

## THREE BALKAN NOVELS ABOUT EAST AND WEST: *THE DAMNED YARD* BY IVO ANDRICH, *THE CASE OF CEM* BY VERA MUTAFCHIEVA AND *THE WHITE CASTLE* BY ORHAN PAMUK

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**ABSTRACT:** THE PAPER PUTS FORWARD THE HYPOTHESIS OF THE SUCCESSION BETWEEN TWO CONTEMPORARY BALKAN WRITERS. THE COMMON THEME OF MEETING AND CLASH OF CULTURES LINKS THE PLOTS AND CHARACTERS OF THE THREE NOVELS WHICH ARE SET FAR APART IN TIME AND SPACE (*THE DAMNED YARD* BY IVO ANDRICH, *THE CASE OF CEM* BY VERA MUTAFCHIEVA AND *THE WHITE CASTLE* BY ORHAN PAMUK). OTHERNESS AND DOUBLENESS OF THE LITERARY PAIRED IMAGES (IN MUTAFCHIEVA - CEM SULTAN AND THE PERSIAN POET SAADI, AND IN PAMUK – HODJA AND VENETIAN), HAVE THEIR MAIN CULTURAL AND EXISTENTIAL PROJECTIONS. PASSING THROUGH THE HARDSHIPS OF THOSE SOCIAL (AND COGNITIVE!) SPHERES, THE CHARACTERS, IN THE WORDS OF FERNAND BRAUDEL, DEPART AGAIN TO THE EXTINGUISHED FLAME OF „THE ARABIAN EAST”, THIS TIME HELPED BY THE WEST. BRAUDEL COMES INTO CONFLICT WITH HUNTINGTON’S CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS THESIS. THE NOVELS CONVEY THE IDEA THAT THAT CULTURE IS RATHER A PRODUCT OF BORROWING AND ASSIMILATION THAN OF DIFFERENCES AND CLASHES. IT IS HERE, IN THE BALKANS, THAT A RARE FUSION OF DIFFERENT CULTURES EXISTS BETWEEN THE SLAVIC, ALBANIAN, GREEK, ARMENIAN, JEWISH, SELJUK AND ARAB-PERSIAN CULTURE ON THE ONE HAND, AND THE CULTURE OF THE WESTERN CIVILIZATION – ON THE OTHER. THE NOVEL OF VERA MUTAFCHIEVA EXPLICATES FICTIONALLY BRAUDEL’S IDEA THAT CIVILIZATION DEPENDS ON THE RULERS, ON THE ENLIGHTENED DESPOTS. MORE THAN A DECADE LATER THE SAME IDEA WAS EMPLOYED IN ORHAN PAMUK’S *THE WHITE CASTLE*. THUS, THROUGH THESE TWO INDISPUTABLE MODERN MASTERPIECES THE CULTUROLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT OF THE BALKAN NOVEL PROSE OVERCOMES THE UNQUESTIONED RESPECT FOR THE HISTORICAL NOVEL AS THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS GENRE IN BALKAN LITERATURES.

**KEYWORDS:** CONTEMPORARY BALKAN WRITERS. DIFFERENT CULTURES CIVILIZATION BALKAN LITERATURES.

*"Why am I what I am? I became you."  
The White Castle by Orhan Pamuk  
"Because it was him, because it was me"  
Michel de Montaigne*

According to Orhan Pamuk, in the traditions of Turkish literature of the 90s of the XIX century there is a genre, which he calls *a novel about East and West*, in which the story focuses on the dangers of Westernization and the worship - imitation of the West, which results in tragicomic confusion. The esthetic perception of this genre, however, is not limited to this confusion alone. "My own novel *The White Castle* is a modest contribution to the tradition of the novel about East and West", says Pamuk<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Pamuk, O. *The Naïve and The Sentimental Novelist*, Copyright, 2010, c.113.

In the Balkan literary tradition in general this novel genre is centred around the question of how East changes West (and vice versa). It is known that certain genres and themes are often related. If we look for what Pamuk refers to as *the center of the novel* beyond the scope of the so-called genre novel, we will see that novels as different in terms of their poetics, tradition, style and theme as *The Damned yard* by Ivo Andrich (1954), *The Case of Cem* by Vera Mutafchieva (1967) and *The White Castle* by Orhan Pamuk (1985) have a common centre. This centre is the common theme about the human fate in the Middle Ages in the South-East of Europe. It is present in all three parallel novel plots. It is also in the motifs about *travel-discovery*, *intellectual knowledge* and *doubleness*, in the understanding of the role of the personality in history and the fragility of individual human fate - the famous Tolstoy's thesis voiced in Serbian, Bulgarian, Turkish, English, and then translated into many other languages.

*The Case of Cem* is a "novel about a historical figure", says Mutafchieva. Ivo Andrich in *The Damned Yard* calls his narrative about the sultan brothers Bayezid and Cem a legend. Considering the interrelations between both novels, Vera Mutafchieva refers to her Cem compared with Andrich's personage as to a loser lacking choice in history. She constantly tests readers' patience in their search for an answer to the question of who Cem is and what the case of Cem is. The answers differ, yet they are all correct: Cem is the enlightened despot who suffered from bad luck in history, but he is also the homosexual sultan-poet who was briefly and melodramatically in love with a woman (a story reminiscent of the scandalous love between Rumi Mevlyana and Shams from Tebriz). This is the dramatic story of the person who found himself in the wrong place at a wrong time in history. Moreover, it is a psychological and historical novel about the personality, and a law-court case considering matters of life and death (as Mutafchieva noted with irony).

Sultan Cem is the Count of Monte Cristo, Wilhelm Meister, Eugene Onegin and Don Quixote of the Orient. In classical novels, protagonists' travels in the East are shrouded in mystery and contemplation; East teaches them the art of sophistication, secretiveness and revenge. "As a rule, it is West that moves Eastwards, not vice versa"<sup>2</sup> - says Edward Said. Even in discovering itself, West imagines that it has travelled Eastwards, as is the case with Columbus when he discovered America. Orient is produced by the West compilation of dreams, style, fictions, paranoia and dramatized boundaries of existence beyond our own experience. West does not usually meet and get to know East on its own territory, it goes to it to meet it, which however does not happen in Mutafchieva's novel. This makes the story line in *The case of Cem* unique.

The Western man loves travelling in the East, and these travels are symbolic, historical, fatal and genre-related. There is a whole range of genres - travelogues, travelers' dispatches, novels and poetry - dedicated to travelling in the Orient. Pamuk loves this theme and focuses on it. On the other hand, there are the travels of the Eastern man to the West. Mutafchieva is the first to write about this. Andrich focuses on the theme of imprisonment and the question whether the eastern man experiences the world in the same way as the Westerner. The question is if *Westernisation*, in the sense in which Pamuk uses the term in his novels and essays, is a viable hypothesis?

The novel about Cem sultan turned into a European literary phenomenon, a case which can be positioned in the tradition of troubadour model (since Cem is a poet), in the context of

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<sup>2</sup> Said, Edw. Orientalism, London, 1977, p.62-92.

Eastern philosophy (unfathomable and unaffected by the idea of death), as well as in the tradition of the postmodern polyphonic novel<sup>3</sup>. According to Mutafchieva, however, the Balkans are dominated by an atmosphere of total semiotic, cultural and historical muteness and blindness. There is no differentiation between the way the Oriental man and the Western pragmatic type think about death and make judgments. This, in turn, makes interpretations difficult, as they have to follow the logic of intertextuality and comparative studies which are of major importance for literary studies.

Mutafchieva employs a whole range of literary devices and strategies to tell the story of Cem, which is a typical example of the tales of travel-conquests. These involve the genres of the chronicle, confession and polemics, travelogue, a story told from different points of view (of the protagonist, antagonist or a moralizer). She uses the effects of polyphony, typical of epic narrative, and the changing roles or masks of the narrator who speaks for his characters; the voice of the omnipresent yet ironically provocative narrator; the auto commentary; alternatively merging and distancing positions of the real and potential audience of the story, as well as the effects of historical, philosophical and publicist retreats in the story line.

The literary device called *a story within another story*<sup>4</sup> is a favourite with all three authors - Andrich, Mutafchieva and Pamuk, although first Mutafchieva, and later Pamuk undermine the classical scheme of incorporating smaller novels within a longer narrative; a device perfectly exploited by Ivo Andrich. In his novel *The Damned Yard* the characters - the narcissistic (Zaim,) the omniscient (Chaim), the objective (Fra Petar ) the borderline (Kamil,) - are emancipated and their stories are relative<sup>5</sup>.

It is notable that Balkan authors like Vera Mutafchieva (*The Case of Cem*), Ivo Andrich (*The Damned Yard*) and decades later Orhan Pamuk (*The White Fortress*) are attracted to the motif of Dioscures and the Double-faced Janus of the Balkans. It is known that Dioscures are associated with chaos, power struggles for the throne, dramatic doubleness and unrecognisability of the personality. The Roman double Janus, however, is different - so not surprisingly, it does not have a Greek equivalent. He is the double-faced guardian, the twin who guards the door to the temple as he guards the time (January is his month which marks the beginning of the yearly cycle). Facing both his inner self and the outer world, he is the mediator between barbarism and civilisation; youth and old age; the two genders. He is the patron of marriage, fertility and harmony.

The literary appeal of the idea of the double - the Eastern and the Western nature of the Balkan man - was born at the intersection of centuries, times and conflicts, and underwent the eternal metamorphosis of *I am You*, charged with ambivalent feelings for the other. Balkan identity was born in the turmoil and catastrophes of history. As Anthony Smith points out, identity is a product of adopting a lot of roles<sup>6</sup>. The main protagonists in the novels of Mutafchieva, Andrich and Pamuk are nearly perfect in that respect. The Balkan man acquires knowledge by adopting a variety of ethnic, class, religious, gender, territorial, family, etc. roles

<sup>3</sup> Vrina-Nikolov, M. Bulgarskiat roman v 50-60-godini na XX v.... - In: Literaturna missal, 1999, №2, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Todorov, Tzv. Poetica na prozata, Sofia, 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Spasova, D. Istoria I istorii. Hermenevtica na razkazvaneto v "Prokalnatiat dvor" na I. Andric.// <http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php?AuID=163&WorkID=10859&Level=1>.; Igov, Sv. Zatvorat: ot spomena kum simvola ("Iz uspomene jednoga političkoga patnika" na Sv. Milarov I "Prokleta avlija" na I. Andric)"// <http://litenet.bg/publish/sigov/zatvoryt.htm> / LiterNet, 04.05.2008, № 2 (102).

<sup>6</sup> Smit, A. Nationalnata identichnost, Sofia, Izd. Kr.Mab, 2000, p.14.

Mutafchieva's novel sets the impossible question about what would have happened and how the events in history would have happened if the chance had favoured one person instead of another. What would have happened if fortune had helped the poet-musician Cem to overcome the cruel, cold-blooded aggressive ruler. Cem against Bayazid? How would have our Balkan fate turned if the horror described in Voltaire's *Candid* - an enlightened monarch ruling an aggressive miscreant conquering empire? Although, according to Voltaire, Mehmet II the Conqueror was indeed an enlightened monarch, well-educated and well-versed in many foreign languages, good at arts, geography and mathematics. Bayazid too before ascending to the throne had been a dervish, spoke different languages, could sing and play musical instruments, and preach. This explains why the image of this ruler is so appealing<sup>7</sup>.

After rejecting all appeals for alliance and voluntarily giving Konstantinople to the Ottomans, Europe, out of envy or simply to save itself (at least Voltaire thought so), raised the so-called Eastern question. The question of who is to rule the South-East of Europe and the warm seas faces both East and West, although the West, according to Mutafchieva, has its own agenda. The price for our slow, obstructed and late development in the Balkans is a romantic victim - the romantic sacrifice of Zizim<sup>8</sup>.

The question of *what would have happened if...* has a disappointingly simple answer - nothing. Neither because blood does not turn into water, nor due to the extravagance of modern literature and the motif of the double, but simply because such is the human nature and the inhuman nature of power. Cem is Saadi and Saadi is Cem; all enemies or benefactors of Cem's cause become too similar, even interchangeable: D'Obusson and Kaitbai, The Pope and Bayazid, Charles and Corvinus, and so on. As for Cem, Cem-Zizim, - he is the Balkans, the antechamber of the East, absorbing all barbaric invasions - from East and West<sup>9</sup>. Caught in the abstinence of various historical doubles, the Balkans fall and rise, survive or prosper, following the same formula for survival: *I am You*.

Death is wiser than life, according to Confucius, who is Mutafchieva's favourite philosopher. This is the reason why the novel tells the story of Cem post mortem. It is a tale of his life, lived and told in a romantic and melodramatic manner, and then doomed to oblivion. Before Mutafchieva the story of Cem was told in a completely different way a decade earlier in *The Damned Yard* by Ivo Andrich.

The story-like mythological motif of the two brothers - rivals for the throne leaves Cem at a disadvantaged position of "a meek man with an unlucky fate and a wrong first step"<sup>10</sup>, who was doomed to failure. Andrich narrates the story in a distanced third person manner from the point of view of Kamil, another prisoner in the damned yard. He tells the story of Cem's travels in Egypt, on Rhodes Island, followed by his twenty-year-long Odyssey around Europe. All European rulers were generously paid for their hospitality, until the young sultan eventually died. From that moment on the coffin with his body was to be used as a bargaining chip for a long time, until in the end it found eternal rest in the royal tomb in Bursa. In

<sup>7</sup> Voltaire. *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*. Paris, 1990, p.818-819). Tzit. po: Zaimova, R. Putiat kum "drugata" Evropa. Iz frensko-osmanskite kulturni obshtuvania, XVI – XVIII v., Sofia, Kr. Mab, 2004, p.211-212.

<sup>8</sup> Tagizade-Karaca, N. *Batılı Üç Eserde 'Romantik Kurban' Cem Sultan (İvo Andriç 'Uğursuz Avlu', Vera Mutafçıyeva 'Cem Sultan' ve Eduard Sablier 'Cem Sultan - Bourganeuf Mahpusu') (Sultan Djem As Romantic Victim in Three Western Works: 'The Damned Yard' by İvo Andric, 'Sultan Cem' by Vera Mutafçıyeva and 'Djem Sultan: The Prisoner of Bourganeuf' by Eduard Sablier.)* // Bilig-Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, Kış / 2006 sayı 36: 167-186. <http://yayinlar.yesevi.edu.tr/files/article/11.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Mutafchieva, V. "Sluchayat Djem", roman, Plovdiv, 1977, p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Andric, I. *Prokalnatiat dvor*, Sofia, Panorama, 1976, p.82.

Mutafchieva's novel *Cem* is romantically rebellious yet tragically resigned and powerless before his destiny. He was happy in his lot, in the company of his alter ego - his beloved - the poet Saadi. Historically the two of them were separated in time by ages. However, in fiction anything is possible - merging reality and fiction and distant moments in time. Saadi has the dominating voice in the polyphonic intertextual and intrinsically contradictory texture of the narrative, presented as "some unspoken yet obtrusively omnipresent tribunal in a law-court trial"<sup>11</sup>.

The naive belief in the irreconcilable conflict between Europe and the Ottoman court is one of our major deceptions - says the female narrator whose voice is heard through the voices of the male narrators. This is a curious gender metamorphosis, bearing in mind the fact that only one of the narrators in the novel is a woman. The divergence of viewpoints is a manifestation of a literary "game of identities"<sup>12</sup>, full of nostalgia and intellectualism. There are feminist illusions interwoven with the male viewpoints which makes the narrative multi-faceted. The polyphonic non-linear temporality, however, does not give different viewpoints equal importance, as is the case with multi-faceted narration<sup>13</sup>. It makes the dual-natured character of Saadi stand out. Mutafchieva assumes the role of a judge and becomes a character in her novel, acting together with the other characters. This in turn creates an interesting interplay between the viewpoints of the female narrator and the poet - both of them in love with their *Cem*. They transcend time limits through a glance at the history of the second half of the 20th century. "The powerful are always on the other side of the barricade. We are always on the losing side. The fate of *Cem* and Saadi is the fate of the Eastern Block. (...) Why didn't you make a stand then? - they asked me. How can you not refer them to the philosophy of Peter the Devil"<sup>14</sup>? Mutafchieva prefers to quote Andrich's character: "There are two worlds which cannot come into contact or agreement. Two horrifying worlds doomed to fight each other in millions of ways. And between them there is a man, who fights these clashing civilisations in his own way..."<sup>15</sup>. One could add that these worlds are not necessarily marked by Huntigton's cultural and religious antagonism. It is just that sometimes a dialogue between cultures involved in a multi-cultural project is impossible. The readers of Andrich and Mutafchieva had the feeling that back then, at the end of 1960s, this fact was to be taken for granted. It is not so nowadays.

Andrich's characters Kamil and Fra Peter - a muslim and a catholic - physiologically live the life of *Cem* by telling his story. Haim the Jew does this wordlessly, following their story like a ghost. But all of them both admire and misunderstand *Cem*'s poetry, reciting it alternatively in Turkish and Italian. Kamil translates the French and Spanish quotes, although their translatability is questionable. The audience does not understand *Cem*'s drunken sprees, dramas and his infatuation with beautiful girls and boys. Kamil's story is passionate and chaotic, with no order or end. At the end Haim will resume the story of *Cem Cemshid*, "victorious or defeated, dead or alive, a slave doomed to be a sultan", "and this is slavery

<sup>11</sup> Angelova-Damianova, S. *Jenite za/ v istoriata – Chast I. Vera Mutafchieva. Istoriata I istoriite. Chast II.* // *Neslucheniati kanon: Bulgarski pisatelki ot 1944 do nashi dni* (sust. M. Kirova), Sofia, Altera, 2013, p. 223–250

<sup>12</sup> Stancheva, R. *Sreshti v prochita. Sravnitelno literaturoznanie I balkanistika*, Sofia, 2002, p.108-109.

<sup>13</sup> Vrinat-Nikolov, M. *L’Affaire Džem et Moi, Anne Commène de Vera Mutafčieva: de l’Histoire-héros à l’Histoire-prétexte.* // *La Revue des Etudes slaves*, Paris, Institut d’Etudes slaves, 2001, t. 73, fasc. 1, p. 185-195.

<sup>14</sup> Mutafchieva, V. *Izbrani proizvedenia*, Plovdiv, Janet-45, 2008, t.12, p.290-291.

<sup>15</sup> Andrich, I. *Proklnatijat dvor, ...*, p.94.

from which one cannot escape even in his death"<sup>16</sup>. Kamil lives the life of Sultan Cem. The false Cem becomes more true-to-life than the real one, and the story begins to sound like a mystification of true historical events narrated by a lunatic.

In terms of genre composition, Mutafchieva's novel is rather complex. It combines the genre features of inquest investigation, autobiography or feature, as well as an inverted model of the medieval lives of saints, reporting the post-mortem miracles performed by holy relics. The novel begins with Cem's death and ends with the travels of the coffin with his dead body, which has become a pawn in political games. The travels of Cem's beloved Saadi do not end with his death either. Long dead and cast in the sea depths, his strangled body will continue telling the story of his lover, friend and master Cem.

Orhan Pamuk's novel *My name is red* begins with the story of a dead man whose corpse lies in a well. The intriguing criminal suspense might be a deliberately sought effect created at the beginning of the novel, which corresponds with the denouement in Mutafchieva's novel. What is more, Pamuk's novels do not show the same addiction to the polyphonic, and what is more - to the multi-faceted post-modern narrative. There is a hint to the effect of multiple narrators in Pamuk's *The Black book*, which is somewhat reflected in the consciousness of the two male protagonists. There are echoes of the voices of the preacher, relatives, teachers, politicians, the crowd and the media. But the author does not go further than that. The motto of Pamuk's characters is that they should be what they are, as it is in *The Black Book*. *My Name is Red* is somewhat an exception to this rule.

The structural frame of the novel *My Name is Red* is based on the technique *narrative within a narrative*. The characters of both Mutafchieva and Pamuk feel that they discuss the humanity and make history by telling tales about themselves; and using different viewpoints they involve the reader in their arguments, provoking their empathy. The question is whether Pamuk, like Mutafchieva before him, makes use of the technique of linear polyphony. In *The Case of Cem* different identities represent the female point of view in history. In *My Name is Red* the narrators Stork, Coin, Killer, Olive, etc. eventually converge in the little Osman, the son of Shekure and Black, who is the one to write the whole story. The seemingly postmodern autonomy of the narrators and viewpoints is finally focused in the axiological personalized written narrative. The multiplied nature of the narrator strives to converge in one identity and wholeness.

Things are similar in *The White Fortress*. The Venetian and Hodzha swap their places and, at the end of the story, it is not clear who is who. Hodzha becomes the Venetian, who writes a book called *The Turk I Once Knew*. Andrich's story is much more personal and traditional in terms of narration.

Pamuk's characters in *The White Castle* are much like Mutafchieva's characters in their compulsive fatalism. After long years spent in exile in Istanbul, the Venetian remembers his other name, the names of his mother and fiancée, whom he has left behind in a dream world, in the world of his alter ego. Back then onboard a galley captured by the Turks he starts telling lies and imagining his other identities: he is a doctor who miraculously cures ill people, or a scholar, or a muslim convert who is studying Turkish. Yet he is never a common slave. A similar carnival of identities, with numerous dressings, translations, differences in gestures, moves and decisions, is demonstrated by Cem and Saadi.

<sup>16</sup> Andrich, I. Prokalnatiat dvor, ...,p.97-101.

Like Mutafchieva, Pamuk easily moves through ages and historical circumstances (which separate the real Cem Sultan from the poet Saadi), making it possible for the Venetian and the strange armless Spanish captive. The captive tells a story which is already familiar to the audience - about his granddad who, while in captivity, managed with his one hand to write a knights novel.<sup>17</sup> The reference to Servantes is obvious, and the literary mystification which is based on the captive's tale (Don Quixote), historical facts, a lost manuscript, and numerous fictitious stories which save the life of their narrator, all serve to reveal the double nature of Pamuk's novel and the novel genre in general. That is how the novel of East and West creates itself.

Cem and Saadi penetrate each other's personality by intuition; Hodzha and the Venetian - by rational logic, the analogy of equality. Whereas Cem and Saadi reproduce the model of Knight - Armour bearer, Hodzha and the Venetian are the analogue of the Antiquity model of Teacher - Disciple. Divided by their carnal heterosexual desires, the characters are united by their spiritual interests. Exploration, trials and suffering; captivity and freedom; escapade and return... Hodzha and the Venetian, much like Cem and Saadi are bound to each other, so much so that they reach the ideal of spiritual merging and bodily identification. Hodzha and the Venetian are alike as two drops of water. In captivity and exile Saadi cannot longer sing, and Cem cannot write poetry without Saadi. Their separations turns into actual physical death. The Venetian and Hodzha survive only thanks to their lie - they swap their places and each of them begins their new life - the life of *The other*. Life in a different place stimulates them to create and write. "You have to live somewhere else in order to find yourself"<sup>18</sup>, says Pamuk in his novels about the creative power of exile.

*Otherness* and *the motif of the double* are the major themes in the novel of the East and West as a genre. They have their cultural and existential dimensions which include with equal importance religion, everyday life, culture and history. As Braudel mentions, religion is at the very heart of civilisations, their past and their present. This in turn contradicts his idea of the extinguishing of the enlightening flame in the Arab East after the 12th century, when Europe took over the torch of progress. "Every single day a given civilisation borrows something from its neighbours, and is free to re-interpret it and to assimilate it".<sup>19</sup> It is what happens in the Balkans in the complicated spheres of religious behaviour and communication. Mutafchieva's novel has captured the most traumatic moment of this encounter - its beginning, when the Ottomans invade the Balkan peninsula. Braudel gives the following interpretation of this beginning: at the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 the Orthodox church chose not to unite with the Latins who could save it, but to surrender to the Turks. This happened because of Greeks' detestation of a union with Latins, by whom they were divided on the basis of theological differences... They preferred to oppose an equal force.

Therefore, what happened in the Balkans after the invasion of the Ottomans can be termed neither slavery nor colonialism, as according to Braudel "colonialism is the utter absorption of one civilisation into another". It is always the defeated who succumb to the stronger force, although their submission is always temporary, whenever there is a conflict of

<sup>17</sup> Pamuk, O. Bialata krepost, roman, Sofia, Ednorog, 2005, p.23.

<sup>18</sup> Pamuk, O. Istanbul., Copyright, 2006, Iletişim Yayıncılık A.S., p.10.

<sup>19</sup> Braudel, F., Grammaire des Civilisations, Arthaud – Flammarion, Copyright, Les Editions Arthaud, Paris, 1987. Sofia, 2014, p.67-75.

civilisations.<sup>20</sup> This is the logic in the novels of the writer, expert in the Ottomans and historian Vera Mutafchieva. Pamuk sees the things along these lines as well.

The participants in the events related to Cem Sultan's case, who died a long time ago, are now giving their accounts of the events before the court of History. Similarly, before the court of private history, the miniaturists in Pamuk's novel have to justify their transgression in using the principles of perspective in their paintings. Or they would write books or create mystifications - that is their destiny. About four decades later Pamuk writes his novels *The White Fortress* (1985) and *My Name is Red* (1998) using the same structure as the one used in Mutafchieva's novel.

The ecstatic literary critique, however, praises Pamuk for his narrative style, which resembles that of Scheherazade, Calvino, Borges or Umberto Eco. But not that of Mutafchieva. In his novels the viewpoints of people, animals, objects, infidels and true believers, conservative or modern, dead or alive, are of equal importance. It is possible in a post-modern novel to swap the place of murderers and their victims, motivated by their love and bias, rivalry and hatred. The worlds of the visible and invisible turn out to be each other's doubles. Our world is a lovely place where the boundaries of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, sublime and base, honorable and dishonored, meaningful and meaningless, life and death are blurred, so that love eventually triumphs.

Modern Bulgarian novel exploits all the viewpoints of long dead witnesses, who stand up in the merciful court of history, and the sentence they get, as Mutafchieva ironically points out, is suspended one, a judgment by default. Thus, in *The Case of Cem* all personalities have in them the features of the other. They swap their places and speak for each other, and for the author as well. They are all the faces of the Double-faced Janus, turned towards the outer world, but most of all towards their inner selves. These personalities involve:

-*The Powerful*:

Nisanci Mehmed Pasha - the Grand Vizier (he and Saadi tell the story from the world of the dead);

D'Obusson - Grand Master of the Order of Saint John (he represents the astute though hostile attitude towards foreigners, savages and infidels; his is the famous apologia of Byzantium in the novel);

John Kendal, Turkopelier in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem;

- *Poets and lovers*:

Saadi and Cem (Cem is not used as a narrator, but Saadi's account is the longest, and most touching and convincing; both of them promote the Eastern idea of non-carnal homosexual love, of its androgynous nature and doubleness. Saadi is the East ambassador; he makes the apologia of the East; he is both one's own and the other, easily incorporated within the Western world though never craving it. He is Cem's alter ego, which however is not enough for him.

Brother Bruno - Frank Suleiman (the Westerner who successfully became a loyal man of the East, driven by contradictory emotions, one of which is ...love);

The infant king Charles of Savoy. Cem-Saadi-Cherles-Suleiman is a complex quadrangle of love and common fates of exile, otherness and doubleness. They are the four

<sup>20</sup> Braudel, F., *Grammaire des Civilisations*, Arthaud – Flammarion, Copyright, Les Editions Arthaud, Paris, 1987, Sofia, 2014, p.75-76, 79.



faces of the same personality: the Ottoman-Serb, the Persian-Ottoman, the French - a child and false king, and the Italian converted to Islam.

- *Mediators - intermediaries, benefactors, killers, spies:*

Kaitbay, the Sulatn of Egypt (who represents the revanchist voice of history and wisdom); Batista Spignola (the outlaw who tries to help Cem in his escape but fails); Husein Beg, the messenger of Bayazid (the voice of honesty), Nikola of Nicosia (the murderer of Saddi); Antoine de Gimel (the actual murderer of Cem); Ayas Beg, the leader of Cem's escort (the one who said the proverbial phrase that the West will never allow the revival of Serbia, Byzantium, Bulgaria<sup>21</sup>...).

- *Women in history:* Selcuk Hatun, the aunt of the Sultan's sons (the unprejudiced view point of history); Philipina de Sasenazh, the favourite-spy (an embodiment of the West's strangeness - its loose morals and the emotional reaction to the world. She too is Cem's alter ego - female and Western).

History is made by those who write it. In the novel the writers/ narrators are not the rulers - sultans, popes or kings, but spies, outlaws, servants, travel companions, prison guards, messengers and heralds, killers and cheating lovers. So, it is neither Cem, nor Bayazid, Pope Alexander Borja or even king Matias, so important for the Christian cause, who are important in human history. The main importance in Mutafchieva's novel is given not to the personality but to the impersonal or historically impossible figure in history. The figure of the anti-hero. The figure of the Other. Her novel is about our own recognised, embraced or rejected Balkan Otherness.

*The Case of Cem* is a novel about life and death. More so about death, which would not let go of those who have felt its breath (Tanpinar). It is a novel par excellence Balkan, as it is about the Eternal Return to the small world of man, a world in which there is no alternative. Where the guesswork formulae of *What would have happened if* and *If only...* - the fictional, literary and melodramatic pipe dreams are not possible. Where the idee fixe of happiness - so very Eastern and so not-Western is doomed. Moreover, it is uncertain if these ideas really affect the larger audience and have a role in the history of humanity.

*The Case of Cem* is not a historical novel; it is a novel about the history of man - says Vera Mutafchieva. Isn't this true of all great Balkan novels which touch upon history and the theme of East and West? The novel of East and West, read through the terminological metaphor of Orhan Pamuk, is actually based on light touches, relationships and identifications. This is so because the other name for the *novel* is *love*.

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<sup>21</sup> Mutafchieva, V. Sluchayat Djem, ..., p.277.