of mind of philosophers, social thinkers, artists—all those people on whom we rely when we are in a pensive mood or just pause for a moment to find out whence we are moving or being moved (vii).

Hence, the story unveils the arrival of historical modernisation, capitalism, and urbanisation in Istanbul and its protracted transformation of human life and experience; yet, Mevlut’s response to these transformations display a postmodern characteristic. He turns out to be an embodiment and co-emergence of the modern and postmodern culture in Turkey. The thematic and structural affinities, moreover, between classical/modern epic and A Strangeness in My Mind disclose Pamuk’s play with the generic aspects as well as social notions and his attempt to rewrite history. In this process, the aspiration for the simultaneous construction of the individual and collective history becomes a postmodernist strategy in the representation of the possible world of the hero. Thus, Mevlut swaying the conventional features of the epical hero aims to play with the idea of victory, through the replacement of heroic conquest with degraded invasion (set in suburb) and fragmented occupation (the business of boza).

A Strangeness in My Mind encompasses individual and national level of struggles, quests, journeys, and missions invoking, with connection to its structure and form, in the minds of the readers a heroic character and an epic story. In his analytic and critical essay “The End of Hero” Maurice Blanchot observes:

It is true, the myth of the hero is not easily erased. There is the space hero, the hero of the stadium, or the hero of comic books. And we are apt to praise some state leader by calling him the most illustrious of history's heroes. The hero is the ambiguous gift literature bestowed on us before becoming conscious of itself (368).

According to this passage, Blanchot affirms that the hero has not disappeared, yet it is transformed and reconstructed within the postmodern context and ambience of society and literature. One of the possible ways of reading the omnipresence of the idea of hero in literature is the obsession of postmodern mind with parodisation and reconstruction. The transformation of epic elements and the application of the characteristics of epic heroes in contemporary literature evince the yearning to discover the purposes of selectivity in the use, usage, and parodisation of these bygone stories.

From Homer’s Achilles to Joyce’s Leopold Bloom, epic stories cannot be delineated without a hero who obviates the plot, theme, and other thematic and formal elements of the work in the presence of grand settings, wide scale events, and national or global related themes. Until recent literary experiments and tendencies, creating such a hero—or creating a hero of such an epic required attributing to the hero characteristics extending the capacities of physical, moral, and mental strength of human beings. Although a hero necessitated perfection in these qualities, the degree of their diffusion displayed variance in relation to
diachronic history; in classical time physical strength and exceptional power accompanied the hero whereas since early modern times intellectual and linguistic capacities have outdistanced the pre-eminence and authority of physical power. As to moral texture, rather than the degree of morality, the essence of morality has undergone modification and variance over time and space. Today, this is taking another turn, and the postmodern world is creating heroes who are moving away from intellectual ambitions as well. Pamuk’s *A Strangeness in My Mind* can be said to be one of the best representative of this type of hero. Apart from contextual elements, some formal and structural conventions of epic are conspicuous in *A Strangeness in My Mind* (such as the beginning in the middle of the story, the episodic narration of the events, and the issues concerning a whole nation); and the parallelism and antithesis between traditional epic hero and Mevlut is where the flavour of epic and its parody is sensed most.

First of all, we should launch the question that what makes Mevlut, the boza vendor, a hero, antihero, or in-betweens? Mevlut has been attributed neither national importance and fame, nor physical strength or a sharp wit. Instead, he is the most insignificant, naïve, inefficient, and whose presence and effect least-felt figure among the characters of the story. Indeed, Mevlut lacks all the so called crucial characteristics which an epic hero is supposed to possess. The significance ascribed to him stems from his inward-oriented yet observing nature. The very beginning of the novel, as stated above, greets the readers with a very short summary of the plot, which will be unfolded completely in the following few pages. In this prologue, Pamuk heralds that this is the “dreams and adventures” of Mevlut Karatas. However, throughout the story, the reader doubts if the situations Mevlut finds himself in can be identified as “dreams and adventures” considering the reader’s schemata of premodern and modern heroes. Although certain events, particularly eloping with the wrong person, can be labelled as unprecedented, Mevlut’s treatment of these events cannot be attributed much adventurous insight. The incongruity between the connotation of the word “adventure” retaining its mythical, national, and heroic sense and Mevlut’s perception of and reaction to them subvert the epic notions and the significance attached to epic in the hierarchy of genres; or broadly speaking it subverts hierarchisation of genres.

Mevlut is a hero who is *glorious* despite, or through, being passive, silent, and isolated, which differs him from both premodern and modern heroes. To recall Blanchot, he says “the hero is solely action and action makes him heroic, but this heroic doing is nothing without being” (369). The core of Blanchot’s tenet is that a hero is made up of being, action, and speech. The backbone of epic is victory, and victory is achieved through action by a hero who has not emerged out of blues, but specified with an origin. Blanchot marks the difference between the master and hero, he reiterates the fact that “Achilles was the hero and Agamemnon was the master”. He contends that what makes the hero superior to, and more memorable, is the speech: “In this sense, and granting that the hero is master, the man who seems to possess speech as a power will be this master's master” (371). Speech has operative function both in premodern and modern epics; in premodern it is the transformative power; in modern epics, speech possesses a revolutionary and reactionary force. As to postmodernism, Ihab Hassan terms it “literature of silence” (*The Dismemberment of Orpheus* 19). The first significant switch from the classical epic hero was undertaken by Milton who, in his infamous *Paradise Lost*, mystified the hero with his portrayal of the antagonists -both Satan and Adam- with heroic characteristics and moral twists, and portrayed them both as heroic and sympathetic characters (even a third character, Christ, can be said to be the hero of the epic). From *Paradise Lost* to contemporary literature, the idea of hero has undergone radical
transformations, and most significantly it lost its seriousness and reality. Accordingly, the actions and their nature are temporised, but putting aside the nature of actions, the role and centrality of hero at the centre of these actions is the crux of the transformation of epic. *A Strangeness in My Mind* is indeed abounding in actions, journeys, and quests but the agent of these actions in most cases is not the hero. The story covers a time span of almost half a century -from 1969 to 2014- during which the dwellers of Istanbul witnessed a lot of upheavals from political battles and coups to earthquakes and assassinations; in addition, Mevlut’s own family and friends confront plenty of actions such as elopements, murders, migrations, and financial crises. One of these important events, an elopement, is experienced by Mevlut himself. Yet, not only it resulted in running away with the wrong girl and submissively marrying her, but also Mevlut played little role in the organisation and execution of the elopement, which resulted in being tricked by his cousin Suleyman. Afterwards, the reader learns that “Mevlut told Ferhat a rather embellished version of the story of how he’d run away with Rayiha. Neither Suleyman nor his van featured in it” (216). Although Suleyman is the intermediator, the planner, and also the schemer of all the arrangement (and also the trick), Mevlut shows no sign of reaction, regression, or revenge. Instead, he fantasizes the event by heroising himself. However, Mevlut’s revisionalisation of the episode seems innocent rather than suggesting impotency. A similar situation occurs when people decide what job he should do after his cart was taken away by the police. He not only acknowledges his dependence on them but also welcomes this situation: “He could sense that Rayiha, Samiha and Ferhat had already decided everything. The truth was that he didn’t even mind” (383). Such examples are profound in the story; and they demonstrate his passivity not only in action but also in language.

Indeed, the strange characteristic of Mevlut, the strangeness in his mind, emerges after a certain moment whereas his childhood and adolescence is respectively typical and mundane: “Mevlut recognized the strange silence he was entering would stay with him for years to come” (8). This “strange silence,” which will constantly accompany him, or which will be silenced when he responds to the city one day while selling boza on the streets, occurs to him once he finds what he was given is *kismet* rather than his *intention*. His indifference and perplexity which is transformed as a ‘strange silence’ is the beginning of the philosophical dilemma of his life, the question of what we encounter and attain in life: our intentions or our kismet. Thus, the adventures of Mevlut rest on his inner life: the inner quest of a response to the city rather than the exterior journeys, accomplishments, failures, and struggles that are economic -due to the urbanisation and loss of the value of street vendors, social –generating because of his oscillating relationship with his cousins and friends, and cultural – arising from the encounter of modernity and traditional life.

Mevlut’s inactivity and silence does not only proceed from his incompetence, and lack of power, he is also free from all sorts of ambition and enthusiasm except selling boza whatever the occasions are. Unlike a hero who fights and rescues his people or nation, Mevlut is often hesitant to take part or even sides in conflicts, fights, and problems which take place in his very close circle and interest his own family and friends. Pamuk presents almost all major events that happened in Istanbul over 40 years, including construction of *gecekondu* houses, earthquakes, elections, family treasons, conflicts with friends. Yet, putting aside his inability and inefficiency, Mevlut barely shows enthusiasm to act upon or react against these events. Mevlut is an observer rather than a homodiegetic character involved in the story he tells. He is portrayed as observing the everyday conflicts, social aspirations of the ordinary
people to hold on life, somewhat lumpen attitudes of the traditional people and their hypocrisy within the urban context. For instance:

He was twenty one years old and he had never slept with a woman. A pretty girl with a headscarf and good morals, the kind he would like for a wife, would never sleep with him before they got married; and he would never want to marry a woman willing to have sex with him before the wedding (Pamuk 152).

This dilemma clearly highlights the effect of modern life on human experience and conflict. Although Mevlut encounters such problems that turn into impasse in the course of the family history, he retains his moral stance. Indeed, his naïve and peaceful state of mind is concerned with his relentless passivity. Instead of invigorating the effect and shock of these reiterating familial clashes, quarrels, and rows, he reconciles these two mutually repelling life styles as he incorporates the intentions of his language and the intentions of his heart.

At such narrative sections, Mevlut appears to be an observer rather than a storytelling agent but particularly his *emic* and *etic* perspective is of consideration in this context. That is, he meets people but not completely becomes part of their life. He is neither a sheer outsider nor a mere insider. As a detached participant of people’s lives, he aimlessly wanders on the streets as a vendor --the act of vending provides a surrogate motive for the travelling hero—and enters the apartments. His neutral status enables him not only to have a temporary touch with the İstanbulite people from various backgrounds but also to join their daily activities such as dinner, chat, gossiping, political debate, rituals, and the like. His exchange of persuasive vendor discourse with both secular and conservative people and his convincing them to buy and drink *boza* show that he transforms the authentic beverage into a means of reconciliation between different worlds: *boza* as a crucial element, brings together the modern and the traditional; the stable and the mobile, and the realm of discourse and intention. Moreover, Mevlut, like the *boza* as such, is associated with the past and the present. Though an ardent vendor of *boza*, Mevlut is not an ambitious persona regardless of how much money he saves. He never gives up vending *boza* at nights, which indicates his love for the streets and the echo of his postmodern mind which relinquishes singularity, and the artificial dichotomies of wrong and right (in the sense of strict morality), religious and secular, holy and unholy. On the streets, he distributes the *boza* to any type of person and he can have conversation with people. Probably, that is why he finds the streets “quieter” (311). The streets enhance Mevlut’s intellectual and imaginative powers by urging him into pondering and reflection foregrounding him as a distinct personality:

At night Mevlut watched the whole world transformed into a mysterious realm of shadows, with the city’s own darkness cloaking the alleyways, and faraway streets rising like rugged cliffs through the gloomy. The cars that chased each other on to were just as strange as those dark backstreets in the night who knew where those black mountains on the side of the TV screen were, why that dog was running, why it was on TV, and why that woman was crying, all by herself (311).

This, in return, the streets of Istanbul help Mevlut reproduce the cultural history of Istanbul cultivating his own perception, observations, and experience with the pronouncements of official history (but privileging the *debris* of residents of the suburb neighbourhoods, so-called *gecekondu* houses and their glory). Thus, the parodic elements, lead to reconstruction of history, in Nünning’s terms, “by conducting a double-coded dialogue between the present and the cultural past” (130).
Mevlut’s serene imperfection and heroic passivity is disclosed in almost all compelling and minor events. Mevlut possesses two specific fears. One is fear of dogs; and the second is the fear of loneliness. The former is a recurrent motif in the narrative, which subverts Mevlut as a hero. Mevlut has a peculiar fear of dogs, which indicates the unheroic trait of Mevlut as an epic hero. Unlike a hero of an epic, he is not bold enough to face the dogs, a sort of mimicry of nature and a caricature of foes. The latter undermines his quality as a hero, who supposedly endures loneliness although he is the spokesman of his people and always standing with them. However, Mevlut turns this image upside down. When his father forbids him visiting his uncle’s house and his friend Ferhat, he tells Ferhat that “He [his father] wants me to fight with you and end up alone and friendless in Istanbul, just like him” (169). Like his fear of dogs, his fear of loneliness and his happiness which is derived from the knowledge that there is a family waiting for him while working on the streets, are frequently referred to and reminded to the reader. After Rayiha dies and his older daughter Fatma marries, his only daughter left with him elopes; unlike expected from him by society, he is not disturbed and concerned about neither his honour nor her education as much as he is disturbed by the fear of being alone:

Mevlut knew though that, the real cause of his anxiety wasn’t the thought of his daughter not finishing high school or going to college but he would soon be completely alone in the house and more generally in the world (500).

Despite the endeavours and craving for not being alone, including keeping on seeing his uncle’s family despite their plots against his own family, forgiving his daughter, and remarrying after Rayiha’s death, he cannot overcome the sense of loneliness, which has been already declared at the beginning of the plot: “There is a strangeness in my mind’ said Mevlut ‘no matter what I do, I feel completely alone in this world” (228). Hence, the hero who is not obliged to anything or anyone turns to be seeking company; Mevlut’s characteristic negates the virility concomitant to the classic epic hero. Silence engulfs Mevlut and leads him to contemplate. His statement presented in the fashion of the free indirect discourse implies his quest outside and journey inside where the boundaries between the hierarchies are blurred: “They would be met by barking dogs every time they crossed a village, only to be plunged once again into a silence so deep that Mevlut wasn’t sure whether the strangeness was in his mind or in the world” (Pamuk 8). It is notable that the strangeness is again connected to silence, yet, the silence Mevlut hears does not refer to void dullness; rather it is a source of reflection and a sort of speculative spatial experience through which he elaborates on life and death. This is a voiceless conversation between the world and Mevlut, who he implies cannot bear loneliness and utter isolation. This demonstrates that fear and silence leads him to cogitate and reflect upon his inner world and the city, enhancing the strangeness in his mind. This also signifies the impact of the external world on Mevlut’s inner world. (The separation of inner and external world here is connected to the significance of the impact of city on Mevlut’s mind rather than a dichotomy of self/individual and other/external world). Yet, the point is that these unheroic characteristics do not debase the heroism of Mevlut, yet they debase the traditional understanding and conventions of heroism.

The challenges and contingents that surround Mevlut would be perceived pathetic if the humorous parodic mood and Mevlut’s eccentric indifference did not colour the overall tone. With this state of mind, Mevlut transcends his weakness and achieves a domestic and individual happiness in the heyday of isolations, fragmentations, and disintegrations; he can be denoted as antiheroic hero, or to adopt from Blanchot, “naturally antinatural” (372).
Mevlut’s heroism is rather in complicity with the satisfied self, self-oriented intrepidity, being stripped of responsibilities and encumbrances generating from social or national strains. In an age of modernity and urbanisation, which coincides the second half of the 20th century and early years of the 21st century in the book, eventuating a competition of constructing buildings and securing stable jobs, abandoning or being forced to abandon being a street vendor and running small businesses— the heroic act is presumably to be able to find reconciliation with the self and the external world. The time span that the narrative covers portrays Istanbul from being a city with a few million population and newly arising gecekondu houses, to over ten million population and skyscrapers in an epoch leaving behind modernity and welcoming postmodernity. Moretti states in his *Modern Epic* that modern epic is “the creation of the new from the past” (41). In the case of *A Strangeness in My Mind*, however, not only “the new” but also “the past” is invented. The temporal setting and the historical developments in the novel, therefore, poses a historical— and invented— anachronism. Even though the novel seemingly represents the familial history of generations with a background of the city, the narrative is not aimed at presenting the documentation of history from past to present nor providing a panorama of the time. Indeed, along with reconstructing the past and the present, Pamuk changes the vantage point, and creates an alternate persona in another setting. Preserving the epic grandeur in a way, Pamuk subverts the accepted norms of heroism through merging the elements of the epic.

**Modern Epic and Mevlut**

Although Pamuk explores the advent and development of modern life in Turkey, particularly in Istanbul, pertaining to the experience it dramatically brought to the lives of individuals and society, and although Pamuk incorporates a realistic, historicist, and romantic tone and narration, *A Strangeness in My Mind* grabs a postmodernist mood, particularly manifested in the characteristics of Mevlut. In this sense, regarding Franco Moretti’s *Modern Epic*, it can be argued that although the novel runs parallel with the works of modernist European epic writers, it also undermines the existing conceptions of modern epic. It is possible to identify the distinguishing elements— not mere distinct features— with reference to the defining properties of the postmodern epic and the representativeness of *A Strangeness in My Mind* of this type.

Revisiting Mevlut’s silence and passivity, here and now, we must remember the modern epics assayed and outlined by Moretti. Moretti contrasts the passivity of modern epic heroes with the pre-modern epic heroes who are adherent to actions. At first glance, Pamuk’s postmodern hero can be analogised to these modern epic heroes with modernity being the setting and passivity of the hero being on the stage. However, a crucial difference is soon discerned; the silence of Mevlut deviates from that of modern heroes who are passive in action yet productive in language and intellectual effort. Silencing the hero had already started in the early forms of pre-postmodern epic parody. One of the exemplar of these is Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of Lock* which is analysed by Tatjana Schaefer as the parody of *Ulysses*. Schaefer states that “Pope omits the force and volume of Ulysses’s great voice entirely. Eustathius suggests that the great voice is generally ‘a virtue.’ Similarly Agamemnon ‘bellowed’ loudly a little earlier” (92). This pronouncement accords in a way with Moretti’s analysis of modern epics. However, Moretti mostly focuses on the estrangement of the hero from action by embracing passivity. The modern epic writers, as Moretti classifies and
investigates, Goethe, Joyce, Melville, Wagner, Pound, Musil, and Eliot, individualized the hero shrinking his mission from national or global journeys and battles into personal adventures, and they narrowed down the scope of events and setting: “It is like a zoom shot: from the world to the nation state to the city to the house” (238). These writers create their own epics and heroes in accordance with, or as reaction to the circumstances brought by modernity and in the tradition of modernism. The representation of the developments related to modernity and postmodernity such as capitalism, urbanisation, and transformation of human experience which took place during the 19th and early 20th century in Europe provides these writers with a context of social semi-transformation, cultural quasi-transition and generic fluctuation. What is more interesting is that all these changes and shifts after modernism and the postmodern turn in Turkish context bring about discordance rather than accordance. Pamuk’s postmodern saga, in that sense, exhibits a conscious attempt of picturing the coexistence of modernity and postmodernity. In this vein, Pamuk has much in common with those who have responded (via reaction/reflection) to the early examples of the epic in Western tradition, and those who have attempted to invent their own epical narrative corresponding to the zeitgeist.

One of the most notable idiosyncrasies of modern epic hero which is issued by Moretti is the individualization of the quest, vocation, and tasks. Yet, it is seen that this individualization should be distinguished from the individualization of the selfhood. The individualisation process which sprang much earlier both in society and literature, with the rise of the novel, has reached its peak during the Enlightenment. Yet, as Scott Lash says “Indeed Enlightenment individualism is more about ‘being-individual’ than becoming-individual at all” (viii). According to his and Beck’s analysis, while being individual belongs to early modernity, becoming individual is rather achieved during the late modernity, or namely modernism (viii). The developments regarding modernisation and urbanisation, on the one hand, contributed to the isolation of the individual, and the scientific developments and industrialisation triggered the isolation of the individual; on the other hand, these same transformations and reforms have made the individual more dependent on the external conditions and turned her into a slave to the system by regarding her as not individual but part of the collective entity and unity. Thus, two ostensibly contrasting processes went hand in hand: being individual and isolated, and being vulnerable and subordinate to the community and system. The inherent and natural power of a hero is not possible to be exposed in a modern epic as it was in the classical epic; rather it is doomed to be confronted by the antagonistic power of social and economic system, which seems to be more acute than the enmity of supernatural powers, relentless armies, and ancient gods. Correspondingly, the individualisation of modern, postmodern too, hero assumes a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the hero is stripped of all national and social tasks and expectations returning to his individual ambitions and aspirations; on the other hand, the emancipation of the hero from the society and economic system of the modern life is not viable, and on the contrary it is increasingly stronger. In modern life, those aspirations and ambitions incarcerate the self rather than liberating it. Pamuk’s hero Mevlut achieves this emancipation to a great extent by freeing himself from ambitions and passions thanks to his state of mind. This is the demarcation where Mevlut is in contravention of the rules, principles and tendencies of

2 And Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Pamuk’s work displays affinity mostly with Marquez’s Hundred Years of Solitude among the epic stories Moretti explores. Both present not only family saga but also they adopt a similar tone and mood.
modern epics. While Mevlut is dependent on his cousins and friends for his financial stability to be able to support his wife and daughters, in his inner world, his struggle is more philosophic and achieves to remain peaceful in any case, which the other characters cannot achieve despite their prosperity.

From premodern hero to postmodern hero, the individualisation takes place in echelon and at variance. Epic hero varies from the nationwide quest and struggle of classic epics to the modern hero who is after his passions and ambitions, and to the postmodern hero who has neither national duties nor individual avidity. Mevlut’s emancipation from the necessities of modern life and economic system is virtually does not take place; however, he achieves, or better to say, he is naturally bestowed with, a “strange” state of mind which reproduces the so-called external reality, not essentially legitimized in postmodernist texts. This conforms to the character’s internal state of serenity resisting any serious act, free of all labour, mission, and most significantly engagement. As Blanchot debates, what construes a hero is serious action which gains meaning when allied with nobility, which is conceived as one of the essentials of “being a hero” mostly associated with a bona fide prowess as well as wisdom. In the Istanbulite postmodernist context, the character retains this nobility as a personal quality to be revealed in the reconstructed city. Mevlut’s inborn integrity on the borders of the disintegrated temporal and spatial setting helps him to dismiss the burdens and impositions. Albeit his serene imperfection and strange mind, he harmonizes tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, the rural and the urban, and most significantly the city and his reflective soul.

Postmodern heroes are simply parodies of both classic and modern epic heroes while modern epic outlines an earnest evolvement with conscious transformations and alterations. As a parody of the classical and modern epic, A Strangeness in My Mind, does not present an active hero, neither acting with physical boldness and prowess nor acting with intellectual dynamism unfolded in imaginative language. Mevlut, as a postmodern hero, is an entire embodiment of silence, inaction and conformity --but is still receptive and responsive. Moreover, unlike the classical or modern epical hero (34), Mevlut, does not appear as a frontier nor as a central figure, rather he represents the marginal, wanderer, sweater, passerby, a little different than the type of the tramp or mere flaneur in that he, for the most part of the novel, remains uninvolved yet an unambitious participant and an indirect and decentred commenter of the external world. While the heroes of modernist writers were displaying safe but ambitious and enthusiastic enjoyment, Mevlut appears as individual but unambitious, involved but isolated, and passive but responsive. Faust with his greed for knowledge and liberty represents the condition of everyman in the rise of scientific and industrial developments; Joyce’s Bloom epitomizes the literary and cultural rebellion against conventions and tradition, which is extant in almost all modernist writers while Pamuk’s Mevlut is any man on the street with regard to his social and economic class whereas he is distinct and unique in his attitude, reaction, and love of void. Pamuk’s characterization of Mevlut is noteworthy; one the one hand, he is a conformist which displays a submissive and easy going personality; on the other hand, he is rebellious and is not captured by the temptations, conditions, and requirements which modernity ordains. Mevlut watches the conflicts and battles outside the events as Moretti says “See the fierce fights heroes waged but from a vantage point that’s safe that of an onlooker” (40). The complex but disguised as simple characteristic of Mevlut is indeed what carries the story ahead while the plot is already revealed in the first pages, and the subheadings of each chapter gives a concise summary of
that chapter. Pamuk, in this way, accomplishes to play with not only the classic and modern epics but also with the authority of the plot. However, rather than the scarcity of adventurous events and their lack of national or global significance, what turns the epic elements into a parody is Mevlut’s extenuation them as well as the overall humourist tone. Nan Ellin argues:

Postmodern culture tends to mask disturbing or disruptive facts of life through irony, humor, and shallow optimistic sound-bytes, as epitomized by Bobby McFerrin’s popular tune which hypnotically repeats “Don’t worry; be happy,” a message rapidly appropriated by the T-shirt industry and emblazoned upon people’s chests. Social theorist Stjepan Mestrovic developed this theme, saying “postmodern audiences are exposed routinely to apocalyptic themes that are camouflaged in ‘fun’ images, so that they are not permitted to feel indignation, outrage, real concern, nor even a desire to act. The threat of the apocalypse is converted into entertainment” (Mestrovic, 3). He concludes, “The postmodernist mixing and borrowing of diverse themes from scattered contexts ensures that no one can ever distinguish fully the sinister from the benign themes. In responding to the popular media, we laugh at the same time that we are filled with horror. Much the same difficulty exists in everyday relationships among persons” (Mestrovic, 4) (137).

Particularly, the humour and optimistic tone in A Strangeness in My Mind with the absence of “indignation, outrage, real concern, nor even a desire to act” in Mevlut’s and several other characters’ case accord with the analysis of Ellin. The tension and complexity that modern and urban life inculcates into people’s life and the paradoxical and melancholic insights are smoothened by irony, humour, and parody. In this respect, Mevlut remains passive and unreactive both in action and in language. Yet, his passivity does not entail an unresponsive character. While he seems to be shaped and controlled by other people and events, his responses to what happens are mostly constructed through his silent yet effective conversation with the city. However, the reader hardly hears the voice of Mevlut while almost all the characters are able to express themselves. The reader can hear them in the first person; they can talk about how they observe the specific events or how they feel about them. Yet, Mevlut’s mind is revealed through free indirect speech.

Hereby, Mevlut’s characterisation as both pursuant to epic hero and also in a way that negates conventional heroic traits is related to postmodern poetics and philosophy of individual, history, and nationalism. The narrative does not present the reader with a character who is engaged in any message or ideological stance. He merges various modes of narration and makes intertextual references to literary movements. The setting is marked with historical modernity, the authorial attitude towards the text is postmodernist; the generic structure is classic (in the sense that it presents an epic); the mood he assumes for storytelling is realistic; the tone he adopts is humorous and parodic. The subtleties interspersed in the storyline which creates sophisticated and manifold levels of meanings and philosophical insights obstruct to reach simple and unambiguous meanings and conclusions. Instead, it creates a postmodern panorama of meanings, possibilities of reading, ambiguity, and intertextuality.

Lastly, the combination of a biographical and a historical text results in a play with historiography. Although the author involves many issues recorded in the so called official history such as elections, coups, 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is noteworthy that he histories the cultural and individual events as well and equates them to the milestones in official history. The opening of the first cinema, the first article of a newspaper columnist, the death of a calligraphy artist are presented with no less emphasis than the so called national and
international events. In *A Strangeness in My Mind*, Pamuk, as in his novel *The Museum of Innocence*, “broadens the world of fiction in a way that it would engulf the reality and transform it” (Cıraklı 210). This postmodern stance has further implications in case of epic parody. Blanchot explains the fact that “[T]he hero makes himself into a superior, quasi-intemporal duration…finding again without difficulty in legend all that he lacked in history” (370). Thus, epic is an alternative to history; what is not experienced or not told by history is narrated by epic which exalts the nation and gives a sense of pride. In this line of thought, the relation of an individual with the serious events rather than their political, national, or global consequences constructs a new history and subverts the official history which is a complication in Turkey with the speculations, mysteries, debates, and the dubiousness. In this sense, epic writing or epic parody culminates in a reconstructing of history. Pamuk’s postmodern epic also narrates what is not told by history: the cultural memory of modern Turkey. However, the parodic elements subvert the exalted and exhilarated tone. Also, ambiguity and the mixture of fact and fiction in the epic run parallel to the postmodern denial of reality and history. Especially, when presented in a parodic mood, epic narration re/constructs history in compliance with the intended function of the text.

To conclude, Pamuk, the historical author, under the framework and structure of epic story-telling, presents a hero whose individual history is concurrent with that of Istanbul, which at the same time reverberates the advent of modernity from the perspective of a postmodern mind. However, the stylistic and formal characteristics of the work are not the only epic conventions to be cited. Pamuk exploits numerous elements of epic narration; yet his hero Mevlut, who is not only liberated from the quests and expectations, but also assigned a naïve and passive characteristic, subverts and parodies the epic genre, epic hero, and modernist criticism of them.

**Selected Bibliography**


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