

Directional Tensions in *Snow*

Osman Firat Baş

Introduction

I borrow the term “directional tensions” from the Polish polymath, artist painter, writer, playwright, art critic and visionary, Witkacy.¹ We all know how he died. Having learned that the Red Army crossed the eastern border of Poland, he committed suicide on September 17, 1939. He knew that his catastrophic vision came to fruition and he did not want to live in a world that he could neither accept nor change. Perhaps, he decided that taking his own life would be better than submission.² We do not know the details. We do not know whether his suicide would satisfy a Western intellectual for whom “in his fantasies, suicide was a solemn ceremony with sleeping pills and whiskey, a final act performed alone and of one’s own free will.”³ We only know that Witkacy took a large dose of Veronal and cut his veins.⁴ At the time, he was 54 years old. Orhan Pamuk, a Turkish writer and author of *Snow* (2002), was 54 when he was awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature.⁵ In *Snow*, Pamuk predicted the inevitable victory of the counterrevolution in Turkey, which was supposed to finally put an end to the secular Republic proclaimed in 1923:

Veiling as it did the dirt, the mud, and the darkness, the snow would continue to speak to Ka of purity.
[...] [T]he snow [...] seemed to have swept everything off to another world, a world beyond time [...].⁶

¹ P.I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, Biblioteka Zet, Warsaw 1932, p. 21 <<http://rcin.org.pl>> [date of access: 8 May 2019].

² O. Pamuk, *Snow*, translated by Maureen Freely, New York 2005, p. 134.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16. For example, Sunay Zaim, an actor and one of the leaders of the “theatrical revolution” in Kars, has a completely different idea of suicide than Ka, although he had also read Western literature (“Sartre and Zola”) in his youth (*Snow*, p. 201). He turns his suicide into an avant-garde show. He even manages to criticize the audience in his final monologue: “They know nothing about modern art, they’ll never be modern!” (*Snow*, p. 404).

⁴ C. Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, New York 1981, p. 11.

⁵ Orhan Pamuk was awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006, when he was 54 years old.

⁶ O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 9, 19.

It is possible that when the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey in 2002, many Turks were reading the above-quoted descriptions of falling snow that would continue for many pages. However, it is only from today's perspective that we can read Pamuk's metaphor of heavy, thick, and deep snow, that sweeps everything off, as the arrival of new (sic!) times, especially when we remember that "the abbreviation AKP could in fact be read as AK Parti, or the White Party, pointing to the group's purity and transparency."⁷ Thus, we can arrive at a somewhat premature conclusion about the symbolic meaning of the pseudonym of the main character of *Snow*: Ak and Ka are mirror images of the same face. Perhaps they are for one another "someone else who reflects" a star we all carry "and everyone carries this reflection like a secret confidante in the heart."⁸

I refer to Witkacy not without reason. I find in Witkacy's aesthetic theory certain assumptions that could help me define the purpose of this article. I realize that Witkacy did not consider the novel to be "pure art," because for him it was a genre in which the author could not overcome life.⁹ And in the case of *Snow*, this "life" is primarily political, even though the novel itself is not, in traditional terms, realistic.¹⁰ Even the city of Kars, which is meant to symbolize Turkey, is not real(istic) Kars.¹¹ Thus, in *Snow* "the ingredients of life are secondary";¹² the novel deforms and parodies life "for artistic purposes [...] for the purpose of the structure."¹³ *Snow* could be conceived of as an "artistic perversion" that, nevertheless, is rooted in reality by means of the protagonist – a poet who believes that his "poems must be a sign, a symbol of something extremely important"¹⁴ and who belongs to a nation that uses "a code of double meanings with great ease."¹⁵

In this article, I will attempt to unravel the encoded and deformed fragments of *Snow*, arguing that their similarity to real phenomena endows them with directional tensions.¹⁶ Then, I will try to define the essence of the book's structure and explain Pamuk's political views, which he hides behind this particular structure, because:

⁷ I. Miszczak, *Antalya, Side i Alanya: Przewodnik Turcji w Sandatach*, Antalya 2015, p. 75. "It should be added that using the abbreviation AKP is forbidden. The president of AKP and the current president Erdoğan accuse those who use this (official) abbreviation of being rude: «Those who call us AKP are rude and defamatory». Prime Minister Erdoğan pointed out that the abbreviation of the name of his party is AK and not AKP: «And those who use the abbreviation AKP are rude. AK [white] expresses purity, justice and development. And if you do not use AK in this sense, you defame the party. [...] Everyone should use the abbreviation AK.» [translation mine, OFB], <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bize-akp-diyenler-edepsiz-iftiracidir-11791871>> [date of access: 18 Dec. 2018].

⁸ O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 118.

⁹ P.I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, p. 24.

¹⁰ "Snow is a political novel. [...] But it is also a surreal fantasy" [translation mine, OFB]. Interview with Orhan Pamuk by Ruşen Çakır, <<http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/131480.asp>> [date of access: 16 Dec. 2018]. Indeed, even if we do not focus on its formal features, the very fact that *Snow* is critical of modernism is enough to classify this novel as postmodern.

¹¹ "Throughout its history Kars turns out to be more leftist, more social-democratic when compared to Turkey as such. Kars is a city in which the left was very popular. But I also wanted to talk about the Islamist political movement. And there is no such movement in Kars" [translation mine, OFB]. Interview with Orhan Pamuk by Ruşen Çakır.

¹² P.I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴ O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 294.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁶ P.I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, p. 16.

a work of art must be borne out of the artist's psyche; all his thoughts, feelings and dreams constitute indispensable elements of a work of art. [...].¹⁷

Snow is full of symbols and allegorical references to real people, phenomena and events, all of which we cannot interpret in an ahistorical perspective. For example, the Turkey national football team suffered two, and not one, bitter defeats against England. A famous Turkish goalkeeper took part in one of those matches; however, it did not happen in the 1960s, but in the 1980s. The poor man conceded eight, and not eleven, goals. And what is this retired goalkeeper and a future member of the National Intelligence Organization¹⁸ doing on the stage of the National Theater in Kars? Is he telling the story of how he did not concede eleven goals?¹⁹ For precisely such deformations contribute to "artistry, i.e. the whole structure and respective tensions"²⁰ by means of which Pamuk shows reality. The fact that this inglorious football match is mentioned in the novel, even in a grotesque and caricatural form, points to a structure that by definition cannot be "devoid of content, because no true work of art can achieve that."²¹ In the present article, I must limit myself to deciphering only a few signs "caked with snow" and therefore "impossible to read"²² (though they are quite clear to the average Turkish intellectual; however, in translation, they must acquire an almost abstract quality). In fact, I do not think that the analysis of all signs found in *Snow* is necessary, because every, even the smallest, component of the structure reveals the meaning of the whole. Indeed, every conceded goal contributes to the defeat. But who suffers this defeat?

School

The two ideas that Pamuk collides in the Turkish National Theater are united not only in terms of contradictions, but also origins. Both ideas date back to the nineteenth century. They were conceived by the Ottoman intellectuals in order to prevent the inevitable collapse of the Ottoman Empire. One faction of the of The Young Ottoman movement was inclined to "appeal to native Muslim traditions,"²³ which were shattered when the last sultan and the Sunni Caliph fled on a British ship to Malta.²⁴ The second faction of the of The Young Ottoman movement believed that the state could be reborn by rejecting religion and tradition.²⁵ One of the proponents of the latter solution was Namık Kemal (1840-1888) – a writer, publicist, poet, and "father" of modern Turkish literature.²⁶ Kemal was the author of the play *Vatan yahut Silistre* ("Fatherland; or, Silistria"), to which Pamuk ironically refers in his fictional grotesque play *My Fatherland or My Headscarf*. Namik Kemal's play "was a call to fight for the integrity of the

¹⁷Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 524.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 177.

²⁰P.I. Witkiewicz, *O czystej formie*, p. 28.

²¹Ibid., p. 15.

²²O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 5.

²³T. Wituch, *Tureckie przemiany. Dzieje Turcji 1878–1923*, Warsaw 1980, p. 27.

²⁴Mehmed VI Vahideddin, the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, "on November 17 [1922] escaped from his palace and boarded a British warship that sailed to Malta." J.P. Łątka, *Turcja*, Poznań 2017, p. 198.

²⁵T. Wituch, *Tureckie przemiany...*, p. 27.

²⁶P. Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz, M. Borzęcka, M. Labęcka-Koecher, *Historia literatury tureckiej. Zarys*, Wrocław 1971, p. 180.

fatherland and for the rights of the nation. The play met with an extremely enthusiastic reception. The youth organized anti-government demonstrations during its stage productions. [...] The play was banned. Kemal was arrested and exiled to Cyprus.”²⁷ Let me at this point emphasise perhaps an obvious thing, which is nevertheless crucial for my argumentation: monarchy detests and rejects democracy and freedom of speech.

Although in *Snow My Fatherland or My Headscarf* is only a parody of the original, it is revealed that it was once exciting for viewers, especially for the youth in the 1930s. Apparently, there were times, which Ka finds out directly from the author of the play, when students cried during the performance. The play was often performed in small theater halls, for example, in a state high school in Kars, which used to “house an Armenian hospital”²⁸ (supported by wealthy local Armenian families). In the culminating moment of the play, the lycée students and progressive university students²⁹ cheered and wept with emotion.³⁰ Let me at this point emphasise a different thing: to believe that young people in the 1930s were so enthusiastic about the play and the newly founded republic because they had been subjected to ideological indoctrination would be to underestimate the impact of the reforms carried out by the Kemalists. The Kemalist revolution could be characterized as authoritarian³¹ – it must have been, since it had its origins in “rotten” theocratic monarchy and not in democracy. Nevertheless, the revolution could also be characterized as a “grassroots movement,” since the masses supported the postulates of modernization, economic development, education and national pride. Indeed, many young Turks and Kurds from lower classes (petty-bourgeois and peasants) joined the revolution, believing in the Enlightenment ideas of the new republic.³² The first generations of these young idealists, born as free and equal citizens and not as the subjects of the Sultan, sincerely believed in the Kemalist revolution, considering it a big step in the right direction and a certain stage that must be overcome in order to move forward. They wanted to transform the young state into a more democratic and just country. Thus, “quite a few Kars youth who would go on to become Marxists and sworn enemies of the West in the 1960s had swallowed their first fish oil tablets” in the state high school in Kars.³³ The Kemalist revolution was petty-bourgeois at heart, because the Ottoman bourgeoisie consisted primarily of tradesmen of various nationalities, mostly non-Muslim (Greeks, Jews, Levantine, Armenians). Such diversity was typical for such a multinational state as the Ottoman

²⁷Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 180.

²⁹Ibid., p. 190.

³⁰Ibid., p. 190.

³¹Chudziak gives a good example of Kemalist authoritarianism and points to a very interesting paradox: “In the early days of the republic, the most radical forms of repression were used in the region of Dersim. [...] Its population, mostly Alevi Kurds, spoke zaza.” In 1937, the tribal leaders “rebelled. The army brutally pacified the entire province, using bombs, chemical warfare and violence. [...] The authorities of the secular Turkish Republic were merciless towards Alevi Kurds.” Despite this, the descendants of the victims of this pogrom “who live in different provinces still love the first president and usually vote for the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP).” M. Chudziak, *Atatürk fantazmatyzowany. Ludowe wyobrażenia o założycielu Republiki Tureckiej*, „Sensus Historiae” Vol. XXI, 2015/4, p. 133-170. Chudziak tries to explain this paradox, but I believe that it demonstrates that the republic was and still is a symbol of hope for many people, despite its shortcomings.

³²P.J. Shaw and E.K. Shaw confirm my thesis about the first years of the Republic: “the Turkish republic adopted a constructive policy based on a positive self-image and optimistic assessment of its future as a nation. Crucial to the success of this attitude [was] the psychological impact of having won the War for Independence [...]” P.J. Shaw, E.K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey 1808–1975*, Cambridge 1976, p. 373.

³³O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 180.

empire.³⁴ But such a diversified social group could not lead the national³⁵ bourgeois revolution.³⁶ That is why when the war for independence ended, the Kemalists immediately began to build a Turkish bourgeoisie,³⁷ which was supposed to take over the private box in the National Theater which used to belong to “Kirkor Qiznieciyaii, a wealthy leather manufacturer” and “his family, dressed from head to toe in fur.”³⁸ Pamuk and his childhood friend Ka are intellectuals who are organically associated with the Turkish bourgeoisie, which appropriated the Turkish state:

Raised in Istanbul amid the middle-class comforts of Nişantaş [...]. In the westernized upper-middle-class circles [...].³⁹

Ka stands out as the member of the Istanbul upper middle class, because he always wears a “German charcoal-gray coat” that protects him from evil forces.⁴⁰ The magical power of the coat could be felt for some time. For example, when Ka was summoned to the police station to identify the killer of the director of the training center the day after the “theatrical putsch.” Police officers treat Ka and his German coat well.⁴¹ “There is nothing to be afraid of,” the interrogating officer says to Ka⁴² even though “[Ka] saw lines of young men awaiting interrogation; they were handcuffed to one another, and it was obvious they had been badly roughed up; their faces were covered with bruises.”⁴³ Brutal towards the youth, the officers do not even touch Ka because of his “expensive” coat – they do not harm him because he can have influential and powerful friends.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the police station is located in the same building where the high school and the Armenian hospital used to were.

The hospital is not the only Armenian remnant in Kars. Walking around the snowy city, Ka sees an Armenian town hall, an old Armenian church, and an abandoned Armenian tenement house, which reminds him of the local population and the deportations.⁴⁵

³⁴N. Başaran, *Türkiye’de Modernleşmenin Bürokrasi mi Burjuvazi mi? Türkiye Burjuvazisinin Doğuşu ve Modernleşmenin Sınıfsal Temelleri Üzerine*, „Gelenek” 2012, no. 117 <<https://www.gelenek.org/turkiyede-modernlesmenin-faili-burokrasi-mi-burjuvazi-mi-turkiye-burjuvazisinin-dogusu-ve>> [date of access: 9 Jan. 2019].

³⁵The term “Anatolian” bourgeoisie is probably more apt, because, in my opinion, Kemalist nationalism, even in its initial phase, was not (and could not be) based on ethnicity. It had its roots in Asia Minor, where the Muslim population with Turkish roots was the majority (97.3%). “Ankara [...] represented new Anatolian Turkish interests [...]. The new state was not based on the notions of the dynasty, empire and religion, but on the emerging Turkish nationalism” (J.P. Łatka, *Turcja*, p. 201). Therefore, the Constitution of 1924 stated that “All Turks, regardless of their race and religion, are Turkish citizens” (P.J. Shaw, E.K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire...*, p. 383).

³⁶K. Boratav, [in:] *Türkiye Tarihi*, ed. P. Akşin, 4. Cilt, İstanbul 1987–1995, p. 270.

³⁷They had to because as a result of World War I, the Greek population was reduced to 120,000 (from 1,800,000 people), while the Armenian population was reduced to 100,000 (from 1,300,000). P.J. Shaw, E.K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire...*, p. 561.

³⁸O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 159.

³⁹Ibid., p. 18, 22.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 140.

⁴¹They later hit him in the face to make him reveal the whereabouts of Blue but is it. The poet intuitively feels that as a representative of the upper middle class, he will not be tortured any longer. Ibid., pp. 423-424.

⁴²Ibid., p. 178.

⁴³Ibid., p. 179.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁵The deportations of Armenians took place in the years 1915–1916 during the rule of the Young Turks.

Asymmetry

The cells in which young Islamic and Kurdish nationalists are held were once (in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) filled Turkish and Kurdish “leftists and democrats,”⁴⁶ “secularist intellectuals,”⁴⁷ progressive intelligentsia, leftist youth, workers and union leaders. They were the victims of each subsequent military coup. They were “murdered on the streets by different political groups,” “tortured, murdered,” because they stupidly, as Ka thinks, tried to stand up for “idiotic, often dangerous beliefs.”⁴⁸ And those stubborn, foolish and disobedient people, who had survived these years of political assassinations and repressions, were killed by the Islamists in the 1990s:

a former Muslim cleric who eventually became an atheist tried to point out inaccuracies in the *Quran* (one bullet in the back of the head); an editor in a newspaper who referred to women in headscarves as black widows (he and his driver were assassinated); a columnist who was searching for the links between Turkish fundamentalists and Iran (his car blew up when he turned the key in the ignition).⁴⁹

When these prominent writers and journalists died,⁵⁰ they were replaced by caricatural “official” intellectuals described in *Snow*. They were appointed by the authorities who “faked spontaneous approval from the masses, hailing the new developments in the social life.” Ka, an “organic” intellectual of the ruling class, will be assassinated for treason, but we do know whether he pays this price for betraying Blue⁵¹ or betraying his social class (by being moved to tears by the death of a poor student of the Koranic school in a deadly putsch). Wearing his gray German coat and perhaps remembering his romantic leftist youth that he now wants to forget, Ka “leaned forward [...] and kissed [the dead boy] on both cheeks.”⁵² Ka also faces a sheikh “who stands on the right side of the state”⁵³ and Sunay Zaim, a Jacobin agitator, for whom Ka’s gray coat is more valuable than Ka himself.

Just to keep you from getting holes in your nice coat, I’ll give you a bodyguard.⁵⁴

Ka also deals with “the apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively.”⁵⁵ For example, Ka faces Z Demirkol, a writer and a communist poet famous in the 1970s, who is now a nationalist, fighting his old friends who tried to protect the secular republic against the Kurdish guerilla and religious fanatics.

Some cynics claimed that [they] had been agents of the state from the very beginning anyway.⁵⁶

⁴⁶O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 144.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 314. Pamuk refers here to real people, respectively to: Turan Dursun (1934–1990), Çetin Emeç (1995–1990) and his driver Sinan Ercan, Uğur Mumcu (1942–1993).

⁵⁰*Ibid.*.

⁵¹Ka was jealous of Ipek and he betrayed Blue.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵⁵A. Gramsci, *Hapishane Defterleri. Seçmeler [The Prison Notebooks]*, transl. By Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London 1999, p. 145.

⁵⁶O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 162.

They manipulated the public through acts of terror. Ka also deals with Blue, “a fierce enemy of the Republic, blood-stained Islamic terrorist paid by Iran, a leftist, an atheist, a Muslim, a jihadist, a poet.”⁵⁷ Blue is also an agent of the state who knows perfectly well that “in this country one can do such things only with the support of the military.”⁵⁸ But does the military support him? As Blue explains to Ka:

- You can’t write anything about the suicide girls now.
- Why not?
- Because the military doesn’t want anything written about them either.
- I’m not a spokesman for the military, Ka said carefully.
- I know.⁵⁹

In the light of the above, I argue the following: military coups that have taken place in recent Turkish history on average every 10 years,⁶⁰ seemingly in the name of Atatürk, though each time with a different slogan on the banners (“We must protect the secular state, Atatürk’s heritage, and democracy” or “We must protect the state threatened by right-wing and left-wing terror”⁶¹), were merely social engineering attacks. Their main goal was to suppress and transform the consciousness of the lower classes, which, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, could become a threat to the interests of the ruling class. The coups were welcomed by the “Istanbul bourgeoisie,” i.e. Ka’s family and friends (“It was perhaps to hide the fact that they felt happier and more secure during military coups, that the middle- and upper-middle-class families of Ka’s childhood in Istanbul were in the habit of quietly ridiculing the silly actions”⁶²). They were probably also welcomed by “hundreds of people who were arrested, dozens of whom were subjected to executions and torture, while many simply disappeared”⁶³ during the military rule in Turkey (1980-1983). From this perspective we know that the so-called postmodern coup d’état of 1997,⁶⁴ to which Pamuk refers in *Snow*, was not orchestrated in the name of the secular state. In fact, this coup looks as if it was the penultimate act of the play that had

⁵⁷Ibid. pp. 195, 401, 381.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 382.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 226.

⁶⁰Not including the “e-putsch” of 2007 (“The military has posted an ultimatum on its website, warning the Justice and Development Party (AKP) against endorsing Abdullah Gül as president.” M. Walków, E. Holodny, *Przewroty wojskowe w Turcji. Armia nie pierwszy raz wystąpiła przeciwko rządowi*, <BusinessInsider.com>, 2016 [date of access: 12 Jan. 2019]) and the last unsuccessful coup that took place on the night of 15 July 2016. The Turkish army staged a “coup in 1960 and 1980” and forced “the ruling government to resign twice (in 1971 and in 1997)” (J.P. Łątka, *Turcja*, p. 222). The coup of 1980 was the bloodiest one. For me, this coup marks the beginning of the Islamic rule in Turkey, because it “has reconciled Atatürk’s heritage and ethnic nationalism with Islam. The result was the so-called Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which gave rise to the official policy of remembrance” (M. Chudziak, *Atatürk fantazmatyzowany...*, p. 156-157).

⁶¹A. Pawlak, *Turecka specjalność: wojskowy zamach stanu*, <<https://www.dw.com/pl/turecka-specjalność-wojskowy-zamach-stanu/a-19404384>> [date of access: 12 Jan. 2019].

⁶²O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 173.

⁶³M. Walków, E. Holodny, *Przewroty wojskowe w Turcji...*

⁶⁴“The 1997 coup, one of several coups in the post-war history of Turkey, is called the ‘postmodern’ or ‘soft’ coup d’état. Refraining from violence, the army presented Erbakan with an ultimatum. The army sent tanks to a demonstration in Ankara, forcing the government to resign. [...] Erbakan tried to emphasize the role of Islam in a Muslim, but officially still secular, country. Erbakan, who died in 2011, was the political mentor of the current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from the Islamic Justice and Development party (AKP),” <<https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/turcja-rozpoznal-sie-proces-dotyczacy-zamachu-stanu-z-1997-roku-6079001069957761a>> [date of access: 13 Jan. 2019].

been performed at the National Theater for years, in which the Islamists finally gain absolute power.⁶⁵ In the final act, the audience could witness the ceremony of transferring power.

“Hidden symmetry”

The stay in Kars was good for Ka. The poet had been experiencing a creative crisis for four years, which was probably related to the change of climate and the fact that there was no snow in Frankfurt. Ka felt inspired to write in Kars only when it started to snow.⁶⁶ It must have snowed in Frankfurt during the four years of his stay, but Ka probably could not write, because for him snow was linked with the poor.⁶⁷ “this other world took on a metaphysical charge in Ka’s childhood imagination.”⁶⁸ Watching a snow flake, Ka suddenly saw in it “the meaning of his life.”⁶⁹ Snow reminded him of God⁷⁰ and God showed him his gratitude by allowing him to write.⁷¹ Inspired by God, Ka began to write a poem titled “Hidden Symmetry.” He had the impression that someone was whispering the verses into his ear,⁷² like the Angel Gabriel who revealed the verses of the Quran to the prophet. Ka thought that “because he’d never before written a poem like this, in one flash of inspiration, without stopping,”⁷³ the poem must have been written by someone else. Ka was probably right, because someone else had written about symmetry before:

Galileo [...] [w]rote once that when he looked through his telescope at the spinning planets, he could hear God’s voice in the music of the spheres. He held that nature and religion were not enemies, but rather allies – two different languages telling the same story, a story of symmetry [...]. Both science and God rejoiced in God’s symmetry.⁷⁴

Ka came to the same conclusion by looking at snow:

The snow reminded me of God. [...] There’s a God who pays careful attention to the world’s hidden symmetry, a God who will make us all more civilized.⁷⁵

Ka is very grateful for the fact that he can write again. He believes in God again. He even dreams of the Kurdish Sheikh Saadettin – a leader of a religious brotherhood. He decides to go to one of the religious ceremonies held by Saadettin. Having drunk three glasses of rakia in front of the portrait

⁶⁵It is absolute power, because it is at the hands of the ruling party.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 257. “Ka had happily announced that after four years of hard work, he had finally completed a new book of poetry.”

⁶⁷“I’d think a lot about the poems I wasn’t able to write.” Ibid., p. 127.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 96. Ka actually felt the presence of God in Frankfurt. “the snow reminded me of God, said Ka. [...] I couldn’t see how I could reconcile my becoming a European with a God [...] so I kept religion out of my life. But when I went to Europe, I realized there could be an Allah [...]” If that was the case, then why had not he felt inspired to write in Frankfurt? We do not know, although for Ka this poem is part of the logic of snowflakes (p. 117).

⁷¹Ibid., p. 129.

⁷²Ibid., p. 100.

⁷³Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁴D. Brown, *Angels and Demons*, New York 2006, p. 29.

⁷⁵O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 96-97.

of Atatürk, he goes to his mysterious residence on Baytarhane Street (Animal Hospital). This residence is supposedly an equivalent of the Illuminati from Brown's novel, but with one small difference. In Brown's novel, only "most enlightened men - physicists, mathematicians, astronomers"⁷⁶ belong to the Illuminati, while in Pamuk's novel "five or six tradesman or teahouse or dairy owners" and "a cross-eyed bus company manager, an elderly man who was the bus manager's friend, a night watchman from the electricity board, a man who had been the janitor of the Kars hospital for forty years"⁷⁷ gather at Saadettin's residence. Surely, there are not too many intellectuals in this group, but is there God among them? It turns out that not, at least not the one Ka wanted. Ka says:

- [...] But that God is not among you.⁷⁸

However, at the same time, he falls to his knees and kisses Saadettin's hand,⁷⁹ saying:

I want a God who [...] doesn't make me fall to my knees to kiss people's hands.⁸⁰

Still, he falls on his knees and kisses the sheikh's hand again. In fact, Ka will kiss Saadettin's hand one more time before he leaves.⁸¹ Therefore, there must be something in this room. Perhaps it is not the God of Ka's dreams, but it must be something that makes these two adult men, who are kissing each other's hands, act in such a symmetrical manner. What is this? A symbol? An arrangement? Mutual interests? Gratitude? If so, for what? Perhaps it is not a religious ritual, but only a symbolic ceremony, during which the Turkish bourgeoisie (represented by Ka) transfers the power of the state to its newly elected "official" (a moderate Islamist)?

Failure

The Turkish poor are the ones who lose. Deprived of education, art, and culture, with the help of which they could make a mark in the world, they are condemned to poverty and ignorance. The state does not want them to wake up and rebel against injustice. These people are not stupid; they are aware of the injustices and poverty, but they can only delude themselves into thinking about a happier future that will never come. Necip, a student of the Koranic school, writes in his *science-fiction* novel:

In the year 3579, there was a red planet we haven't discovered yet. Its name was Gazzali and its people were rich, and their lives were much easier than our lives are today...⁸²

It is science fiction, but it is not scientific. Young Turkish men never question reality, but they can talk for hours about whether God exists. This question is very important to them for obvious reasons: if God exists, there is hope for heaven and the suffering of the poor is meaningful:

⁷⁶D. Brown, *Angels and Demons*, p. 28.

⁷⁷O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 95-96.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 97.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 94.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 97.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 97.

⁸²Ibid., p. 104.

If God does not exist, it means heaven does not exist either. And that means that the world's poor, those millions who live in poverty and oppression, will never go to heaven. And if that is so, then how will you explain all the suffering of the poor?⁸³

Conclusion

In the present article, I analyzed Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, trying to unravel perhaps not all, but certainly "many [...] mysterious and unexplainable factors" that give "each snowflake [...] its unique"⁸⁴ form. I argue that in *Snow*, Pamuk comes to terms with the recent Turkish political history and with his social class. However, I do not claim that the novel should be read as a political text only. Someone else would certainly notice in *Snow* other meanings, such as the role of numbers. Indeed, the number 19 is regarded as holy in Islam and it is not without significance that Ka writes 19 poems during his stay in Kars.⁸⁵ Perhaps through "revealing [the poems] hidden symmetry,"⁸⁶ Ka was trying to transform the word "*Illuminati* into a symmetrical symbol,"⁸⁷ a task at which many symbolists have failed. However, such readings remain somewhat elusive, while I am certain that the analyzed semantic layer is one of the axis of the petal on which Ka has placed nineteen his poems.⁸⁸ Moreover, drawing on Witkiewicz's concept of form, I argue that this one axis gives meaning to all other axes and *vice versa*, because they must be identical in order to create a perfect whole ... a petal ... And in fact every axis and branch of a petal are identical, although each of them stands for a different poem...

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁸³Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 214.

⁸⁵Asuman Kafaoğlu-Büke, *Yazın Sanatı*, «Kar» Orhan Pamuk, <<http://edebiyatelestiri.blogspot.com/2006/>> [date of access: 15 Jan. 2019].

⁸⁶O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 377.

⁸⁷D. Brown, *Angels and Demons*, p. 27-28.

⁸⁸O. Pamuk, *Snow*, p. 481.

KEYWORDS

Turkish literature

ORHAN PAMUK

ABSTRACT:

The article describes the hidden political content of the novel *Snow* (in Turkish: *Kar*) written by the Nobel winner Orhan Pamuk. *Snow* is analyzed in terms of tensions between artistic abstraction and realism.

literary criticism

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Osman Fırat Baş – graduate of Polish Studies at Ankara University, literary critic, translator. Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. In 2006, he was honored with a congratulatory letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland for his achievements in translation. Laureate of the Honorary Award of the Polish Culture Foundation for the promotion of Polish literature in the world (2014). Receiver of the Decoration of Honor Meritorious for Polish Culture (2015). Laureate of Ryszard Kapuściński Translation Prize (2016). |