

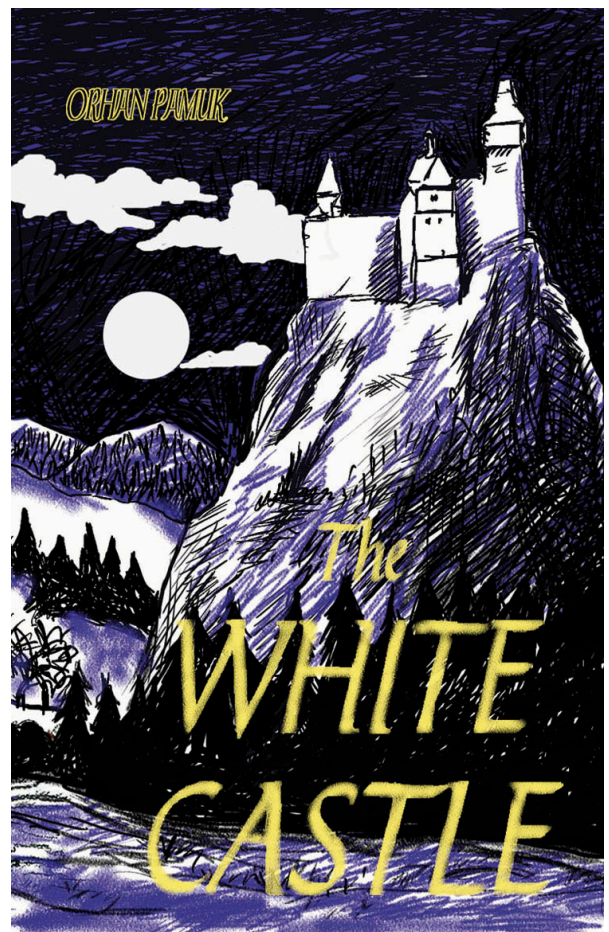
Faber Firsts

## The White Castle by Orhan Pamuk

80 **ff**

### The White Castle by Orhan Pamuk In brief

The White Castle is a work of historical and philosophical fiction set in the 17th century. A young Venetian scholar and engineer is sailing to Naples when he is captured by Turkish pirates and taken to Istanbul, where he is put up for sale at a slave market. He is bought by a minor Turkish courtier and savant, Hoja, who is his exact physical double. Hoja is enthusiastic to learn and absorb as much as possible about European intellectual advances, as a way to return the Ottoman Empire to a position of superiority. As such, he forces the narrator to teach him everything he possibly can. Inevitably, this trading of both knowledge and confidences leads to a relationship more complicated than simple master and slave. When they are enlisted to fight in the Sultan's army at the White Castle, the potential for reversals of fortune is realised.





## Background

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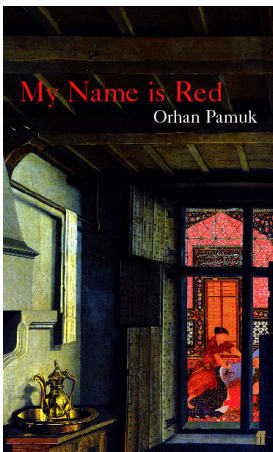
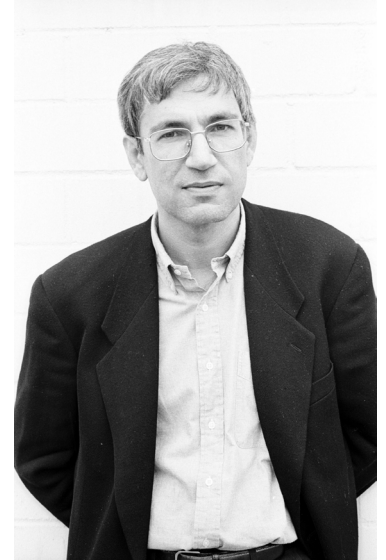
## For discussion

- The central question in *The White Castle* is trying to find out 'Why I am what I am'. But do you think this is answerable?
- Critics have said that the real drama in *The White Castle* takes place within the characters, rather than without. Would you agree with this?
- Do you still believe in the novel as an adventure story, or do you find it simply allegorical?
- Can you think of any other novels that take on the challenges of discussing ideas of identity? How do they compare to *The White Castle*?
- What do you think that the war engine that the men construct represents?
- Do you think that the author's strengths lie as a storyteller or a philosopher? Which do you think he would prefer to be seen as?
- Towards the end of the novel, the narrator asks 'Wasn't inventing and listening to diverting stories the pleasantest part of life?' Discuss.
- *The White Castle* could be said to be about the power of fiction itself – what do you think?
- The novel is set in 17th century Turkey. How much of an accurate picture of that time and place do you feel that you get from reading it? How important is that to you?
- Had you guessed what the 'twist' at the end of the novel was? Did it make you want to look back at certain passages and re-read them in a different light?
- There is no dialogue in the novel. How does this affect your reading of it? What do you think Pamuk was hoping to achieve with this technique?
- What point to think Pamuk is making about the sharing of knowledge, particularly science?
- Why do you think Pamuk focussed on the White Castle as the title for the novel, rather than any of the other symbols in



## About the author

Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul in 1952 and was educated in the city, graduating from the Institute of Journalism at the University of Istanbul in 1976. During the 1980s he assumed a position as visiting scholar at Columbia University, conducting research and writing *The Black Book*. After a period returning to Istanbul, then became a Fellow with Columbia's Committee on Global Thought. In 2003 he won the International IMPAC Award for *My Name is Red*, and in 2004 Faber published the translation of his novel *Snow*, which Margaret Atwood called 'essential reading for our times'. *Istanbul*, a memoir of his life in the city, was short-listed for the BBC FOUR Samuel Johnson Prize and described by Katie Hickman in the *New Statesman* as 'an extraordinary and transcendently beautiful book'. In 2006, shortly after a period when a criminal case was opened against him for his comments on the Armenian Genocide, he became winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He now lives in Istanbul.



## Resources

<http://www.orhanpamuk.net/>

The author's official website

[http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/12/19/051219ta\\_talk\\_pamuk](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/12/19/051219ta_talk_pamuk)

Orhan Pamuk on his trial

## Suggested further reading

### Fiction

Our Ancestors - Italo Calvino

Mehmet, My Hawk – Yasar Kamal

One Hundred Years of Solitude – Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Various Works - Proust

The Name of the Rose - Umberto Eco

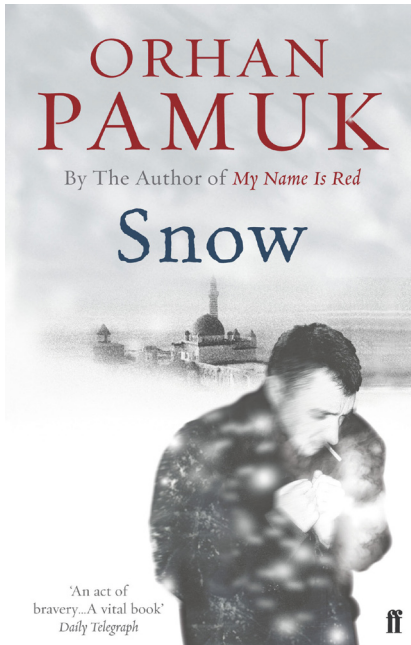
The Maze – Panos Karnezis

Midnight's Children – Salman Rushdie

Various Works - Kafka

### Non-Fiction

Lord of the Horizon: A History of the Ottoman Empire – Jason Goodwin



## Other books by Sylvia Plath

### Fiction

The Black Book, translated by Maureen Freely

The New Life, translated by Güneli Gün,

My Name is Red, translated by Erdem M. Gökner

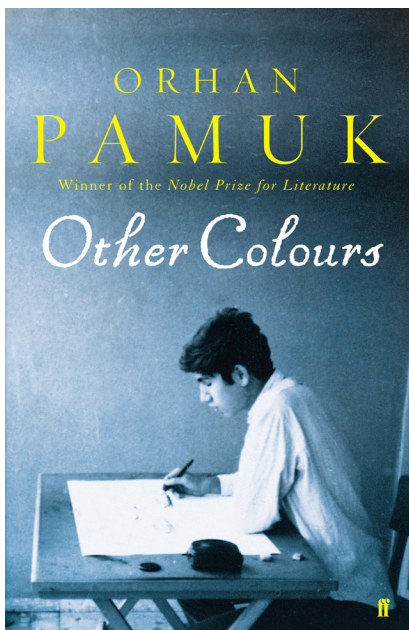
Snow, translated by Maureen Freely

### Non-fiction

Istanbul: Memories of a City

Other Colours: Essays and a Story, translated by Maureen Freely

My Father's Suitcase: The Nobel Lecture



80 ff