

# THE NARRATION ON ISTANBUL BY ORHAN PAMUK: THE BLACK BOOK

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## **Abstract**

Orhan Pamuk, who is one of the most well-known storytellers, uses the relationship between a character's feelings and place descriptions about İstanbul. This quite often makes his novels subjects of architectural literary analysis. Pamuk strongly dwells on the city of İstanbul as background in his novels on account of his own life experiences. This paper aims to understand how Orhan Pamuk reflects İstanbul in *The Black Book*. The novel tells the story of the era before the military coup in 1980. Due to the socio-political environment, İstanbul was being transformed. However, as a postmodernist writer, Pamuk has seen previous periods of İstanbul so he reflects on his nostalgic feelings that İstanbul should not have changed. Being constructed as a multidirectional and sophisticated narrative layer, İstanbul is the most powerful theme in the novel while the way Pamuk writes about İstanbul is connected with his feelings and life experiences. Different regions within Nişantaşı, a well-known central district in İstanbul, come together in different stories in the novel. In this respect, Pamuk represents complicated relations through the perception of place. His narrative space descriptions are quite realistic but the missing details make the reader realize the difference between reality and fiction. Moreover, Pamuk paints an image of İstanbul that reflects a chaotic environment in the sub-text of the novel. In conclusion, Orhan Pamuk structured a powerful İstanbul theme, which is constructed through his narrative spaces that refer to existing places.

## **Keywords:**

Narration of urban space, İstanbul, Orhan Pamuk, *The Black Book*, Atmosphere of narrative space

**Word Count:** 4033

## **1. Introduction**

Orhan Pamuk is one of the most talented storytellers to use the relationship between character's feelings and place descriptions in his city, İstanbul. This quite often makes his novels subjects of architectural literary analysis. Pamuk strongly dwells on the city of İstanbul as background in his novels on account of his own life experiences. This paper

aims to understand how Orhan Pamuk reflects Istanbul in *The Black Book* while a literature review will support the themes and ideas. The analysis will also draw on Orhan Pamuk's other novels and books to help strengthen the Istanbul narratives, understand the author's vision, and support the idea that Pamuk generally uses the same narrative places in his novels.

As a designer, researching literature to understand place perception is actually a very constructive method. Thus, narrative spaces in literature will be explained in general here. To understand the relationship between the author and his description, the first part of the paper outlines the narrative spaces appearing in Orhan Pamuk's novels. Then, the story of *The Black Book* will be reviewed to understand what the novel talks about. Narrative spaces from *The Black Book* will be explained in two parts, interior places and exterior places, using the connection with the theme Istanbul. To understand the place that narrations really comment on, the paper will refer to the author and narrative space relationships. In this paper, Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul narratives will be reflected by the guidance of *The Black Book*.

## 2. Narrative Spaces In Literature And Orhan Pamuk's Novels

Literature is a way of understanding a different world that is created with words. To create a world of words, however, the author must build some facts. Time, space and character are the most important elements that turn words into a narrative because these make the narrative more understandable and readable. "Among the many pressing needs of literary theory is a reasoned account of the structure of narrative, the elements of storytelling, their combination and articulation." (Chatman, 1978). Space is a very significant way of promoting characters and time context in literature because narrated space draws the reader's mind into the story. "In the process of reading, readers will complete the 'verbal picture' by imagining the rest" (Bolak, 2000, p. 8). According to Manfred Jahn, literary space is "the spatial environment and the inventory of the objects created in the reader's imagination on the basis of incomplete textual cues" (Jahn, 2000).

In literature, authors generally create a space that is a modified reflection of everyday spaces. In this context, the story of the novel includes the architecture and the urban environment's physical and cultural spatiality; thus, the idea that literary work can be a source of architectural or urban spaces is empowering (Çağlar & Ultav, 2004). Literary narrative spaces can be an inspiration point for architecture due to having a different perception. "Literature indeed allows us to observe and revisit existing places and spaces, but also to conceptualize projected ones" (Grafe, Havik & Maaskat, 2006, p. 6). Besides, literature and architecture are interdisciplinary areas. Klaske Havik referred to an instrument for analyzing and conceptualizing places' experience, which is literary reflections (Havik, 2006). In this regard, there is a strong connection between narrative spaces in literature and architecture. Employing interdisciplinary method of establishing links between architecture and literature is justified by Havik (2006, p. 37) as follows:

"After all, the relationship between humans and their environment, one of architecture's *raison d'être*, is often described with great accuracy and detail in novels and stories. I would argue that literature in fact provides essential information about the way in which space is experienced, about the role of time, about the role of memory and imagination. If existing literature can provide such insights, a literary approach using instruments from literature should also be conceivable within the domain of architectural research".

Orhan Pamuk is a postmodernist novelist, screenwriter, academic and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature who studied architecture for three years but did not finish. Space is the most important thing that he

reflects in his words. His place perception and the way he tells the story are completely connected. In atmosphere in Orhan Pamuk Novels work, Uğurlu asked “What is place?” in Orhan Pamuk’s novels and she decided that “Place can be how everything looks and reflects on each other. A place can be everywhere and everywhere can be a place. Generally his place is uncertain and complicated” (Uğurlu, 2003). Except for the characters of the novels, Pamuk reflects his own feelings and experiences by playing in an imaginary space created by himself. Pamuk usually describes a place that he knows very well while structuring a world that can be understood as imaginary. He turns real space into a narrative by changing the spatial details. In literature, his novels are called multi-layered because he presents overlapping, blurred or mixed images when they need to be repeated. Moran (2006) describes Pamuk’s intention as writing a contemporary novel through the tradition as well as context of Eastern Literature.

The Black Book is full of lives of İstanbul streets, but at the same time a reflection novel that is comprised of stories within stories (Parrinder, 2006). Orhan Pamuk sometimes use the same imaginary places that he created and used in a previous novel. For instance, Nişantaşı is much mentioned in Pamuk’s novels because he has spent his life around Nişantaşı and, despite writing fiction, he reflects his own experiences so places in his novels are usually structured around this area. However, he creates a different Nişantaşı, which seems darker and more blurred. Alaaddin’s Shop, Şehrikalp Apartment, Merih Model Atelier, Rüya’s ex-husband’s house, Celal’s museum house, and the Sultan’s son’s hunting pavilion, the back garden, İstanbul’s underground railways, the New Life Cake Shop, etc. are some of the iconic places that he created. To illustrate, he created a place called Allaaddin’s Shop in Nişantaşı, which he includes in his fiction world instead of Necdet Güler’s stationery shop in the real world. The shop is used to reflect the complications in real world (Uğurlu, 2003). Moreover, in his book İstanbul, Memories and City, he showed how the narrator discovers various other Orhan’s and İstanbul’s (Gürses, 2010). Ultimately, his narrative spaces become multi-layered again. Narrative spaces are the way he creates the novel’s world. That is why narrative spaces are very important Orhan Pamuk’s novels.

### 3. Story Of The Black Book

The Black Book (*Figs. 1 and 2*) is a quest story that takes place in İstanbul, in particular the chaotic environment in Nişantaşı that Pamuk creates. Galip, a lawyer, is left by his wife, Rüya. She is a beautiful woman who is Galip’s cousin and has a brother, Celal. Celal and Rüya are the children of uncle Melih’s two different wives. According to the story, Rüya becomes lost. Then, Galip realizes that Celal, who is a newspaper writer, is lost too. Galip does not explain the truth that they are lost to their extended family, which has moved to different apartments from their family apartment for economic reasons. The novel tells of Galip’s for his wife and Celal in İstanbul. He thinks Rüya has run away to her ex-husband’s flat. After investigating with his friends, he realizes that she is not in her ex-husband’s apartment. He starts to read Celal’s columns and look for hints. During this search, Galip notices some tips and codes in Celal’s articles and starts to be like Celal. Finally, Galip moves into Celal’s apartment, wears his clothes and begins to be Celal. Mysterious people start to call Celal’s phone and Galip talks like Celal. When he searches for his wife and cousin, he always feels like somebody is following him. Nişantaşı seems like a labyrinth. Although there no hopeful word in Rüya’s separation letter, he thinks, his wife will come back. However, he cannot find his wife and Celal before they are killed. While the searching continues, Pamuk provides other characters and places constructed with details that feel nearly real, yet there is a something in the characters and places, which is a blurred and unexplained.



Figure 1 and 2: The Black Book Book Covers (Authors' archive)

Pamuk reveals his postmodern view in the story as the book carries the main characteristics and follows the principles of postmodernist literature (Yaprak, 2012). The book tells a story before the military coup in 1980s. Even mysterious characters about military coup are mentioned in the novel. Due to the environment, Istanbul is being transformed. However, as a postmodernist writer, Pamuk has seen previous periods of Istanbul so he reflects his feelings that Istanbul should not be changed. Finally, according to **Bernt Brendemoen (n. d.)**, there are many nested themes in *The Black Book*.

### 3.1. Narrative Spaces from *The Black Book*

*The Black Book* includes powerful narrations about Istanbul's spaces, with Nişantaşı's various districts brought together in different stories. Pamuk's representation of complicated relations through place perception is known as chronotope, which means vertical space and time relation (Bakhtin, 1981). Although the places and details are similar and realistic, there are some missing connection points between space and time perception in *The Black Book*. Places within the book generally symbolize something about the event or the author. Pamuk also uses spaces to give place cultural or historical ideas that the reader cannot understand generally (Brendemoen, n. d.).

In *The Black Book*, there is an intense connection between the characters and the space. For instance, the main character, Galip, looks at people's faces in Istanbul's streets to try to understand where Rüya and Celal are. Words spoken or written by other characters act like a guide for Galip. He tries to solve the mystery in Celal's newspaper column because he thinks these words will lead to the place where Rüya and Celal are.

In this study, *The Black Book's* narrative spaces are divided into two sections: public and private. These will be described in two sections from the selected spaces in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Mentioned spaces in the novel and their classification

Public Spaces	Private Spaces
Nişantaşı	Heart of the City Apartment
Alaaddin's Shop	Rüya's ex- husband's house
Taksim Square	Celal's museum house
Police Station	Galip and Rüya's House
Master Bedii's Atelier/Mars Mannequin Atelier	Galip's lawyer office
Beyoğlu	Celal's friend Salih's flat
Teşvikiye	Aunt Hale's flat
Bosphorus	Grandparents' flat
The Mosque of the Suleyman the Magnificent	Sultan's son's hunting pavilion

### 3.1.1. Public Spaces

The Black Book's public spaces are located in Istanbul. Some represent real places, such as Nişantaşı, Taksim Square and Beyoğlu, although they are described as multi-layered spaces. Other spaces, like Alaaddin's shop, do not exist in real life. However, through his language, Pamuk uses these concepts to reflect existing places.

*Nişantaşı* is existing real district inhabited by wealthy Istanbulites. Pamuk also lived in Nişantaşı for a long period. In *The Black Book*, Nişantaşı is presented as a chaotic environment on the verge of the military coup where Galip constantly faces closed streets and dead ends. People are murdered as he looks everywhere in vain to find his wife and Cemal. Eventually, he finds them dead in Nişantaşı again. The novel and Galip's search are generally focused around Nişantaşı.

*Alaaddin's shop* is a reflection of Necdet Güler's stationery shop in real life (Uğurlu, 2003). "The shop was situated in what once had been the finest location in the city" (Pamuk, 1997, p.36). The shop is described as a place where everything can be found: cologne bottles, revenue stamps, illustrated matchboxes, nylon stockings, postcards, artists' drawings, sexology annuals, hairpins, prayer books, fish, alcohol, etc. Actually, Alaaddin's Shop reflects the complications of our world. For instance, there are many objects placed on top of each other, which shows the disconnected relations between humans and objects. At the same time, this place tell us about the cultural wealth of Istanbul through the variety of objects, different and complicated goods for sale and their placement. "In the distance was Alâaddin's shop: amid the toys, magazines, balls, yo-yos, colored bottles, and tanks glimmered a light that was just the same shade as Rüya's complexion, and he could just see it reflected on the white pavement outside" (Pamuk, 1997, p. 45).

*Taksim Square* is mentioned as a meeting and transition point in Istanbul. Life's movements are understood from that period's Taksim. "Galip thought he must be one of those men you found in Taksim Square on clear nights who charged you a hundred lira to see the stars through their telescope, but then the man reached into his briefcase and took out an album. He turned the pages himself" (Pamuk, 1997, p. 103). Taksim Square is reflected as a metamorphosing pedestrian site; like a modern country square but placed in a hopeless country (Bolak, 2000).

*The police station* is one of the iconic landmarks in *The Black Book*. It is located in Nişantaşı and connects with the other places spatially. Galip and Rüya are always frightened about the police station. “She was going to drop by at the police station and report him. In fact, they regarded the police station as fearfully as a dark blue ghost. Once, after Celâl had mentioned in a column that the dark spot in our subconscious was the police station, an officer from this police station had served him a subpoena asking him to report to the prosecutor’s office to make a statement” (Pamuk, 1997, p. 31) Pamuk also used the place to make clear the ideal differences of the period. Teşvikiye and Beyoğlu police stations are also mentioned.

*Master Bedii’s Atelier/Mars Mannequin Atelier* is described as an underground museum built by Master Bedii and his children. They produce mannequins for protecting Turkish identity. It is a symbolic space with underground rooms for the subconscious of Istanbul and unforgotten roots of Turkish people. (Bolak Hisarligil, 2011).

Beyoğlu and Teşvikiye districts are also described with events occurring at a certain interval. Other public spaces mentioned include the Bosphorus and the Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent where several events take place. These places are all reflections of the Istanbul theme.

### 3.1.2. Private Spaces

Orhan Pamuk gives an identity to the private spaces that creates a clear relationship between event, character and space. Sometimes the private space and the changeable details can give a hint to the character about events that have not yet happened.

*Heart of the City Apartment* is located in the center of Istanbul. The novel examines the various apartments of the same building lived in by past generations through the example of Galip and his extended family. Physically, Pamuk describes it as a tall-row style through dirty concrete walls, windows that reflect each other, narrow stairs and long corridors. In addition, he calls airshaft the Dark Void (Bolak Hisarligil, 2011). Eventually, the family move out of Heart of the City Apartment to different flats because the old apartment flats are turned into offices so the building loses its residential character (Bolak, 2000). Heart of the City Apartment is a place where Galip loses his own character and transforms himself into Celal. In Celal’s column, there is some spatiality about the apartment, its smell (a mixture of wet stone, mildew, fried oil and onion) and a dark void in the apartment’s central shaft.

*Rüya’s ex-husband’s house* is where Galip thinks Rüya went after leaving him. The house “defined Rüya’s ex husband as petit bourgeois, a member of the middle class; everything about this place said he was a “traditional citizen”. “All the props were there: the old easy chairs with their floral cotton slipcovers, the synthetic curtains, the enameled plates with butterflies around the rims, the ugly buffet with the candy dish they only used on holidays when guests came to call and the never-touched assortment of liqueurs, the carpets that had faded to a shabby brown” (Pamuk, 1997, p. 95).

*Celal’s museum house* is the place that Galip finds when he searching for his wife and Celal. He thinks they might be in Celal’s old flat in Heart of the City Apartment. When Galip find the “ghost house”, he almost remembers from the past. “Everything, the furniture, the curtains, the placement of the lamps, the colors, the shadows, the smells, exactly replicated the room of twenty-five years ago” (Pamuk, 1997, p. 163).

## 3.2. Relationship between the Narrative Spaces of *The Black Book* and the Author

Orhan Pamuk has explained the importance of *The Black Book* in his writing process: “What *The Black Book* really does is live in Istanbul, walk in the streets, and what it is like to live in Nişantaşı in the 1970’s. *The Black Book* is a book about my own life, the shops I love, things that are still open, Alaaddin’s shop, Nişantaşı Police Station, Taksim Square and it is a history of Beyoglu and many of my personal moments around here” (Pamuk, 1999).

#### 4. Istanbul As A Theme In Orhan Pamuk’s Novels

Pamuk usually sets his stories in places that he knows well so having grown up and lived in Istanbul for a long time; the city is one of his most familiar places. He loves Istanbul and the feelings the city evokes in him so he uses it as a theme in his narratives. Apart from *The Black Book*, other selected books can illustrate this point:

*The Museum of Innocence* is set in the late Seventies and early eighties among wealthy, Europeanized Istanbulites in the upscale neighborhoods of Şişli and Nişantaşı (Tillinghast, 2012).

His autobiographical book *Istanbul: Memories and the City* tells his own life story in Istanbul until the age of 22. Istanbul is connected with the feeling of *hüzün* in the book (Fig. 3).

*The White Castle* tells the story of a young Venetian kidnapped by an Ottoman privateer and taken to Istanbul, where he becomes the servant of a scholar who values his knowledge of Western medicine, science, and technology, but particularly his skills as a pyrotechnician (Tillinghast, 2012).



Figure 3: Image from *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (Pamuk, 2003)

##### 4.1. Istanbul as a Theme in *The Black Book*

Istanbul is the most powerful theme in the novel. The way he describes Istanbul is connected with Pamuk’s own feelings and life experiences as mentioned above. He describes the book as a story that is appropriate to the violence, colors and complexity of life: “*The Black Book* was written with the excitement of being able to say everything about Istanbul and the book tries to tell a lot of things” (Pamuk, 1999).

In *The Black Book*, Istanbul is constructed as multidirectional and sophisticated narrative layer. Pamuk, separated Istanbul into three parts: architectural, experimental and symbolic. He describes the city physically (real), mentally

(imaginary) and symbolic by creating a boundary around the urban level, the house level and landscape level (Bolak, 2000).

All the places that Pamuk uses in the novel represent Istanbul. For instance, Alaaddin's shop and the people who enter to shop there to buy something different seem to be like citizens that come to Istanbul to satisfy their specific needs. There is also a complicated diversity and every kind of goods in the shop, just as Istanbul has every kind of people.

More specifically, Pamuk makes the reader feel the Istanbul theme during this period. Real spaces like Teşvikiye, Nişantaşı, Beyoğlu and the Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent are described to paint an Istanbul life and create an image of the city (Bolak, 2000). Pamuk also sketched while he was writing *The Black Book* and placed Istanbul in the middle of his fiction world (Uğurlu, 2003) (Fig. 4).

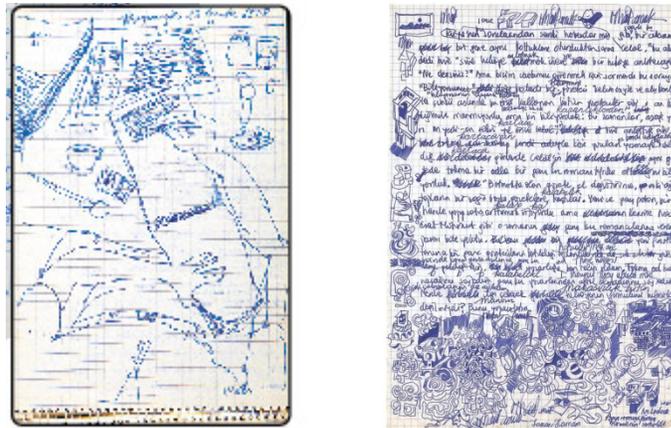


Figure 4 and 5: *The Black Book* sketches by Orhan Pamuk (Milliyet, 2015) (The Paris Review, 2005)

## 5. Conclusion

Narrative spaces in literature have become increasingly interesting for architecture because of interdisciplinarity. Accordingly, *The Black Book* was analyzed here because Orhan Pamuk wished to reflect in Istanbul his own experiences and memories. The spaces are shaped to represent the time and identity of the characters through the guidelines of postmodernism. This study aimed to understand how Orhan Pamuk reflects Istanbul as a theme in *The Black Book* because he used other spaces to create an image of Istanbul. His narrative space descriptions seem to be real, but the missing details make the reader realize the difference between reality and fiction. Pamuk paints an image of Istanbul that reflects a chaotic environment in the sub-text of *The Black Book*.

In conclusion, Orhan Pamuk creates a powerful Istanbul theme. He structured the narrative spaces referencing Istanbul's multilayered environment and the period of the city. In addition, he made strong Istanbul vision to use actual spaces in the novel.

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