

Welcoming Address to the honorand

Lucia ATHANASSAKI

Friend of literature, winner of many prizes, Orhan Pamuk;

THE University of Crete, the School of Philosophy, and the Department of Philology honour you today for your contribution to world literature. The Nobel Prize which was awarded to you in 2006 does not represent only the international recognition of your work, but it promotes its wide dissemination through translations into many languages and its appeal to a great variety of literary traditions.

I am sure that my own experience with your work is representative: I was first acquainted with it in English when I glanced at the English translation of your spiritual autobiography, *Istanbul*, on a table at Blackwell's. Although it is now a few years since I read *Istanbul*, I still remember how impressed I was with your contemplative stance towards different cultural traditions and the way they influence the literary and visual representations of the world.

I have not had the chance to do the necessary research that would allow me to examine the relationship of *Istanbul* with the rest of your work. Your descriptions, however, of the western traditions of visual representations of your native city dictated which of your books I would like to read next. *My Name is Red* was my next choice, this time in a Greek translation. I chose this book for its topic, miniature painting, but I feel that the treasure I discovered is not only visual, but literary as well.

I must confess that I have not yet reached the end of this fascinating book. Yet, since both in your spiritual autobiography and in this novel you focus on the differences between western and eastern tradition, I would like to say a few words only about their similarities and, more precisely, their common starting point that a reader of my background, a classicist, discerns. The most impressive starting point that western and eastern traditions share is their emphasis on creativity, not origi-

nality, an emphasis that characterizes not only the visual traditions you describe, but Homer's poetry, usually considered the first work of western literature.

In *My Name is Red* we read that the miniaturist's virtue is to paint exactly like the old masters. To put his signature on his miniature is an act of *hybris* that brings punishment. Reading about all this I was thinking of what is said about the Homerids, and it came as no surprise when I read that some of these miniaturists had lost their sight. Nevertheless they paint, because it is possible to paint with the soul's eyes. This is an unmistakable similarity that brings close your miniaturists to the epic singers, the Muses' disciples, who are blind and sing—not their own original tales, but the tales that the Muse dictates to them. Modern comparative research in the Serbo-Croatian traditions showed, however, that although the Serbo-Croatian poets claim that they repeat traditional tales faithfully, this is not true. Every new version they sing is a new version that differs from the previous version. Yet their conviction that they sing exactly the same tale shows how deep is their belief in the value of tradition—and this is precisely what your novel brings out as well. Your miniaturists value tradition.

Before yielding the floor to my colleagues in the Department of Philology, I cannot resist the temptation to say a few words not only about speaking animals, but about speaking artifacts in the Islamic and Ancient Greek traditions. In *My name is Red* the Dog protests vehemently and argues that at the root of people's unjustified low esteem for his species is Mohamed's love for his cat, a love that is the beginning of all dogs' misfortunes. Beginning with Achilles' immortal horses, Xanthus and Balius, a host of animals—foxes, hedgehogs, hawks—speak in Ancient Greek Literature, both in epic poetry that has deep roots in the traditions of song culture, but also in the poetry that self-confidently declares its break and independence from the tradition. Finally, the speaking artifact: a miniature of a tree tells us its woes, namely how robbers destroyed the book to which it belonged, how this particular page was saved, etc, with the result that the miniature acquires an identity problem: where does it belong after all these adventures? We have speaking artifacts in the Ancient Greek world too: elaborate monuments, as for instance the statue of Phrasiclea on her tomb, speaking through the famous inscription. Other statues utter preemptive curses against whoever may try to vandalize them.

I attempted this brief comparison not in order to imply that you have been influenced by Homer and the Ancient Greek civilization. Like English and French studies, for instance, Classical studies too have recognized issues related to an anxiety of influence and how writers deal with these issues. With regard to your work, however, and although I would not like to exclude the possibility that Homer exercised influence on you, I chose not to explore the issue of influence. I focused on common origins simply in order to foreground the deep common springs of human experience and inspiration that fertilize the thought and the art of all those whom the Muses love in East and West. This is what I will point out to our students when I encourage them to read the work of the new Doctor of Philosophy of our School.

And with this glance into the future I express my thanks to the Department of Philology and to my colleagues in the Division of Byzantine and Modern Greek literature for their excellent initiative, and I welcome you, Orhan Pamuk, to our School as an Honorary Doctor of Philology.

Welcome to our School!



Orhan Pamuk speaking. Beside him, professors
Angela Kastrinaki, Alexis Kalokairinos, Lucia
Athanassaki, and Manolis Patedakis.

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