Capitalizing Istanbul: reading Orhan Pamuk’s literary cityscape
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Chapter 2 - A Labyrinth: The View of the City in The Black Book

The city is the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth.
Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project

The citation for the Nobel Prize awarded to Orhan Pamuk refers to his “quest” for the soul of Istanbul, adding an epic quality to the writer's literary cityscape. The citation can also be read as a reference to Pamuk’s breakthrough work, Kara Kitap, [The Black Book] (1990, 1996). This “personal encyclopedia of Istanbul” (1999: 138) is also the account of a long and arduous search. It tells the story of Galip, a young lawyer, searching for his missing wife all around Istanbul. The city is not a mere backdrop to the search, but a complex entity that reflects the chaos Galip endures within and without, as well as the aesthetic principle of the novel.

A quest for Istanbul defines Pamuk’s work on multiple levels. Pamuk’s claim on the cityscape is not simply a novelistic one; Istanbul is indeed central to his work and persona as an author, and something that he has incorporated into his life as a matrix of thinking. Linking Pamuk’s status as novelist of the city to his encyclopedia of Istanbul, this chapter sets out to delineate how Pamuk’s vision is achieved in the narrative. The task is to trace Pamuk’s gaze through his transcription of the city into writing, in order to identify the links between viewing, writing and reading as acts of cognition.

The Labyrinth

I open this chapter with Walter Benjamin’s observation, taken from The Arcades Project (1999), because it captures precisely the paradox at the heart of this chapter: the modern city evokes the ancient image of the labyrinth, in need of a singular look from the person who seeks to understand the logic of its space. Created by the legendary Greek craftsman-
architect, Daedalus, the labyrinth is a structure of no return, except for three heroes, each of whom reverts to means outside it; Daedalus and his son Icarus, by flying over it, and Theseus, by unraveling Ariadne’s thread to trace his way out. The image of a labyrinthine city dates back to the accounts of Troy and to the representations of Knossos (Wright 9-12). The unicursal labyrinth included one entrance and a confusing, yet definite path to its center. The labyrinth is a recurring trope for the modernist city. The labyrinthine experience of the nineteenth-century city, on the other hand, is without a center or boundary. Here, the labyrinth refers not to the view, or the graphic structure, but to the experience of urban space. As the center is non-existent, the journey becomes both an end in itself and the climax of experience. The labyrinthine character of the city relates more to the walker, and not simply to the viewer.

The idea of the labyrinth city captures the paradoxical desire to master the aerial perspective, and to be immersed in the urban maze. Michel De Certeau’s take on the labyrinth in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) examines this dichotomy in terms of urban experience. The practitioner of the city is a split figure, embodying either one of the two contrasting aspects of experiencing the city, the overview and the partial view: “An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below” (92). While the distanced viewer “reads” the city as an image, the walker performs the city. De Certeau’s account privileges the walker, taking a critical stance towards the association of visibility with cognition.

In the following pages, I deploy the image of the labyrinth to trace the tension between different views in the novel and reveal how the novel unites Pamuk’s Daedalian authorship and Icarian persona, the writer and the viewer. I show that when describing the viewer of Istanbul, there is no clear-cut distinction between the pedestrian and the visionary; the view towers over the human as the panorama invites one to lose the self within its myriad stories. I begin with an introduction to Pamuk’s ‘view’ in order to trace its association with
the labyrinth city and the figure of the pedestrian. It is in this context that I briefly examine James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Paul Auster’s “The City of Glass” (1984) as two novels that play with both themes. Finally, I look at the labyrinthine narrative and language found in *The Black Book*, precisely because in its encyclopedic narration of Istanbul, the novel captures the same themes. Although Pamuk lays claim to a bird’s eye view, his visionary does not cut an Icarus-like figure; his aim is not to soar above the city towards a higher being, but to plummet to the city to discover its suppressed stories and cavernous locales.

**The View(er)**

The view from Pamuk’s office is reminiscent of the postcard vistas of Istanbul which typically extend over the two sides of the Bosphorus and the old city, and are framed by the two minarets of a nearby mosque. This comprehensive view is a recurrent image for Pamuk’s interviewers when describing his work (Cottrell 2003; Ybarra 2003, Halkin 2004; Farnsworth 2003). For Pamuk himself, the panorama is a privilege that he has made his own, a means of talking about both himself and his work.\(^{23}\)

Nobody until now has seen the entirety of Istanbul as I have, horizontally and perpendicularly, that is in depth, in a manner which penetrates its own history and its soul, and which comprehends its own positioning, the way it settles on the seas, the way it extends. The view from my office has such a privilege that suits a novelist. Sometimes I think I deserve everything I see from here. (1999: 69)

The above passage tells us something about Pamuk’s way of seeing. His gaze here is one that sees through past and present, one that makes sense of the history and topography of

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\(^{23}\) Pamuk’s claim on the cityscape can also be explained biographically; he attended the school of architecture at Istanbul Technical University, but left it to pursue a career in writing. Pamuk’s texts are similarly considered to possess an architectural structure of functionality and interdependence (Belge: 1996; Irzik 1996: 270). Pamuk, in fact, knows through experience that overview does not lead to the truth of the city: one reason for his rejection of architecture was the cultural discrepancy between the builders of the city and its present occupants (2007: 307).
the city. For Pamuk, this vision entails a horizontal and a vertical understanding of the panorama. The horizontal view, the glossed over, cliché image of minarets and domes, is one that is most readily associated with the city, and one to which Pamuk has exclusive access from his office. Pamuk indeed traces, in his novels, what he calls the horizontal view of the city, the renowned silhouette of Istanbul, a skyline of minarets and domes. Yet his gaze does not simply sweep the surfaces: the vertical view is equally important, evoking the city’s layers of meaning. Perpendicular view in this sense is what is linked to, but cannot solely be defined by the overview. Pamuk’s cityscape suggests the surface with all that is hidden and suppressed beneath it; the past but also the present, the palimpsest that emerges from the city’s heritage, and from its conflictual and chaotic present. The challenge is to trace Pamuk’s conception, with all its complex effects, in his writing.

This scopic claim to a city’s panorama prompts panoptic associations. Pamuk's perspective evokes the problem of visibility, of the link between seeing and surveying. The view from the office serves as a place from which he visually captures the city. Claiming to be the only one to ‘get the picture’ literally, Pamuk positions himself as a master-of-all-I-survey. This way of seeing, which Rebecca Weaver-Hightower probes in her work on island narratives in Empire Islands, is key to providing the fictional colonizer with a fantasy of power over the land he views (2002 3). Pamuk is certainly not a colonizer; nevertheless, his claim to the view is one that actualizes the fantasy of a comprehensive view of the city.

Viewing a city does not necessarily convey the same sense of mastery. The sense of the modern city is one that escapes the onlooker, as Michel de Certeau’s viewer of New York from the summit of World Trade Centre attests. In The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), de Certeau traces, beneath what is considered to be mass consumption, the acts of resistance and creativity of common heroes, “walking in countless thousands on the streets.” (ibid) In probably the most cited chapter of this work, “Walking in the City,” de Certeau introduces walkers as the shapers of the cityscape:
The ordinary practitioners of the city [who] live down below […] are walkers, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. The paths that correspond in this intertwining unrecognized poems […] elude legibility. (93)

This account provides a perceptual shift when the walker climbs to the summit of the former World Trade Centre in New York and becomes a visionary: (the view) “transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god” (92). De Certeau’s onlooker, although sharing with Pamuk a similar claim to the view, differs from Pamuk in various aspects. The cityscape is based on an opposition between the omniscient onlooker and the ordinary pedestrian, the reader and the walker. The onlooker seems to have a dominant, totalizing gaze, yet in practice it is the walker who creates the city. Walkers as inhabitants define the city while shaping its rules and regulations through their practice.

Istanbul’s history makes it a city that has an in-depth, as well as a surface view. Jelal’s article, “The Day The Bosphorus Dries Up,” presents one such image. The idyllic representation of the Bosphorus is reversed with an apocalyptic imagery replete with the refuse of the city:

Suların bir anda çekildiği son günde karaya oturmuş Amerikan transatlantikleriyle yosunlu İon sütunları arasında açık ağızlariyla tarih öncesinden kalma bilinmeyen tanrılara yalvaran Kelt ve Likyalı iskeletleri olacak. Midyeyle kaplı Bizans Hazineleri, gümüş ve teneke çatal bıçaklar ve bin yıllık şarap fıçıları ve gazoz şişeleri ve sivri burunlu kadırga leşleri arasında yükselecek bu medeniyetin antik oacak ve lambalarını yakacak enerjyi uskuru bir bataklığa saplanmış köhne bir Romen petrol tankerinden alacağini da hayal edebiliyorum. (1990 42)

On the last day when the waters suddenly recede, among the American transatlantic gone to ground and Ionic columns covered with seaweed, there will be Celtic and Ligurian skeletons open-mouthed in supplication to gods whose identities are no longer known. Amidst mussel-encrusted Byzantine treasures, forks and knives made
of silver and tin, thousand-year-old-barrels of wine, soda-pop bottles, carcasses of pointy-prowled galleys, I can image a civilization whose energy needs for their antiquated stoves and lights will be derived from a dilapidated Romanian tanker propelled into a mire-pit. (1996 15)

The apocalyptic imagery of the Bosphorus reconfigures the significance of the strait as a magical realm of catastrophe, fear and bliss. The waterway, with its millennial history turns into a “lacuna” to be appropriated by the present inhabitants of the city. Jelal's article presents an imagery of the waterway as a repository for past and present trash and treasures. The odd content of this receptacle, recycled in text, ranges from the mafia to the cars that flew into it, to the actual accumulated trash. An inventory of the hidden, suppressed, and discarded aspects of Istanbul, Jelal’s newspaper column poeticizes an acute sense of loss and nostalgia. Jelal’s Istanbul evokes the Paris of Baudelaire, described by Walter Benjamin as “more submarine than subterranean” (1935: 41). Once the sea that glosses over the myriad traces dries up, the Bosphorus is no longer simply a palimpsest but a lacuna that incorporates multiple spaces and temporalities within its new spatiality.

To write about the city is to represent the co-existence of order and chaos, progress and decay, past and present, all of which leave their marks on the cityscape. For Sibel Irzik, Jelal’s column is an expression of his gnostic drive, a “fantasy of a city that bares itself to the gaze of the author in a state of ultimate visibility and readability” (2006: 728). Jelal’s depiction of the city makes it a readable space which upholds the many layers of meaning, the space where conflicting trajectories can coexist within an aesthetic whole. Yet, this is a fantasy that also entails a recycling of the ‘seen’. Jelal’s column is an act of appropriation; it turns these stories into a means of experiencing the multiple temporalities and thousands of lives that constitute a space. The apocalyptic image, then, is also the condensed history of the city, transforming the hidden chaos into a mosaic. Pamuk himself notes:
Kara Kitap’da olup bitenler hafızanın karanlık köşelerinden çıkarılıp yan yana getiriliyor.(...) Tıpkı bir eskici dükkanında olduğu gibi, bütün zamanları çağrıştıran eşyalarla kırıp kırıp dolu olduğu için hafıza dümdüz bir hikayeden kaçmak isteyen her yazar için vazgeçilmez bir hazinedir (Pamuk 1999: 140).

[(W)hat happens in The Black Book is assembled from the dark corners of memory (which is just like) a junk shop brimming with goods from multiple periods.” (my trans.)]

The dark corners of Pamuk’s memory occupy the ‘center’ of the story, in an attitude that dissolves the simple reciprocity between centre and corner, reminiscent of Gaston Bachelard’s poetic exploration of the dialectics of inside and outside in The Poetics of Space (1957). An example of this occurs when Galip looks at the bed sheet upon which a junk dealer displays his bric-a-brac:

Nesneleri büyüleyici olan şeyin aslında kendileri değil sergilenmiş şekilleri olduğunu hissetti. (1990 270)

[Galip] felt that what actually made objects enchanting did not reside in the objects themselves but in the way they were being displayed. (1996 190)

Just like the bed sheet where the junk dealer transforms bric-a-brac into enchantment, the text becomes the ground on which the writing self practices his magic.

Urban theorist-historian Spiro Kostof has noted the numerous sovereigns of Istanbul to illustrate its histories of conflict and appropriation: Constantine, the Roman Emperor and founder of the city; Justinian the Byzantine Emperor; Mehmed the Conqueror, who viewed himself as the new leader of the Eastern Roman Empire; Ataturk, the founder of the secular Republic of Turkey (1967: 189-191). Istanbul, once a contender against Rome, is a site where the revolutions of history signify conflict and antagonism. Istanbul, as it was built in

24 To illustrate the change in traditions, I would add Tayyip Erdoğan, the current Prime Minister of Turkey and the mayor of Istanbul between 1994-1998, an imam by education.
the late Ottoman period and as it exists today, belongs to different heritages. Istanbul, in other words, has a history and heritage appropriated by those who are the descendants in name only. The present inhabitants of Istanbul, with a different cultural background, appropriate and adapt the millennial past of the city in order to create their own urban space. For those who immigrated to Istanbul in the second half of the twentieth century, Istanbul is not simply a bridge between the two continents, but a frightful city of defeat, chaos and junk, from which “nothing could be expected” (112). It is a moribund city whose “revitalization” can only be started in the periphery, and in the concrete shantytowns that Galip visits during his search (112). Istanbul, for the inhabitants of the shantytowns, “remained a newly conquered city” (299). As such, revitalization is rather an act of invasion.

The chaos and alienation resulting from constant transformation come to characterize the city itself. In *The Black Book*, however, this site of conflict is one that generates not only hostility, but an inimitable poetry—a singular aesthetics of the city. The myriad stories that lay underneath the waters and the city of Istanbul are resurrected, brought to the surface and brought to life in the novel. They are resurrected as legends that haunt the present of the city. De Certeau sees legends as arts of everyday life that can serve as means of escape and fantasy: “it is through the opportunity they offer to store up rich silences and wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets everywhere, that local legends permit exits, ways of going out and coming back” (1984: 107). Istanbul is a protean city that offers multiple Istanbuls to those who know the legends, as the apocalyptic imagery of the Bosphorus reveals. Jelal’s columns personalize these legends, and through them, Istanbul.

The novel, as one of the characters contend, is “about storytelling rather than telling a story” (144). Voiced by different characters, stories circulate in the novel, uniting the inhabitants of the city as well as the characters themselves, highlighting the parallels between individual and collective stories in and of Istanbul. Jelal’s columns are displayed as the keys to the city’s secret; Galip’s search for Rüya turns into a mystical quest that parallels the Sufi
tradition of the search for the beloved. *Hüsn-ü Aşk (Love and Beauty)*, a mesnevi written by Sheikh Galip in the eighteenth century, tells the story of Aşk (love) and his journey to Diyar-ı Kalp as a quest to unite with Hüsn (beauty), only to realize in the end that the seeker and the sought for are one.

The intense intertextuality of the novel draws from Islamic and Western heritages and seems to echo the chaotic heritage of the city. The name Galip, for instance, recalls the Turkish mystic Sheik Galip; Jelal evokes the famous thirteenth century Sufi poet Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi; Hüsn-ü Aşk serves as a model for Galip’s search for Rüya. The quotations preceding each chapter, on the other hand, are taken from a variety of sources including Sheikh Galip, Rumi, Lewis Carroll, Dostoevsky, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Isak Dinesen, and Turkish writers such as Halit Ziya and Ahmet Rasim. The diverse quotations link the novel to multiple literary heritages. Thus, Jelal’s column, “We are all Waiting For Him” introduces Doctor Ferid, who reportedly wrote the story of the Grand Inquisitor and the Messiah before Dostoevsky did in Brothers Karamazov. In the same vein, in the brothel scene in “Look Who’s Here,” a hooker acts out a renowned film character, Türkan Şoray in *Vesikalı Yarım (My Disorderly Babe)*, and expects Galip, in turn, to act Şoray’s counterpart in the film.25 “Master Bedii’s Sons,”26 an account of the subterranean storehouse of mannequins that Galip visits, clearly alludes to Dante’s Inferno. Yet the storehouse, also a gallery in the style of Madam Tussaud’s, displaying authentic Turkish personas, is a plethora of stories from the Turkish past. Manufactured by a Master Bedii, only to be despised by storeowners as they look too much like the people on the streets, the mannequins are destined to remain

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25 In *Vesikali Şehir (My Disorderly City)*, Feride Çiçekoğlu analyzes the image of the female prostitute in contemporary Turkish cinema as a metaphor for Istanbul.

26 The theme and the character are repeated twice in the text: In Book I Chapter 6, Bedii Usta is recounted in Celal’s column, and in Chapter 17, the subterranean storehouse is retold as a ‘real’ place that Galip visits.
underground as they cannot imitate an ‘other.’ Just as intertextuality turns the novel into a mound of stories, the many stories about Istanbul turn the city into a palimpsest.

**The Walker**

*The Black Book* tells the search of Galip, a young lawyer, for Rüya, his wife/dream (in Turkish Rüya means a dream) who has vanished for no apparent reason, leaving behind a note of nineteen words. Suspecting that Rüya might be with Jelal, her half-brother and a renowned journalist, Galip closely follows Jelal’s column to discover their whereabouts. Jelal’s writing, alternating in the novel with the chapters that recount Galip’s search, reveals a world of hidden meanings both in his columns and in Istanbul. Printed in *Milliyet*, one of Turkey’s most prestigious newspapers, Jelal’s pieces evoke a tradition that lasted until the 1990s when, before the supremacy of TV, columnists were the stars of the media and the public, writing about a wide range of topics, from love to politics and health. Jelal’s columns thus interrupt Galip’s story, while at the same time linking it to the myriad stories recounted in the column. Galip’s search is a journey to the many faces of the city, from the headquarters of Jelal’s journal to the shantytown outside the city where Rüya’s ex-husband resides, and ultimately to the 'Heart of the City,' the old family apartment in the town centre with the same name. The 'Heart of the City' is also home to Jelal’s hideaway, a flat where, Galip discovers, Jelal stayed with Rüya. Galip takes tenancy of Jelal’s flat, reads his archive, writes in his column, and assumes his identity. As such, the novel brings to mind de Certeau’s analogy between reading and renting, where “text is habitable, like a rented apartment” (xxi). In The

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27 On a wider plane, Bedii Usta’s models delineate the will to become another on a collective level: the quest to adopt western lifestyles, at the expense losing authenticity.

28 The number nineteen is considered the 'miracle' number in Islam, one of the many proving that *The Koran* is the direct word of God. Islamic mystical traditions form one of the key themes in the novel.
Black Book, the metaphor provides the plot: Galip reads the city to reach his wife/dream and inhabits not only Jelal’s flat, but his writing.

The Black Book is a play on the parallels between reading, writing and walking. For example, in “Love Tales on a Snowy Night,” a group of people in a nightclub, including a BBC crew in Istanbul to shoot a documentary on freedom of speech and press and the club locals, tell each other stories. A tall bespectacled writer, a parody of Pamuk himself, tells a story about another writer who began roaming the streets after his wife forsook him without explanation. His walks are a means of "reading this book of life, gadding about here and there, walking the streets for hours where the city offered him each day new pages in which to read faces, signs, and stories" (144). The man is ultimately captivated by, and eventually identifies with the stories and the city itself, a motif that forms the core of Pamuk's memoir. The analogy between writing, reading, and walking recalls Paul Auster’s “The City of Glass” in New York Trilogy (1985). A parody of detective novels, the text is based on characters that read and write through their trajectories across the city. "The City of Glass" also makes use of the trope of the labyrinth to capture the urban experience. New York is “an exhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps [which] always left [one] with the feeling of being lost [...] not only in the city, but within the self as well” (Auster: 4-5). Quinn, a writer who assumes the identity of a detective he is mistaken for, starts following a man he thinks might be the real detective’s ‘identified’ suspect. Apart from the doppelganger, the novella's most memorable aspect is the graphic interplay between language and street. The suspect proves his identity by writing his message through his walks in Brooklyn. In a manner that evokes de Certeau’s pedestrian, the walkers write the urban text. Unlike De Certeau’s pedestrian, however, walking in the novel is a means not only to practice the city, but to dissolve in it:

Each time [Quinn] took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing
eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. (3)

In the novella, all that is solid melts not into air, but into the streets of New York. As opposed to de Certeau’s city-dwellers, however, Quinn is able to unravel the significance of the walk, albeit through a mental map that allows him to assume the position of an onlooker. Nevertheless, the solution of the mystery leads to the dissolution of the characters: Quinn’s identity disintegrates and the suspect disappears. In similar fashion, the story ends with the disappearance of the suspect and the dissolution of the protagonist, who also appear as shadows of other characters. The city is a space of oblivion and obfuscation. A quest for true meaning or identity is not only futile; it is lethal.

Walking and maps also feature strongly in The Black Book. Jelal (and through him, Galip) reads Rumi’s walks on the maps of Cairo and Istanbul. In “Who Killed Shams of Tabriz?” a chapter on the identity between the seeker and the sought, Galip attempts to read the signs of the city and its inhabitants, but to no avail; all he sees is himself, "the map of his own passage throughout the city these past few days" (228). Yet, Galip is no different from other city-dwellers; the quest marks all the inhabitants of the city: “all Istanbul, no matter how it was marked on the map, was teeming with folks who were on the same trip!” (229). The novel recounts an attempt to disclose the mystery behind the everyday. The mystery, however, is not resolved; the city appears increasingly enigmatic, and the identity of the protagonist/narrator becomes ever more impenetrable. Moreover, the meaning of the city can only be glimpsed through those who walk within. The walkers in The Black Book recall de Certeau’s walkers. They practice the city:

[B]ız yürüdükçe kaldırımlar ve dükkanlar anlamıyor muş. (1990 441)
It seemed as if... our passage gave meaning to shops and sidewalks along our way. (1996 318)
Istanbul exists through those who move within it.

**Urban Odyssey**

Walking through the city is a literary theme that runs through nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, from Baudelaire to Benjamin, Dostoevsky and Dickens.\(^{29}\) Perhaps a more significant parallel, especially one that positions *The Black Book* within the international scene, is with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).\(^{30}\) The theme and the parallels between the two position Pamuk’s novel within the legacy of modernist literature, a point which runs through this study as well. *The Black Book* recalls *Ulysses* in the way it mixes the illusion with the real, the old with the new, the sacred with the profane, and the ordinary with the exceptional. The image that both novels propose is in keeping with the modernist tendency to desacralise epic quests and treasured texts: the mundane details of everyday life in the city constitute the poetics of the novel. As such, the novels provide a space where, in John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury’s words, “the trivial and everyday are mythologized” (qtd. in Bradbury and McFarlane 405). There are quite a few similarities in terms of plot: walking the city, an unfaithful wife who haunts the main characters' urban peregrinations, transubstantiation (Stephen/Bloom and Jelal/Galip).

A more significant parallel between the two novels is in the parallactic, perambulatory narrative: both novels trace the main characters as they roam the city and read it as a

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\(^{29}\) Pamuk’s development of the city theme and his place in the tradition of city novelists have been treated widely, including the Nobel Speech. See Belge (1992) and Irzık (1995) for a comparison of Pamuk’s Istanbul in *The Black Book* with *Crime and Punishment*. See Bilge Mutlutay Çetintaş (2006) for a comparison with *The New York Trilogy*.

\(^{30}\) This comparison links the novel to Oğuz Atay’s *Tutunamayanlar* (*Disconnected*) (1972), the novel closest to Joyce’s *Ulysses* in Turkish, notably with the stream of consciousness technique. See Berna Moran (1994) for a comparison between *The Black Book* and *Disconnected* in terms of their (post)modern narratives.
collection of randomly juxtaposed signs, driven by a desire to locate meaning in urban space. The texts echo their walk, and ultimately both novels are about homecoming and the multiple signs of the city. These parallels between the two novels have been observed on numerous occasions. Textually, the act/practice of wandering creates a city text that is meandering, impressionistic, and fleeting. The conflicts that urge the restless peregrination about the city blend with the city itself. Thoughts unfold when walking. Yet the relationship between walking and reading is not unilinear: neither the strolls nor the thoughts we read in the text act as a conduit to cognition. On the contrary, they often work to obstruct meaning.

Labyrinthine Narrative

The main concern of The Black Book is not to present a new story, but to retell those of the past, to enrich the present (the here and now) with the stories of the past (399). In that respect, it is a novel of Istanbul, a Barthesian interpretation of the city, not giving it a meaning, but appreciating and aestheticizing its confusing plurality of meaning. The cityscape is celebrated as a site of myriad stories. The novel assembles and harmonizes these stories that imitate, obliterate, and supersede each other. Confusion is a major component of Pamuk’s aesthetics, blurring the view and playing on cognition. This confusion also works with the notion of the labyrinthine city, troubling cognition at both the textual and conceptual levels.

31 On Ulysses as a text of urban walking, see Peripatetics in the city novel, PI Barta 1996. See Episode 8, “Lestrygonians,” and 10, “The Wandering Rocks,” where the text follows Bloom’s impressions triggered by his walks in the city, whether, as in “Lestrygonians,” in pursuit of food, or as in “The Wandering Rocks,” where the narrative traces different characters’ walks in the town for different ends.

32 I use the word interpret in its Barthesian sense, as not giving a text a meaning, but as appreciating the plural it is made of. “Interpréter un texte, ce n’est pas lui donner un sens, c’est au contraire apprécier de quel pluriel il est fait” (Barthes, S/Z 11).
Galip discovers that Jelal’s writing is itself labyrinthine; a pastiche, it feeds on formulas and even cliché approaches that confound its readers with the promise of hidden truths. Yet not only Jelal’s writing, but Galip’s story, and by extension the novel itself, appear as commonplace and unoriginal. Thus, in the chapter entitled “Somebody Is Following Me,” Galip visits Jelal’s office with the hope of finding information, but soon finds himself discussing Jelal’s narrative style with another columnist. The journalist challenges the authenticity of Jelal's stories and style. He first asks Galip to tell him a story. Galip tells an account of his quest for his missing wife. The journalist then demonstrates its formulism by transforming Galip's story into a Jelalesque one:


“Good subject,” said the old columnist. “Like Poe said: a beautiful woman who dies or is lost! But the storyteller has to be more decisive. The reader doesn’t trust a writer who cannot make up his mind. Let’s see, we might finish the story using one of Jelal’s tricks. Reminiscences: the city swarms with the man’s happier memories. Style: the clues in the reminiscences are buried in a highfalutin language that points to a void. Erudite Ignorance: the man pretends he cannot figure out the identity of the other man. The Paradox: therefore, the man the wife ran off with is the man himself. How’s that? See, you can do it. Anybody can.” (1996 87-88)

The dialogue between the journalist and Galip, one of the many self-referential passages in the novel, relates to the novel on many levels, especially in terms of its poetics. The reference to Edgar Allen Poe's choice of poetic subject refers to the conventionality of the plot. Erudite Ignorance (Tecahül-i Arif in Ottoman Turkish) is a form of irony and a favorite figure of
speech in classical Ottoman poetry, which allows the poet to elaborate on the object. And finally, the Paradox refers to the twist on the doppelganger theme that marks the novel. Paradox, as insight reached through the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory ideas, is a theme that appears not only in this novel, but in much of Pamuk's work. In short, the journalist's comments do not only highlight Jelal’s poetics; they give insight into the novel's plot, mystery and many loops. In a novel already preoccupied with the search for meaning and its futility, the above passage further elaborates the impossibility of finding an authentic identity or undertaking a genuine search, while at the same time ironizing the referentiality of the story, the text and the author. The novel introduces a world where each character is a parody or imitation of another one, with no clear-cut distinctions between characters or stories.

The analogy between textual and urban space also informs the work of Walter Benjamin. Graeme Gilloch contends that Benjamin works not simply to depict, but to mimic urban experience in his discontinuous, fragmented narrative. Gilloch comments: "[i]n Benjamin's work the city is transformed into a text. The counterpart to this metamorphosis is that the text itself becomes ‘urban.’ Its formal properties mimic the very set of urban experiences to which it gives voice" (181-2). This parallel between city as text and city as labyrinth also marks The Black Book. The novel has repeatedly been referred to as a labyrinth, recreating the maze-like spatiality of Istanbul (Irzık, “Edebiyatta”; “Istanbul”). In the following passage, for example, Galip (and the reader) grope their way through the mound of details:

Galip, Karaköy'e vardıında, [eski] koltuğu gördüğü yokuşun tenhalığıyla, meydanın boşluğunun herkesin işaretlerini okuduğu bir felaketle ilişkisi olduğunu düşünmek üzereydi. Sanki yaklaşımda olan bu felaket yüzünden, sefer çıkması gereken vapurlar birbirlerine bağlanmış, iskeleler tenhalmuş, Galata Köprüsü üzerindeki seyyar satıcılar, şıpşak fotoğrafçılar, yanık suratlı dilenciler de, son günlerini dinlenerek geçirmeye karar vermişlerdi. (1990 125)
Galip was beginning to associate the deserted street where he saw [gutted] the armchair and now this forsaken square with a cataclysm for which everybody else had already read the signs. It was as if some impending disaster was the reason why ships scheduled to sail had been roped to one another, why people had made themselves scarce at the docks, and why the street peddlers, the instant photographers, and the beggars with disfigured faces who worked the Galata Bridge had all decided to take a vacation on the last day of their lives. (1996 80-81)

The armchair, which Galip recognizes during his descent from Taksim towards the Bosphorus, is one of the many odds and ends he takes for an omen, as well as a landmark in in his quest for Jelal and Ruya. Yet, these signs appear to reveal larger ‘truths.’ Sibel Irzik contends: “Whenever a secret seems to be on the verge of being revealed, it fades into a much larger pattern as only a small part of an endless network of relationships, conspiracies, and imitations” (“Istanbul” 733). According to Irzik, the parallactic narrative “creates a zoom effect by which the perspective becomes panoptical and the narrative is spatialized” (733). The space that the narrative performs is indeed labyrinthine. The language, and more specifically the syntax of the novel, presents a more controversial use of the labyrinth.

Pamuk’s language and the seeming impenetrability of The Black Book generated an unprecedented critical response in Turkish literary circles, with ongoing debates on rhetoric and literature. The long and complex sentences in the novel, abounding particularly in the first nineteen chapters of the novel, ignited a controversy over Pamuk’s use of Turkish. Pamuk was simultaneously commended and vilified for his language. The primary reason for the attacks was the change in word order, considered a sign of foreign, especially American, influence on his writing (Yücel 51). Pamuk’s trademarked periodic sentences alter the word order in Turkish (SOV) by inverting the subject and the verb or by moving the subject next to the verb. This style provides clarity to Pamuk’s periodic sentences. Yet, the word order also evokes English, a feature that is entirely lost in translation. Another controversy that can at least be partially illustrated in English concerns Pamuk’s word choice. For example, when
writing about a minaret that is part of the view on a postcard, the Turkish version adds that the minaret belongs to a mosque, a redundant qualifier that is taken out of the English translation (9). Such ambiguities are considered impediments in a text that relies heavily on intertextuality and wordplay and Pamuk have been condemned as a “bad writer who passes as a good novelist” (Koçak 138, Yücel 48).33

As opposed to this criticism, Pamuk’s use of Turkish was also praised for its innovativeness. In his linguistic analysis of The Black Book, Bernt Brendemoen declared Pamuk a pioneer of word order in Turkish writing. For Brendemoen, the unusual grammatical structure is the reflection of Galip’s feverish quest (1996: 129).34 The dislocation of the subject imitates the loss of the individual among the mound of objects. The book’s long sentences evoke the palimpsest that the city has become, with its conflicting voices, conquerors and inhabitants. The act of writing is indeed about meaning making. Yet, the meaning of the novel’s labyrinthine sentences is one that points to the opaqueness of language. Focusing on episodes like “The Day The Bosphorus Dries Up,” quoted earlier in this study, Sibel Irzik reads Pamuk’s sentences as verbal imitations of the city: “the sentences are hopelessly periodic, and their subjects get lost in a maze of clauses, like individuals in Istanbul’s crooked streets” (“Istanbul” 733). The novel also claims to translate the cityscape into writing and celebrate its own aesthetics. According to Pamuk, the narrative texture of the novel imitates the city:

33 Orhan Koçak has shown the misuse of adjectives of time, and an unrealistic representation of temporality, which result in inner inconsistency (1991: 129-133). Koçak argues that the adjectives of time that mark Galip’s doings lead to five different timings. Such inconsistencies, although in line with the general theme of the novel, are problematic as they are accompanied by problems in grammar, i.e. redundancies, which do not support any of the novel’s claims.

34 Bernt Brendemoen contends that Pamuk often inverts the subject and the verb to create specific effects. Jelal’s narration employs a more traditional style of prose, adhering closely to the SOV sentence structure. Once Galip starts writing Jelal’s column, however, the journalistic style also changes, becoming closer to Galip’s narration (129, 131).
Romanın uzun cümleleri, kendi etraflarında dönen baş dönürcü barok cümleler bana şehrin karmaşasından, tarihidenden ve bugünkü zenginliğiinden, kararsızlığından ve enerjisinden çıkmış gibi gelir. (1999 138-39)

[The periodic, dizzying baroque sentences of the novel seem to me to have sprung from the chaos, the history, and the present richness, indeterminacy, and energy of the city. (trans. mine)]

In short, the novel transcribes the city—its past and present, harmony and chaos—into writing.

With its intricacies and confusion, *The Black Book* does not simply narrate a labyrinth; it performs one. Its irregular sentences and passages make it difficult to find one's way. A labyrinth is a structure that aims to preclude exit by obscuring it. As in classical accounts of the labyrinth, each detail Galip meets within this labyrinthine text seems to provide the clue to unravel the mystery. Everything in Istanbul seems to be a sign, the decoding of which promises to be the thread that will help Galip find his way out of the labyrinth of junk that is Istanbul. Details act as Ariadne’s thread for the reader as well, with the promise of release from the maze. Yet the threads show the reader not a way out, but a way in - to the text and to the self.

**Protean Self**

Viewing the cityscape as a puzzle holds the promise of coming up with a solution. Such knowledge of the city, however, is a fiction:

Dolmuşun pencelerinden seyrettiği eskiden bildiği İstanbul değil, esrarını yeni anladığı ve sonrasıları üzerine yazacağı başka bir İstanbul'du. (1990 297)

What he saw out of the dolmuş window was not the Istanbul he’d known all along but another Istanbul whose mystery he had just cracked and would eventually set down on paper. (1996 285)
Istanbul shifts its shape and meaning for those who want to write it. At the same time, unknowability does not preclude discovery: both the self and the city can be renewed. Indeed, Galip’s altered state of mind leads to a different vision of Nişantaşı, the neighborhood where he has spent his life:

Nişantaşı’nın köşesindeyken, bir başka kişi olma isteği öyle bir kuvvetle içinde yükseldi ki, onbinlerce defa gördüğü apartman cephelerini, dükkan vitrinlerini, banka panolarını ve neondan harfleri bambaşka ve yepyeni şeyler olarak görebildiğiğini sandı. (1990 278)

On Nişantaşı Corner, the desire to be someone else arose so strongly in him that he imagined he could apprehend the façades of apartment buildings, storefronts, bank billboards, and neon signs as completely different and novel things. (1996 196)

An alternative self entails an alternative perspective of the city, whereas a different vision of the city signifies a rejuvenation of the self. Istanbul here is a multifaceted entity that shapes the individual, and a phantasmagorical being which manipulates the plot and characters. The protagonist is not the viewer but Istanbul itself, a city which has undergone major decay and destruction only to offer itself as the site for renewed meanings and practices. In this respect, Pamuk’s Istanbul evokes Italo Calvino’s Invisibile Cities (1974), where the same city shifts its shape according to the visitor’s expectations. Each time Marco Polo describes it to Kublai Khan, the city becomes another. For Marco Polo, we “take delight not in a city’s seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours” (37). Istanbul is a protean city and a Phoenix; renewing its mystery with each walker, its past becomes part of the present no matter how different the two are.

*The Black Book* ends with the assertion of the protean self. Jelal is murdered and so is Rüya, whose body is found later in the grocery store in the neighborhood. No longer able to pass for Jelal, Galip nevertheless moves to Jelal’s flat and carries on writing under his name. At the end of the last chapter, another shift in identity takes place as the narrative is taken
over by the first person (391-400). Galip’s search is mainly narrated in the third person, but 
the narration switches briefly to first person in Chapter 1 (p. 5) and 3 (p. 25) when Galip 
recounts his childhood memories to the reader. It is as if the narrator’s objectivity is 
inescapably and unconsciously infused with his identification with his protagonist. Here, the 
book evokes Judith Butler’s discussion of theories of self-recognition in *Giving an Account of 
Oneself*: “I speak as an ‘I,’ but do not make the mistake of thinking that I know precisely all 
that I am doing when I speak in that way” (37). The switch between the first and third person 
pronouns acts as a reminder of the blurred nature of subjectivity and of the ‘I’ that tells an 
other’s story. In a tone reminiscent of Rimbaud's renowned poem, in *The Black Book*, “I is an 
other.” Not only the city, but the self that narrates it is unknowable and labyrinthine. In other 
words, knowledge of the city is inseparable from self-knowledge: both are impossible. 
In a novel where each character turns out to be the echo or the ‘dream’ of an ‘other,’ 
what remains in the end are not the characters or the plot, but ‘writing:’ 

Sabaha doğru acıyla Rüya'yı hatırlıyor ve masadan kalkıp uyanmakta olan şehrin 
karanlığına bakıyor. Rüya'yı hatırlıyor ve masadan kalkıp şehrin karanlığına 
bakıyorum. Rüya'yı hatırlıyor ve İstanbul'un karanlığına bakıyoruz [...] Çünkü hiçbir 
551) 

Toward morning [Galip] aches remembering Rüya and gets up from the desk to gaze 
at the city’s darkness. I remember Rüya and, getting up from the desk, I gaze at the 
city’s darkness. We remember Rüya and gaze at Istanbul’s darkness. [...] After all, 
nothing can be as astounding as life. Except for writing. Except for writing. Yes, of 
course, except for writing, the sole consolation. (1996 400) 

Istanbul, with its myriad faces and stories, is indeed at the crossroads of all the characters in 
the novel. Istanbul unites Galip and Rüya, the seeker and the sought, in writing. The last 
passage also unites Galip and Pamuk, in the image of a writing self that gazes at the city from 
his office. The Protean quality of the viewer-narrator is thus revealed once more by the
shifting, narrating voice. The same shift also points to the unity that binds this multitude of ‘I’s together: writing as the sole consolation, Rüya as the dream, and Istanbul, with its hazy silhouette and labyrinthine streets, as the crucible where all dreams and all identities are forged into one.

Conclusion

The novel problematizes both vision and narration as means of organizing experience. Viewing, walking and writing are ends in themselves. Just as an overview does not lend us the truth of what is seen, narrative of *The Black Book* does not lead to clear understanding. The winding sentences, just like the city and its mess, lose the reader within their labyrinth. The sentences also remind us that narrative is not simply a mode of cognition, but a means of expression in which clarity or consistency may not always be the primary concern.

The cityscape that emerges from the novel is one that challenges viewing, writing and reading as acts of cognition. This polymorphous, palimpsestic city defies unitary and unified subjectivity, both locally and globally. Sibel Irzık makes the following remark:

*The Black Book* translates the defining aspects of urban life and the very precariousness of Istanbul’s identity as a third-world metropolis into aesthetic principles that contain and subvert anxieties about authenticity, generating pleasure and authority out of the knowledge of urban realities. (2006 732)

Irzık relates Pamuk’s international success to his accessible descriptions of the city for the global urbanized public. Istanbul is a phoenix city; its history consists of conquests and destructions which lay claim to the site for renewed meanings and lifestyles. In this city of ruptures and continuities, urban spaces possess the ability to transform themselves in time and survive as part of different traditions. A fictional city, Istanbul is the phantasmagorical site of multiple quests, including the ultimate consolation, the quest for narrative.