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Pamuk's Dis-orient: Reassembling Kafka's Castle in Snow (2002)

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“Die Grenzen unserer kleinen Wirtschaften sind abgesteckt, alles ist ordentlich eingetragen. Besitzwechsel kommt kaum vor und kleine Grenzstreitigkeiten regeln wir selbst. Was soll uns also ein Landvermesser?”

—Monus in Kafka, *Das Schloss*<sup>1</sup>

Critics have been as quick to notice “parallels” between Orhan Pamuk’s most recent novel *Snow* (2002) and Franz Kafka’s *The Castle* (1922) as they have been reluctant to analyze them. In the May 12, 2005 edition of *The New York Review of Books*, Christian Caryl mentioned an “echo or two of Kafka’s hero K.,” pointing out that *Snow*’s protagonist sheds his given name Kerim Alakuşoğlu as a teenager to take on the acronymic nickname Ka instead, “even if it meant conflict with teachers and government officials.”<sup>2</sup> Though the novel’s epigraphs—from Browning, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, and Conrad—have emboldened reviewers in their long-held suspicions about Pamuk’s position in world literature, *Snow* is silent about its textual partnership with *The Castle*. Yet the domain of Count Westwest’s comes forth in the novel nonetheless—fragmented, obsolescent, and covered in snow—along the indirect routes binding Germany to Turkey. Pamuk’s multi-local refiguration of Kafka’s castle, however, resists any comparative impulse to read the two novels as equidistant mirror-images. In lieu of such a “parallel project,” *Snow* extends Kafka’s unfinished text, reanimating the structures of address and desire that compel Kafka’s abbreviated hero K. through the streets of a strange village.<sup>3</sup> As with Pamuk’s 1985 novel *The White Castle*, *Snow* generates a landscape of naive *doppelgängers* and estranged mirror images, signaling the mutual imbrication of Turkish and European cultures. But in contrast to the earlier novel, *Snow*’s spectral partners lie beyond, and beneath, the text. A figural *mise en abyme*—arching from the authorial Pamuk, through his own fictional doubles in the

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss* (Finidr: Vitalis, 2005) 72.

<sup>2</sup> Caryl, Christian “The Schizophrenic Sufi.” *The New York Review of Books*. 12 May 2005.

<sup>3</sup>I would like to thank Christina Gerhardt, Deniz Göktürk, Kurt Beals, and the anonymous referees of *TRANSIT* for their generous critical insights about this article.

novel, and on to Kafka and his landsurveyor K.—incites telling uncertainties about the contemporary production of knowledge on “Turkey and the West.”

But what makes *The Castle* a likely co-text for *Snow*, a story about Islam and Turkish Westernization in the age of an expanding European Union? In contrast to the high-finance metropolis of *The Trial*, the snowy village abutting the seat of Westwest in *The Castle* has a peculiarly pre-modern feel, which baffles K.’s sense of rational justice and efficacious problem-solving. The repetition in the count’s name (“West, West!”) suggests a frenetic compulsion to exemplify an almost hyperbolic Westernness. The castle is thus not a hermetic container of Western essences and practices *per se*, but the incessant catalyst for a bricolage of modernizing gestures beyond the castle walls. (One is reminded of the village superintendent’s wife Mitzi, flailing through piles of file folders in her husband’s bedroom closet in search of the one with the blue label marked “Landsurveyor.”)

We will remember K.’s gaze upon the castle’s outermost tower: “Etwas Irrsinniges hatte das—und einem söllertartigen Abschluss, dessen Mauerzinnen unsicher, unregelmäßig, brüchig, wie von ängstlicher oder nachlässiger Kinderhand gezeichnet, sich in den blauen Himmel zackten. Es war, wie wenn ein trübseliger Hausbewohner, der gerechterweise im entlegensten Zimmer des Hauses sich hätte eingesperrt halten sollen, das Dach durchbrochen und sich erhoben hätte, um sich der Welt zu zeigen.”<sup>4</sup> Kafka’s novel is thus concerned with the precarious circumstances under which subjects in these “far-flung rooms” pursue consecration as Western, and how such Westernizing practices are monitored—or repudiated—over time. Pamuk’s *Snow* takes up this inquiry anew, not in the symbolic bi-continental metropolis of Istanbul, but in the

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<sup>4</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 14.

once-cosmopolitan city of Kars on Turkey’s eastern-most border, “a place that the whole world had forgotten.”<sup>5</sup>

During one of the novel’s pivotal scenes, a revival performance of the 1940s morality play *My Country or My Headscarf* at Kars’ National Theater quickly descends into bloodshed, as the soldiers on stage open fire on Islamist hecklers in the audience.

It was only with the third volley that some in the audience realized that the soldiers were firing live rounds; they could tell, just as one could on those evenings when soldiers rounded up terrorists in the streets, because these shots can be heard in one’s stomach as well as in one’s ears. A strange noise came from the huge German-manufactured Bohemian stove that had been heating the hall for forty-four years, the stovepipe had been pierced and was now spewing smoke like an angry teapot at full boil.<sup>6</sup>

To suspect that the sudden hiss from this huge German-manufactured Bohemian stove [“Alman malı iri bohem soba”] indicates Kafka’s “heating” presence in this novel is somewhat incidental to the analysis that follows. But the furnace’s forty-four year tenure would date its installation—in the “national theater”—to the late 1950s, in the midst of two disparate developments: 1) the birth of the West German guest worker program, which would bring four Turkish generations into constant traffic with Germany and its institutions, and 2) the publication of Kafka’s works in Turkish, amid the first broadly successful transatlantic attempts to canonize him as a “German author.”<sup>7</sup> Pamuk rejoins these two histories in *Snow*: the socio-political outcomes of transnational

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<sup>5</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Knopf, 2004) 10. “herkesin unuttuğu bir yerdi.” Orhan Pamuk, *Kar* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002) 16. All translations from Pamuk’s original Turkish text cite Maureen Freely’s English translation. The original Turkish will be given in the text or in the footnotes, as appropriate.

<sup>6</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 157. “Salonun bazı yerlerinde gerçekten üzerlerine ateş edildiği duygusu üçüncü yayılım ateşinde uyandı. Kuruski atışlarda olduğunun aksine insan yalnız kulağıyla değil, askerlerin sokaklarda terrorist kovaladığı gecelerde olduğu gibi midesiyle de işitiyordu çünkü. Kırk dört yıldır salonu ısıtan Alman malı iri bohem sobadan tuhaf bir ses çıkmış, teneke borusu delindiği için dumanlar öfkeli bir çaydanlığın ağından çıkar gibi tütmeğe başlamıştı.” Pamuk, *Kars* 157.

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of early post-War trends in the uptake of Kafka’s works, see Stephen Dowden, *Kafka’s Castle and The Critical Imagination* (Columbia, SC: Camden, 1995) 19-56.

mass migration, and the imbrication of European icons within twentieth century Turkish culture.

The interplay of these estranged historical strands lends the novel its searching political poetics. While most political dialogue in the novel invokes the stable binary East/West, the text is designed around a series of mutual imbrications:

K < Ka < Kar < Kars<sup>8</sup>

- K Kafka's applicant, summoned to castle Westwest;
- Ka Pamuk's secular Istanbulite poet and journalist, who "enjoys a small, enigmatic fame" under this name<sup>9</sup>;
- Kar Turkish for "snow"; indicates covering, non-distinction, invisibility, the inchoate. The symbology of the novel places "kar" in a metonymic chain with the words "sheet" [çarşaf] and "cover" [ört], which allude to women's religious garments and headscarves, as well as to protective coverings, such as Ka's German overcoat;
- Kars Turkey's easternmost border, Istanbul's provincial other.

This structure of envelopes within envelopes guides the reader into a prism of ontological doubles. In stark contrast to the standard "East-West question" ["Batı-Doğu meselesi"] invoked in debates about Turkish-European cultural relations, the terms in the chain above do not act as counter-definitions to one another. Each term both inheres in and constitutes each of the other terms. Roman Jakobson's discussion of the US Presidential campaign slogan "I like Ike" explores such poetic imbrications as follows:

Both cola of the trisyllabic formula 'I like /Ike' rhyme with each other, and the second of the two rhyming words is fully included in the first one (echo rhyme), /layk/ -- /ayk/, a paronomastic image of a feeling which totally envelops its object. Both cola alliterate with each other, and the first of the two alliterating words is included in the second: /ay/ — /ayk/, a paronomastic image of the loving subject enveloped by the beloved object. The secondary, poetic function of this electoral catch phrase reinforces its impressiveness and efficacy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Kar* is the original Turkish title of the novel, as well as the word for "snow" in common usage.

<sup>9</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 5.

<sup>10</sup> Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *The Discourse Reader*, ed. Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (London: Routledge, 1999) 57-8.

Jakobson's phonological analysis here underscores the emotional affinity, the mutual "nearness" in the relationships among any permutation of the series K < Ka < Kar < Kars.

### **Ka and K, Landsurveyors**

*Snow's* narrator, Orhan, relates most of what he knows about the German-Anatolian travels of his high school friend Ka, a secular middle-class poet from Istanbul's affluent Nişantaşı neighborhood. Neither a disinterested frame narrator nor an apologist, Orhan retraces the steps of his recently assassinated friend—from their shared hometown of Istanbul, to Frankfurt am Main, and on to the Eastern border city of Kars. Recounting Ka's experiences with a degree of interiority and affect that far exceeds his corroborating sources, Orhan traces his friend's steps so faithfully that the local grocer in Kars begins to confuse the two men. "I almost felt I *was* Ka,"<sup>11</sup> admits Orhan, wondering, as do his readers, "How much of this was coincidence, how much was just my imagining?"<sup>12</sup> This fictional Orhan Pamuk thus triggers a relay of call-and-response possibilities that echo throughout the novel—between the authorial Pamuk and his homonymic narrator, between the narrator Orhan and his deceased friend Ka, and between Ka and Kafka's homophonic hero K. Each of these pairings may also be read as an elaboration on the potential doubles within *The Castle* itself: between K. and the castle's representative Klamm, on the one hand, and between K. and the authorial Franz Kafka, on the other.<sup>13</sup>

Orhan recalls how his friendship with Ka began in their teenage years, when the two boys were engrossed in European literature. Whether the homophonic equivalence between Kerim's

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<sup>11</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 413. "Kendimi Ka gibi hessettiğim çok olmuştu." Pamuk, *Kars* 413.

<sup>12</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 411. "Bunların ne kadar rastlantı, ne kadar benim kurgumdu?" Pamuk, *Kars* 413.

<sup>13</sup> For a summary of the critical literature advancing this theory of doubling within *The Castle*, see Dowden (1995, 135), as well as Jens (1998 [1957], 653), and Sokel (1964, 39).

newly chosen nickname and Kafka's archetype was ever deliberate or significant for the two friends remains fully unthematized throughout the narrative. Yet the two ethnically unmarked abbreviations K. and Ka—pronounced identically whether in Turkish or German—are subject to an indissoluble *differance*. Telling the two names “apart” from one another would be possible only in the context of writing or reading. As if to call attention to this unresolvable ambiguity, Ka vainly admonishes the editor of Kars' *Border City Gazette* for misprinting his name:

“My name is printed wrong,” said Ka. “The A should be lowercase.” He regretted saying this. “But it looks good,” he added, as if to make up for his bad manners.

“My dear sir, it was because we weren't sure of your name that we tried to get in touch with you,” said Serdar Bey. “Son, look here, you printed our poet's name wrong.” But as he scolded the boy there was no surprise in his voice. Ka guessed that he was not the first to have noticed that the name had been misprinted. “Fix it right now.”<sup>14</sup>

Both Kafka's K. and Pamuk's Ka arrive in their snowed-in provincial cities as foreign latecomers, and are variously greeted as long-anticipated VIP emissaries and meddling nuisances with bad manners. Each sees himself as commissioned to pursue a recalcitrant political cabal and its insider logic. But unannounced escorts and unlikely detours aggravate their searches, as if according to a deliberate design. This rapidly unfolding succession of preordained events presents Ka with a dizzying socioscope of prescription and panopticism. He is nearly as often admonished for taking meetings as he is entreated to accept new ones. Such is the case as Ka voluntarily meets with Islamist sympathizers, for which the local newspaper editor takes him comically to task

“After you left us, you had meetings with the wrong people, and those people told you the wrong things about our border city,” said Serdar Bey.

“How could you know where I've been?” asked Ka

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<sup>14</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 28. “‘Adım yanlış dizilmiş,’ dedi Ka. ‘A küçük olacak.’ Bunu der demez pişman oldu. ‘Güzel olmuş,’ dedi bir borçluluk duygusuyla. / ‘Ustat, biz de adınızdan emin olmadığımız için sizi aradık,’ dedi Serdar Bey. ‘Oğlum, bak oğlum, siz şairimizin adını yanlış dizmişsiniz,’ diye hiç de telaşlı olmayan bir sesle oğulların azarladı. Ka bunun dizgi yanlışının ilk fark edilişi olmadığını sezdi. ‘Şimdi hemen düzeltin...’” Pamuk, *Kars* 33.

“Naturally, the police were following you,” said the newspaperman. “And for professional reasons, we listen in on police communication with this transistor radio. Ninety percent of the news we print comes from the office of the governor and the Kars police headquarters.”<sup>15</sup>

Avital Ronell has stressed how Kafka’s K. functions less as an embodied subject of bourgeois interiority than as a “mark of incompleteness,” an abbreviated icon standing for a generic position.<sup>16</sup> The castle “requires K. to produce an identity. In front of anyone... who claims to be a representative of the Castle.... K. entitles himself ‘Landsurveyor,’ not *a* landsurveyor but *the* landsurveyor. This entitles him in turn to assume a role of legitimacy.”<sup>17</sup> Just back from twelve years of political exile in Frankfurt am Main, Pamuk’s newcomer Ka similarly depends on institutional auspices to guarantee his status as a commissioned, outside expert in Kars.<sup>18</sup>

Known as a “Turkish poet” when in Germany, and as a “German journalist” when in Turkey, Ka is dispatched eastward from Istanbul to Kars to cover a local suicide epidemic among “covered”—i.e. headscarf-wearing—teenage girls. The liberal-cosmopolitan newspaper *Cumhuriyet (The Republic)* sponsoring his investigative venture to the other end of the land had begun publishing in 1924, one year after the Treaty of Lausanne recognized post-imperial Turkey as a sovereign state. In name and in spirit, this newspaper has been co-terminus with the Turkish Republic’s Westernization project and its archetype, Mustafa Kemal. In view of the violent confrontation between secular Kemalism and Islam since the founding of the Turkish Republic, the symbolic parameters of Ka’s task as a journalistic “surveyor of the land” come into

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<sup>15</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 15. “‘Bizden ayrıldıktan sonra yanlış insanlarla görüştünüz, serhat şehrimiz hakkında yanlış bilgiler aldınız,’ dedi Serdar Bey. / ‘Nerelere gittiğimi nasıl biliyorsunuz?’ dedi Ka. / ‘Polis tabii sizi takip ediyordu,’ dedi gazeteci. ‘Biz de meslek icabı bu telsizden polisin konuşmalarını dinleriz. Gazetemizde çıkan haberlerin yüzde doksanını bize Kars Valiliği ve Emniyet verir.’” Pamuk, *Kars* 30.

<sup>16</sup> Avital Ronell, “Doing Kafka in The Castle: A Poetics of Desire,” *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance*, ed. Alan Udoff (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) 219.

<sup>17</sup> Ronell, “Doing Kafka” 216. For an insightful exploration of K.’s vocation as landsurveyor, see also Zilcosky (2003, 123-8).

<sup>18</sup> Ka spent a decade of political exile in Frankfurt am Main after a Turkish court issued an ambiguous warrant for his arrest. From this perspective, it is plausible to read Frankfurt as a recreation of the banking-center and industrial metropolis of Kafka’s second novel, *Der Prozess*.



clearer focus. Beyond uncovering the local circumstances of the headscarf conflict and its political fomenters, he will inevitably provide his readers with a synecdochal narrative about the state of the republic as a whole.

One of the targets of Ka's investigation, the philandering terrorist Lacivert (Blue), gives him some unwanted career counseling as follows: "The Turkish press is interested in its country's troubles only if the Western press takes an interest first. [...] Otherwise it's offensive to discuss poverty and suicide; they talk about these things as if they happen in a land beyond the civilized world. Which means that you too will be forced to publish your article in Europe."<sup>19</sup> Pamuk thus refashions K.'s job description as landsurveyor, dramatizing the institutional and discursive constraints upon "telling a story" about political Islam in Turkey.

Ka's somewhat disingenuous self-designation as a reporter for *Cumhuriyet* profoundly pre-structures his itinerary. Upon his arrival, he is promptly whisked into a series of meetings—with the police chief, the newspaper editor, the mayor, and eventually the rebel ringleader Lacivert. A young religious student, Necip, is tasked with arranging this clandestine meeting with Lacivert, about which he informs Ka, "My instructions are such that I cannot give you the name of the person you need to meet unless you first agree to meet him."<sup>20</sup>

Without Ka's approval, the *Border City Gazette*, a daily newspaper with a three-figure circulation (a quarter of which is mailed to ex-residents of Kars now living in Istanbul), festively announces that the visiting journalist will soon be reading his new poem "Snow" before a public audience. Ka retorts:

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<sup>19</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 74-5. "Türk gazeteleri Batılılar ilgilenmedikçe kendi milletinin sefaletiyle ve acılarıyla ilgilenmez," dedi Lacivert. "Yoksulluktan, intiharlardan söz etmek ayıp, çağdışı bir şeymiş gibi davranırlar. O zaman sen de yazını Avrupa'da yayınlamak zorunda kalırsın." Pamuk, *Kars* 78.

<sup>20</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 66. "Bu görmeniz gereken kişinin kim olduğunu, size ancak onu görmeyi kabul ederseniz söylemeye yetkiliyim." Pamuk, *Kars* 69.

“I don’t have a poem called “Snow,” and I’m not going to the theater this evening. Your newspaper will look like it’s made a mistake.”

“Don’t be so sure. There are those who despise us for writing the news before it happens. They fear us not because we are journalists, but because we can predict the future; you should see how amazed they are when things turn out exactly as we’ve written them. This is what modern journalism is all about. I know you won’t want to stand in the way of our being modern—you don’t want to break our hearts.”<sup>21</sup>

Here Ka’s journalistic resolve begins to falter, as he confronts the rather performative nature of social knowledge in this strange city. Like K., Ka begins to suspect that the inscrutable *telos* of his pursuit—whether this be the political demarcations of the “land” or his own role in drawing them—changes its orientation at every step.

### **Pamuk’s Castle**

The interlocking synchronization of institutional functionaries, scheduled and surveiled interviews, and (mis)guided tours through the snow reanimates K.’s round-robin antics with the accidental spokespersons of Kafka’s castle. Barnabus, Gerstäcker, and Klamm’s village superintendent Monus accompany and evade, console and rebuke K. in his pursuit of an ultimate audience with Westwest. Yet none of his contacts sufficiently embodies this archetype, which K. dramaturgically prefigures as follows: “Es [ist] gar nicht nötig, dass er mit mir spricht, es genügt mir, wenn ich den Eindruck sehe, den meine Worte auf ihn machen, und machen sie keinen oder hört er sie gar nicht, habe ich doch den Gewinn, frei vor einem Mächtigen gesprochen zu haben.”<sup>22</sup> When Pamuk’s Ka receives a friendly invitation to join a local sheik for a tete-a-tete, his patience for all this ceremonious hospitality dissolves: “Am I supposed to pay my respects to

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<sup>21</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 29. “Kar adlı bir şiirim yok, akşam da tiyatroya gitmeyeceğim. Haberiniz yanlış çıkacak.’ / ‘O kadar emin olmayın. Daha olaylar gerçekleşmeden haberini yazdığınız için bizi küçümseyen, yaptığımız gazetecilik değil, kehanet olduğunu düşünen pek çok kişi daha sonra olayların tamı tamına bizim yazdığımız gibi gelişmesi üzerine hayretlerini gizleyememiştir. Pek çok olay sırf biz önceden haberini yaptığımız için gerçekleşmiştir. Modern gazetecilik de budur. Siz de bizim Kars’ta modern olma hakkımızı elimimizden almamak, kalbimizi kırmamak [istemiyorsunuz.]” Pamuk, *Kars* 34.

<sup>22</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 62.

every lunatic in Kars?”<sup>23</sup> The charismatic leader of the city’s headscarf-wearing movement, the young Kadife—herself once a leftist Istanbul intellectual—enlightens Ka as to the social life of the city: “In Kars everyone always knows about everything that’s going on.”<sup>24</sup>

But where is the castle? Each of the two novels opens with the *absence* of a discernible castle as the hero arrives, late at night. In both cases, only snow is visible:

“Es war spät abend als K. ankam. Das Dorf lag in tiefem Schnee. Vom Schlossberg war nichts zu sehen, Nebel und Finsternis umgaben ihn, auch nicht der schwächste Lichtschein deutete das große Schloss an. Lange stand K. auf der Holzbrücke die von der Landstraße zum Dorf führt und blickte in die scheinbare Leere empor. Dann gieng er ein Nachtlager suchen.”<sup>25</sup>

And from *Snow*:

“When, at ten o’clock at night, three hours behind schedule, the bus began its crawl through the snow-covered streets of Kars, Ka couldn’t recognize the city at all. He couldn’t even see the railroad station, where he’d arrived twenty years earlier by steam engine, nor could he see any sign of the hotel to which his driver had taken him that day (following a full tour of the city): the Hotel Republic, “a telephone in every room.” It was as if everything had been erased, lost beneath the snow.<sup>26</sup>

In both arrival scenes, snow obstructs the newcomer’s gaze upon a well-known monument. Whereas K. is certain that he will eventually re-discover “the” castle despite the restricted visibility, Ka appears shaken by the absence of Kars’ memorable buildings from decades past: the train station and the Snow Palace Hotel. He recalls that The Snow Palace Hotel [Kar Palas Oteli] had been owned and renovated by a Western-leaning professor in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>23</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 90. “Kars’taki bütün çatlaklarla niye görüşmem lazım?” Pamuk, *Kars* 93.

<sup>24</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 110. “Kars’ta herkes, her an, her şeyden haberdardır.” Pamuk, *Kars* 112.

<sup>25</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 5.

<sup>26</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 6. “Otobüs karlar altındaki Kars sokaklarına saat onda, üç saat gecikmiş olarak girdiğinde Ka şehrin hiç tanıyamadı. Yirmi yıl önce buraya buharlı trenle geldiği bahar gününde karşısına çıkan istasyon binasının da, arabacının onu bütün şehri dolaştırdıktan sonra götürdüğü her odası telefonlu Cumhuriyet Oteli’nin de nerede olduğunu çıkaramadı. Karın altında her şey silinmiş, kaybolmuş gibiydi.” Pamuk, *Kars* 12.

Pamuk's surrogate *lieux de memoire*— the transit hub and hotel, the latter of which conjoins the titles of both novels—suggest that modern Kars is defined not through the autochthonous accumulation of power, but through departures and arrivals. Once an affluent city in the early twentieth century, some fifty kilometers away from the Georgian and Armenian borders, Kars impresses upon the newcomer Ka a skeletal, post-imperial melancholy. Traces of Slavic design and architecture reinforce a sense of transnational connectivity, in keeping with Kafka's imagined provincial capital. Meaningfully absent from Kars' cityscape, however, is a central, focalizing castle. Although Ka eventually takes notice of the local Selçuk castle, his attention is first drawn to the poorest of Kars' municipal districts, the shantytown called Kaleiçi, or "within the castle."<sup>27</sup> After a brisk morning walk through its snowy streets, Ka senses that, in Kaleiçi, "it wasn't the poverty or the helplessness that disturbed him, it was the thing he would see again and again during the days to come [...] in the crowded teahouses where the city's unemployed passed the time playing cards. [...] It was as if he were in a place that the whole world had forgotten, as if it were snowing at the end of the world."<sup>28</sup> The initial *absence of the castle's absence* in *Snow* recasts the *presence of the castle's absence* in Kafka's novel. This intertextual substitution on the novel's opening pages indicates that a covert redistribution of power, reaching beyond local relationships and circumstances, underlies Kars' recent history.

As if to console himself, Ka remembers that the city had experienced a golden age of Westernization before the fall of the Russian and Ottoman empires. Czar Alexander had ordered

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<sup>27</sup> The original Turkish text refers to this district as Kaleiçi ["within the castle"], which is consistent with the city of Kars' official district listings on [www.kars.bel.tr](http://www.kars.bel.tr). In her English translation, however, Maureen Freely renders the name of this neighborhood as Kalealtı, or "beneath the castle." This change, although incidental to the narrative, alters the figural symbology of the cityscape in the context of the current analysis.

<sup>28</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 10 "Yoksulluk ya da çaresizlik değildi içine bu kadar işleyen; şehrin her yerde [...] kağıt oynayan işsizlerle tıktık tıktık kalabalık çayhaneler[de...] daha sonra hep göreceği tuhaf ve güçlü bir yalnızlık duygusuydu. Sanki burası herkesin unuttuğu bir yerdi ve kar sessizce dünyanın sonuna yağıyordu." Pamuk, *Kars* 16.

the construction of five parallel avenues “like never before seen in the East,”<sup>29</sup> and the city’s thriving middle class enjoyed the spoils of a trade route linking two Westernizing powers. Yet since the beginning of the Turkish Republican period in the 1920s, Kars had gradually lost its autonomy and affluence, and its 500 year-old castle effectively ceased to signal local power and hierarchy. To Ka’s eyes, the castle building itself is a semiotic ruin—ostentatious, marginal, and evacuated.

### **Kafka’s Snow**

In Kafka’s novel, the interplay between castle and snow appears to the human observer as follows:

Nun sah er oben das Schloss deutlich umrissen in der klaren Luft und noch verdeutlicht durch den alle Formen nachbildenden, in dünner Schicht überall liegenden Schnee. Übrigens schien oben auf dem Berg viel weniger Schnee zu sein als hier im Dorf, wo sich K. nicht weniger mühsam vorwärts brachte als gestern auf der Landstraße. Hier reichte der Schnee bis zu den Fenstern der Hütten und lastete gleich wieder auf dem niedrigen Dach, aber oben auf dem Berg ragte alles frei und leicht empor, wenigstens schien es so von hier aus.<sup>30</sup>

Here snow is a ubiquitous, equalizing substance that obscures the specificity of all objects near at hand. The distant castle hill, towering “free and light” above, gains its singularity because all other forms are covered in a layer of blinding white. Kafka’s expressionless snow is purely negative semiotic potential; it arbitrates distinction between what is covered and what is exposed.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 21.

<sup>30</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 12.

<sup>31</sup> In a related sense, Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka’s use of sound as follows: “Sound doesn’t show up [in *The Castle*] as a form of expression, but rather as an unformed material of expression that will act on the other terms.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 6.

*Snow* meditates on the trope of exposé, of bringing-to-light, of uncovering. Near the close of the novel, the narrator Orhan reassesses his motivations for traveling to the easternmost edge of his country:

“As I was gazing out at the enormous snowflakes bouncing softly against the walls of the castle before sinking into the dark waters of the river, Fazıl innocently asked why I’d come to Kars.”<sup>32</sup>

In this cartoon-like dramatization, *Snow*’s narrator contemplates the two elements—snow cover and the empty castle—in their eternal and ephemeral interaction. What Kafka achieves with the dyad snow/castle in the semiotic realm, Pamuk applies to the realm of Turkish socio-political history. Though he claims to be in Kars on assignment, Ka’s covert motivation for his visit to Kars is to find and marry Ipek, his old friend from leftist student circles in Istanbul, thereby rescuing her from the throes of fundamentalist Islam and bringing her back to her Kemalist roots. Ka’s conceit of “uncovering” the story of the “covered” girls—a mix of sanctioned journalistic investigation and clandestine romantic aspiration—recalls Frantz Fanon’s essays on Algeria from the 1950s. For Fanon, the French desire to uncover Algerian women exhibited the “crystallisation of an aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence.... Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance. There is in it the will to bring this woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet like the headscarf-wearing girls he has come to cover in Kars, Ka is also enveloped in a conspicuous garment himself: an overcoat he bought at the *Kaufhof* during his exile in Frankfurt am Main. This ostentatiously European accessory figures at the very beginning of the novel as follows: “We should note straightaway that this soft downy beauty of a coat would

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<sup>32</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 409. “Ben kaleye ve Kars çayına büyük tanelerle ağır ağır yağın kara bakarken Fazıl iyiniyetle Kars’a niye geldiğimi sor[du].” Pamuk, *Kars* 411. The English translation overstates the bouncing movement of the snowflakes against the castle.

<sup>33</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 36.

cause him shame and disquiet during the days he was to spend in Kars, while also furnishing a sense of security.”<sup>34</sup> At their first meeting, the Islamist organizer Lacivert praises Ka’s coat and tries to prevent him from taking it off—in a kind of chiastic counter-gesture to the secular impulse to sartorially liberate devout women:

“Please don’t take off your coat until the room has warmed up... It’s a beautiful coat. Where did you buy it?”

“In Frankfurt.”

“Frankfurt... Frankfurt,” Blue murmured, and he lifted his eyes to the ceiling and lost himself in thought. Then he explained that “some time ago” he had been found guilty under Article 163 of promoting the establishment of a state based on religious principles and had for this reason escaped to Germany.<sup>35</sup>

At this moment, Ka discovers how the privileged status that both he and Lacivert enjoy relies on the symbolic and infrastructural capital of their “German connections.” In fact, all of Kars’ Islamist organizers—Muhtar, Kadife, Lacivert, and Necip—were once active in the student movements at universities in Germany or Istanbul. The local cabal that Ka intended to uncover in Kars is thus neither autochthonous nor anti-modern, it relies fundamentally on transnational and urban connections.

Just as K. finds his connection to the castle via the village secretary Monus and his daily inventories of the village, the channel of access which lends Ka his venerable stature in Kars is his collegial relationship with a certain “Hans Hansen,” a reporter at the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Ka also notices that the local newspaper in Kars is printed on a hand-me-down press from Hamburg, and that the surveillance equipment that local MIT<sup>36</sup> agents use to catch Islamists on tape are manufactured by Grundig, a symbol of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder*. It is

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<sup>34</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 3.

<sup>35</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 73. “‘Paltonuzu soba odayı ısıtana kadar çıkarmayın...Güzel palto. Nerede aldınız?’ / ‘Frankfurt’tan.’ / ‘Frankfurt... Frankfurt,’ dedi Lacivert ve gözünü tavana dikip düşüncelere daldı. / Dine dayalı bir devlet düzeni kurulması fikrini yaydığı için ‘bir zamanlar’ 163. maddeden mahkûm olduğunu, bu yüzden Almanya’ya kaçtığını söyledi.” Pamuk, *Kars* 76.

<sup>36</sup> Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, or National Intelligence Organization.

perhaps on the basis of these transnational implantations that the transit hub forms the invisible, organizing principle in Ka's arrival sequence, rather than Kars' intransigent, territorially bound castle.

Because the Islamist cabal perceives Ka as a direct conduit to the European press, he is invited to sit in on a clandestine summit at the Hotel Asia, where religious agitators intend to produce a press release explaining their position on the unrest and attempted putsch in Kars. They decide to compose an open letter, which Ka will then deliver to his contact at the *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspaper: "Almost everyone warmed to the title at once; 'Announcement to the People of Europe about the Events in Kars.'"<sup>37</sup> This attempt at collective enunciation, however, falters from the start: "At first no one spoke, so sure were they that the room was bugged and that there were several informers present."<sup>38</sup> Not even the opening brainstorm question "If a big German newspaper gave you personally two lines of space, what would you say to the West?" generates usable ideas, and the meeting suspends without significant success.

We will remember how far away the "local" castle turns out to be for Kafka's K.:

Immer erwartete K., daß nun endlich die Straße zum Schloß einlenken müsse und nur, weil er es erwartete, ging er weiter; offenbar infolge seiner Müdigkeit zögerte er, die Straße zu verlassen, auch staunte er über die Länge des Dorfes, das kein Ende nahm, immer wieder die kleinen Häuschen und vereisten Fensterscheiben und Schnee und Menschenleere.<sup>39</sup>

The castle of Count Westwest is present enough in K.'s field of vision to impress its image upon him and regenerate his will to penetrate it. But the village "never ends." Pamuk's narrator Orhan,

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<sup>37</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 270. "Taslağın başlığı 'Kars'ta Olanlar Konusunda Avrupa Kamuoyuna Duyuru' idi. Bir an herkesin koşuna gitti bu." Pamuk, *Kars* 270.

<sup>38</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 269. "Polisin odayı dinlediğinden, en azından kalabalık içine birkaç muhbir yerleştirdiğinden herkes o kadar emindi ki, başta kimse konuşmadı." Pamuk, *Kars* 269.

<sup>39</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 16.



in turn, describes the building where Ka spends the last few hours before his death—beneath a pink neon “K” sign outside a Frankfurt porn shop—as follows:

Ka’s final destination, the Frankfurt city library, was a modern and anonymous building. Inside were the types you always find in such libraries: housewives, old people with time to kill, unemployed men, one or two Turks and Arabs, students giggling over their homework assignments, and all other manner of stalwarts from the ranks of the obese, the lame, the insane, and the mentally handicapped. One drooling young man raised his head from his picture book to stick out his tongue at me.<sup>40</sup>

A few short hours before his death, Ka visits this dystopic interior space, which Orhan describes in an almost zoological fashion. This description mirrors K’s dysphoric encounter with the meager multiplicity—the “recht elendes Städtchen”—that constitutes the Castle Westwest:

Im ganzen entsprach das Schloß, wie es sich hier von der Ferne zeigte, K.s Erwartungen. Es war weder eine alte Ritterburg noch ein neuer Prunkbau, sondern eine ausgedehnte Anlage, die aus wenigen zweistöckigen, aber aus vielen eng aneinander stehenden niedrigen Bauten bestand; hätte man nicht gewußt, daß es ein Schloß sei, hätte man es für ein Städtchen halten können. Nur einen Turm sah K., ob er zu einem Wohngebäude oder einer Kirche gehörte, war nicht zu erkennen.<sup>41</sup>

If the castle of Count Westwest is refigured in *Snow* as the Frankfurt public library, this substitution recalls Edward Said’s description of Orientalism as “a library or archive of information, commonly, and in some of its aspects, unanimously held.”<sup>42</sup> As the seat of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, and the location of former West Germany’s single comprehensive repository of German-language books and periodicals, Frankfurt am Main embodied for Ka the site where textual representations of Turkey are housed, redacted, and reproduced. The library arbitrates and channels the production of discourse by which modern

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<sup>40</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 252. “Ka’nın her sabah gittiği Frankfurt Belediye Kütüphanesi modern ve kimliksiz bir binaydı. İçeride bu kütüphanelerin tipik ziyaretçileri, ev kadınları, vakit öldüren ihtiyarlar, işsizler, bir-iki Arapla Türk, okul ödevi yaparken kıkırdayıp gülüşen öğrenciler ve bu yerlerin şaşmaz müdavimleri; aşırı şişmanlar, sakatlar, deliler ve geri zekalılar vardı. Ağzından tükürük sarkan genç biri, baktığı resimli kitabın sayfasından kafasını kaldırıp dil çıkardı bana.” Pamuk, *Kars* 252.

<sup>41</sup> Kafka, *Schloss* 12.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 41.

Turkey is reconstituted in the European imagination. The drooling man's gesture, sticking his tongue out at Orhan ["dil çıkardı bana"], is all the more grotesque considering that "dil" in standard Turkish usage means both *tongue* and *language*.

## Conclusion

"Freilich," sagte K., "man soll nicht verfrüht urteilen. Vorläufig weiß ich ja vom Schloss nichts weiter, als daß man es dort versteht, sich den richtigen Landvermesser auszusuchen."  
—Kafka, *Das Schloss*<sup>43</sup>

When the Nobel Foundation named Orhan Pamuk its 2006 laureate for literature, commending him for "discovering new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures," it echoed the sentiments of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels from the previous year, which had honored him with its 2005 Peace Prize. In justifying their selection, the Frankfurt-based Börsenverein praised Pamuk as follows. "Mit Orhan Pamuk wird ein Schriftsteller geehrt, der wie kein anderer Dichter unserer Zeit den historischen Spuren des Westens im Osten und des Ostens im Westen nachgeht. [...Er] verbindet orientalische Erzähltraditionen mit den Stilelementen der westlichen Moderne und entwickelt Bilder und Begriffe, die unsere Gesellschaft in einem nicht eng verstandenen Europa gebrauchen wird."<sup>44</sup> International literary organizations and European reviewers have been all but unanimous in highlighting how Pamuk's syncretic imagination reinterprets Europe anew from one of its most vigorously maintained margins.

Yet Pamuk's engagement with *The Castle* reveals a sober stance regarding the delicate circumstances under which he is internationally honored. *Snow* closes with a representational

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<sup>43</sup> Kafka, *Das Schloss* 11.

<sup>44</sup> The 2005 press release announcing the conferral of the Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels on Pamuk is available at the Börsenverein's website, [www.boersenverein.de](http://www.boersenverein.de).

aporia about literary production itself. Fazıl, a former student of Kars' Islamist academy and one of Ka's and Orhan's most pensive informants, reproaches the Istanbul-based author-narrator Orhan and his entire textual project:

“I can tell from your face that you want to tell the people who read your novel how poor we are and how different we are from them. I don't want you to put me in a novel like that.”

“Why not?”

“Because you don't even know me, that's why! Even if you got to know me and describe me as I am, your Western readers would be so caught up in pitying me for being poor that they wouldn't have a chance to see my life. For example, if you said I was writing an Islamist science-fiction novel, they'd just laugh.”<sup>45</sup>

Fazıl continues, demanding that “his author” inform readers that nothing said about Kars in the novel is true.

For Orhan Pamuk, author, this repudiation remains an essential feature of his subjecthood as a writer and observer of contemporary Turkey. “Ich stelle ja auch die Frage nach meiner Zuverlässigkeit und Glaubwürdigkeit, wenn ich, ein „verwestlichter“ Beobachter von Istanbul, ein Urteil über einen derart ausgewählten und geschundenen Ort meines Landes verbreite.”<sup>46</sup> Here Pamuk's cautionary tone resonates John Zilcosky's insightful reading of K.'s vocation as a landsurveyor. Although K. entitles himself to an audience with the castle in his capacity as *Landvermesser*, this may also turn out to be a designation that threatens “audacity and hubris (*Vermessenheit*) and, most importantly, the possibility of making a mistake while measuring (*sich vermessen*).”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Pamuk, *Snow* 410. ““Ama yüzünden anlıyorum, bizim ne kadar yoksul, senin romanlarını okuyan insanlardan ne kadar değişik olduğumuzu anlatmak istiyorsun. Ama beni öyle bir romana koymani istemem.’ / ‘Niye?’ / ‘Beni tanıyorsun ki! Tanıyıp olduğum gibi anlatabilsen bile senin Batılı okurların yoksulluğuma acımdan benim hayatımı göremezler. Mesela benim İslamcı bilimkurgu romanı yazıyor olmam onları gülümsetir.” Pamuk, *Kars* 412.

<sup>46</sup> Orhan Pamuk. “Ich werde sehr sorgfältig über meine Morte nachdenken.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 5 Jul. 2007.

<sup>47</sup> John Zilcosky. *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing*, (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 24. See also Heller (1969 [1952], 70)

Pamuk's reflections on being a "Westernized observer" recall those of another author at work on his latest novel, *The Castle*, in 1920. In a letter to Milena Jesenska, Kafka wrote the following:

Ich habe eine Eigentümlichkeit, die mich von allen mir Bekannten nicht wesentlich, aber graduell sehr stark unterscheidet. Wir kennen doch beide ausgiebig charakteristische Exemplare von Westjuden, ich bin, soviel ich weiß, der westjüdischste von ihnen, das bedeutet, übertrieben ausgedrückt, dass mir keine ruhige Sekunde geschenkt ist, nichts ist mir geschenkt, alles muss erworben werden, nicht nur die Gegenwart und Zukunft, auch noch die Vergangenheit, etwas das doch jeder Mensch vielleicht mitbekommen hat, auch das muss erworben werden, das ist vielleicht die schwerste Arbeit, dreht sich die Erde nach rechts—ich weiß nicht, ob sie das tut—müsste ich mich nach links drehen, um die Vergangenheit nachzuholen. Nun habe ich aber zu allen diesen Verpflichtungen nicht die geringste Kraft, ich kann nicht die Welt auf meinen Schultern tragen, ich ertrage dort kaum meinen Winterrock.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps it is a similarly reverent incredulity—toward the task of surveying where contemporary Turkey begins and ends—that lends *Snow* its vigorous political resonance.

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Giuliano Baioni, *Kafka—Literatur und Judentum*, trans. Gertrud Billen and Josef Billen (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001) 4.

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