

PATERNAL ABSENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL TRANSITION: ANALYZING THE VANISHING MEDIATOR IN ORHAN PAMUK'S THE RED-HAIRED WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

The main theme of the fiction written by Orhan Pamuk is always the crisis of the modern Turkish subject that finds itself in an impossible contradiction between the Eastern tradition and the secular modernization of the West. This paper discusses the character change of Cem in *The Red-Haired Woman* by contending that his turn into an idealistic, leftist young man to a rich capitalist man is a dialectically necessary reaction to the trauma of relationships. The analysis utilizes the concept of Vanishing Mediator (VM) and Oedipal Guilt Complex developed by Jameson/Zizek. Master Mahmut, the well-digger, serves as the VM: he delivers the utilitarian ethics of bringing in the new ideology of secular capitalism, and has to then figuratively or literally vanish. The guilt complex thus created out of Oedipal structure is construed as the fundamental psychological process that drives Cem to the materialistic path. According to this reading, the required, but tragic, historical change towards a new capitalist reality is justified, as it is personal pain framed as the structural necessity of ideological processing.

1. Introduction

Orhan Pamuk's literary production functions as a unified and sustained investigation into the crisis of identity faced by the contemporary Turkish subject. This modern subject is perpetually characterized by a persistent and irresolvable tension between contradictory cultural forces. These forces include the historical legacy of Eastern tradition and the imposed political project of Western secular modernization. This ongoing struggle defines the Turkish identity not by successful synthesis, but by fragmentation, profound guilt, and nostalgia. Pamuk addresses the East-West dichotomy—a concept of significant geopolitical, sociological, and cultural weight—in a deliberate deconstructivist manner. By doing so, his work questions the established explanatory power of theories concerning interculturalism and transculturation. The inability to achieve synthesis is, in itself, the critical finding of the relational analysis presented throughout this research. The emotional life of the protagonist thus serves as a proxy for Turkey's greater geopolitical struggle.

1.2 Defining the Problem and Thesis

Modernization in Turkey required a bitter shift in ideology, between agrarian or the socialist ideology to a secular, materialistic, and capitalist ethos. This macro-level transformation of the national ideology needs to be traumatic and necessary at the micro-level, the individual-level of the subject. The essence of the issue under consideration is the following: How will

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this national ideological shift become a mandatory psychological mechanism in the life of the lead character?

This paper holds the view that the Vanishing Mediator paradigm mediates the relationship between Cem and the figure of the father in *The Red-Haired Woman* and that the structural need to perpetuate a relationship between absolute fatherhood and relational sacrifice is essential to the creation of the capitalist subject. The interpretation extends beyond a personal drama reading to a literary investigation on the national allegory, in which the emotional life of the protagonist created by him is an approximate expression of a geopolitical conflict that the country of Turkey was experiencing.

1.3 Theoretical and Methodological Intervention

The contribution that the study adds to the research is the synthesis of a new conceptual model which argues that the transformation of Cem is structurally inevitable. This totalizing account of the creation of the modern, melancholic Turkish subject combines two powerful theoretical instruments:

Vanishing Mediator (VM) Framework (Jameson/Zizek): This is an instrument of a structural analysis, which is why it is important to have a figure that facilitates the dialectical transition between hostile ideologies.

The mechanism of the Oedipal Guilt Complex: This is applied to psychological analysis that is applied with regards to the functioning of the relational trauma and guilt as the force that made the subject adopt the new, antagonist ideology.

This synthesis presents a very thorough and aggressive account of how the modern, melancholic Turkish subject came to existence. The following sections are the initial operationalization of this theoretical framework and then use it during the detailed analysis of the journey of Cem in *The Red-Haired Woman*.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion of the metamorphosis of Cem in *The Red-Haired Woman* must be performed with a strict theoretical apparatus that can explain the structural necessity of the ideological change as well as the psychological process that forces the individual subject to accept such change. The paper combines Vanishing Mediator (VM) paradigm and the Oedipal Guilt Complex and bases this synthesis on the theory of the Relational Crucible. In this tripartite structure, this revolutionizes the analysis to a thematic reading of personal anguish into a clear statement of national allegory, showing how macro-historical pressures are internalized and solved through intimate trauma.

2.1 The Vanishing Mediator (VM): Jameson/Žižek

Based on the work of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, the VM concept is invaluable to the analysis of instances of dialectical transition when ideology changes form one hostile form to another. It offers a strong means of elucidation of structural needs of socio-economic dislocation and reconstruction.

Definition and Function

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The Vanishing Mediator (VM) is a figure, either a human, or a social organization or a concept, that offers the original ethics or value system, which is needed to make a historical or ideological shift. The VM is like a necessary intermediary between the old ideology (thesis) and the new which is antagonistic (antithesis). In the context of Pamuk, the VM has to provide the primary values (e.g., discipline, labor, material ethic) which will help to end the abstract idealism of the past and the materialist pragmatism of the future in the main character.

This intermediate role implies that the utility of the VM is necessarily temporal. It is the structural need of this mechanism which makes the next ideological shift not accidental, but inevitable, compulsory process which is based on socio-economic logic.

Trajectory and Structural Necessity

The dialectic through which it is the VM that determines the final course of its direction: the VM manages to lead to the emergence of an antagonistic, successor ideology. Nevertheless, after the turnover is made and the new order is well-established, the mediator does not have any additional business to be and vanishes off the historical radar screen. This structural imperative is very similar to the notion introduced by Max Weber where the original, charismatic body of ethics is replaced by the routinized, material conditions and rational-legal arrangements that the ethics originally facilitated. This path is traced in full detail in *The Red-Haired Woman* on the role and subsequent elimination of Master Mahmut.

Argument: Inevitability and Trauma

The VM framework is an aggressive proposal to explain why the ideological change at Cem was structural. His personal trauma is not an accidental narrative phenomenon but is structurally necessary to the conclusive substitute of his biological father abstract, leftist ideals with secular capitalist ethos of his future success as an engineer. This scheme preconditions the required (structural) dimension of the transformation and prepares the groundwork to the psychological compulsion needed to make it happen.

2.2 The Oedipal Complex and the Guilt Mechanism

Whereas the VM is a description of the structural demand of the ideological change, the Oedipal Guilt Complex is a description of the psychological process that drives Cem, the subject, to internalize and execute this necessary change. The Oedipal complex of symbolic or literal displacement of the father is the focus of the development of the conscience and morality of the subject. The influence of this relational framework in the story of Pamuk is to enforce change of ideology through the translation of trauma into compulsion.

Oedipal Metamorphosis and Remorse.

The change of Cem is understood as the dialectical reaction influenced by the feelings of guilt instead of the conventional literary conveyor of joy or happiness. The false meaning of optimism that was created initially is substituted by the mandatory pain of guilt which is the driving force behind the change.

His unintended murder of his surrogate father, Master Mahmut, and his involvement with Gulcihan makes up a contemporary Oedipal design. The complex is not only the result of individual underperforming but a psychological weight that makes the protagonist seek ideological transformation.

The Obsession to Materialism.

The feeling of guilt induced by the Oedipal complex of the inadvertent killing of Mahmut by Cem is the necessary psychological mechanism, which drives him into the materialist way. The suffering causes him to give up the idealism of high mind and vainly failed past in favor of the materialistic present and the future.

This interpersonal trauma conceptualizes the socio-economic transformation in Turkey, the painful descent into secular materialism and the rejection of traditional or socialist values, as being a cyclical occurrence. The father image needs to be destroyed symbolically or physically so that the novel ideology of materialism can completely come into being within the son and thereby change the trauma into fate. The psychological price to justify the historical transition required is the guilt.

2.3 The Relational Crucible

The paper locates the whole transformation process to the context of the relational crucible, which is an abstraction that integrates the structural and psychological aspects by establishing the place of change. The most active location of the translation of the macro-level pressures into the intimate and transformative ones is the relational sphere.

Macro/Micro Link: Traumatic Relational Sacrifice

The thesis of the dissertation is that macro-level ideological change needs a micro-level, traumatic relational sacrifice. The national struggle of ideological orientation (modernization of Turkey) is realized and decided with the help of the close relations of the main character.

The Suffering as Structural Need.

The framework enables the article to read as not an unforeseen trauma the personal anguish (guilt) of the protagonist but as the structural necessity that justifies the necessary, that may be tragic, historical transition towards a new secular capitalistic reality. The relational crucible concept brings the analysis to a higher level by stating that there is a causal relationship between the intimate failure (the Oedipal conflict) and ideological necessity (the VM path).

A combination of the three tools used in the study, namely, VM (structural necessity), Oedipus/Guilt (psychological compulsion), and Relational Crucible (site of action) creates a unified, aggressive account of why the transformation of Cem can be described as pain inflicted and materialistic, making the transformation an indisputable national allegory. This model is now strictly followed in analysis of The Red-Haired Woman that follows.

3. ANALYSIS: THE DIALECTIC OF PATERNAL ABSENCE

The Red-Haired Woman is an epic micro-level dramatization of the ideological change in Turkey. This discussion holds that this shift is a painful, dialectically necessary reaction, set in terms of the idea of the Relational Crucible which is where the relational processes of paternal absence and sacrifice are the structural necessities that drive the creation of the capitalist subject. The change is carried out via the mechanism of the Vanishing Mediator and solidified with the help of the Oedipal Guilt Complex.

3.1 Paternity and Ideological Antagonism

The very form of nascent identity of Cem is determined at the very beginning by the absence of the father and the consequent ideological confrontation of the two father figures who hover around his life. Those characters represent the clashing cultural and economic paths that vie over the soul of the contemporary Turkish subject.

The Biological Father is a symbol of idealistic, leftist, intellectual ideals of the previous Turkish intelligentsia. He is portrayed as being abstract, detached and finally not to be relied upon, an ideological figure whose ideals politically and intellectually, did not serve to give the country a solid foundation on the ground. His departure leaves a vacuum in the life of Cem in terms of ideology and emotion.

This emptiness leaves to Cem a deep sense of need of a good paternal anchor, which is based on reality and practical activity. This is his anchorage in Master Mahmut, the well-digger. Mahmut is a symbol of utilitarianity, old craft and discipline of working. In order to provide the abstract discourse given by the biological father, Mahmut grounds the protagonist in the material, day-to-day world-grounding that any subject, negotiating in a fast-paced modernizing economy, needs to stand. Their ideological opposition is obvious: unsuccessful socialist abstraction and productive material work. The relationship between Cem and Mahmut is therefore a structural requirement to bring down the initial ideological distance.

3.2 Master Mahmut as the Vanishing Mediator

The role of Master Mahmut is not just a symbolic one, but it is structurally necessary, and at the same time doomed to follow the exact course of the Vanishing Mediator (VM) framework. The role that the VM plays is to bring about a dialectical change in the old ideology (abstract idealism) to the new one (secular capitalism).

Mediation and the Transfer of Ethos

Inseparably, Master Mahmut gives the secular professional value system and work ethic that would help remove Cem of the political and intellectual abstractions of his biological father. Even the process of drilling a well, an activity based on material usefulness and quantifiable effort, is in itself the ideal metaphor of the new capitalist work ethic. It is a profession that requires discipline, material involvement and an emphasis on measurable, helpful output, the direct opposite of indiscriminate output of intellectual political dissent. This work ethic, practical, utilitarian is the first step that needs to be taken in order to bring Cem to his ultimate destiny of being an engineer, the archetypal modern-day capitalist worker.

The Sacrifice: Structural Requirement for Transition

It is the accidental killing of Mahmut that functions as the structural one in which the VM is then eliminated out of the historical scene to have been successful in passing the core materialist values to the Cem. The physical death of Mahmut is therefore not an incidental element of the plot but a structural necessity of the new ideology to become established. The VM should be cleared so that the successor ideology is not polluted with the original, traditional situation that the transitional figure is going through. The utility that the character of Mahmut lives dies not necessarily when Cem discovers how to dig, but on a deeper level, when he internalizes the work ethic and consumerism that make him a rich engineer. The sacrifice wipes it all clean, leaving Cem psychologically easy to the past yet to the future closely pressured.

3.3 The Guilt Complex and Compulsion

The psychological engine of the Oedipal Guilt Complex brings into existence the structural requirement set forth by the Vanishing Mediator. The Oedipal crime of the unintentional killing of Mahmut and the involvement of Cem with Gulcihan makes a complete Oedipal structure, which produces the psychological imperative needed to change.

The Psychological Mechanism: Guilt as Engine

This complex of guilt serves as the driving force, which forces Cem down the road of materialism. It is the most important mental process that eliminates the ideological contradiction in his past. The agonizing suffering of the sin makes him realize the high idealism of his youth, that failed him, and instead seize the capitalist future of the capitalist present, with its real, physical, materiality. The psychological cost to justify and impose the structural imperative of the ideological change is the guilt.

Ideological Escape and Paternal Actuality

The quest to become a successful engineer and be rich turns into an expiation, a means of getting out of the emotional turbulence of the past. Through a successful, materialistically based existence, Cem subconsciously tries to compensate the death of his material mentor, Mahmut. It is not a happy or optimistic decision but a trauma-based obsession. The father figure (Mahmut) needs to be metaphorically erased to allow the fresh materialist ideology to become completely materialized to the son making the guilt a final act of ideological recruitment.

3.4 The Genesis of the Capitalist Subject

Such dialectical necessity of the traumatic relational sacrifice is confirmed by the ultimate condition of the lead character, creating a certain rapport between micro-trauma and macro-ideological transformation.

The Resulting Subject: Capital Embodied

Cem as the rich engineer is the full-fledged capitalist man. His whole resultant identity, his profession, his position, his riches, is an outcome of the ideological change brokered by Mahmut and solidified by guilt. He has managed to substitute the abstract, failed identity of the generation of his biological father with a materialistic, practical one. He is a

representation of the successful, contemporary, secular subject that Turkish Republic wanted to establish.

Dialectical Necessity at the Micro-Level

The revolution is conceptualized as a hurtful, dialectically requisite reaction, which proves that ideological transformation at the macro-level (the adoption of secular capitalism in Turkey) necessitates a traumatic relational loss at the micro-level. This conclusion claims that there was a close cause and effect relationship: Cem had to pay the indispensable price, an act of accidental killing, which was the traumatic event necessary to him as a person to create his success, and by extension, the national allegory of the modernization of Turkey, a complete one. This method of analysis proves that the individual change cannot be extracted out of structural needs of history.

4. DISCUSSION

The above discussion revealed that the structural inevitability of the ideological shift of Cem in *The Red-Haired Woman* was achieved due to the Vanishing mediator (VM) and the Oedipal guilt complex. This discussion section summarizes all these findings to reveal the significant implications of these findings on the modernization accounts and the special, indispensable role of trauma and absence in the history that Pamuk envisions. The analysis proves that it is not only the relational sphere where the individual drama is played but the structural location where the political history is engraved in the personal psyche.

4.1 Implications for Modernization Narratives

The Vanishing Mediator framework applied to the father-son relationships in *The Red-Haired Woman* fundamentally slays the paradigm of the linear national progress by deriving the Turkish transition to secular materialism.

Critique of Linear Progress and Idealism

Contemporarization accounts, especially those related to the early Turkish Republic, frequently describe the shift to a secular, Western-oriented, and capitalist world as a fresh and rational divorce with an obsolete past. Cem trajectory analysis does not allow seeing this transition as a step in the right direction. Rather, it reveals it as a traumatic, cyclically imposed historic movement propelled by agonizing relational sacrifice.

The VM framework shows that the new capitalist ethos could not just be brought into existence but needed to be brutally negotiated through a mediator of transition (Mahmut). This need ascertains that the change was not an equilibrium, rational social agreement but an immense discontinuity that required the demolition of the medium entity. The trauma of the death of Mahmut disillusion any hope of historical development of rational, painless progress, by making the emergence of the new secular capitalist ethos a result of compulsion and guilt, and not of free intellectual decision making. Pamuk, therefore, presents a historical account based on trauma and the need to survive psychologically.

The Paternal Void and Ideological Failure

The conflict between Cem and two father figures is essentially an ideological outburst indicating the identity crisis in the country. The analysis relates the paternal absence the failure of the biological, intellectual, socialist/ ideological father to the national crisis of identity. Such a failure requires taking a new, realistic direction. On the one hand, the biological father represents an ideology that did not secure the nation on the practical reality and, hence, created a vacuum that could be occupied solely by materialist ethic.

The article looks at how the old (socialist/intellectual father) fails, and as such, the new (capitalist/materialist Mahmut) must be adopted in a painful manner. The next sacrifice of Mahmut, the intermediate person is the last and irreversible stage. This dialectic of relations reveals the historical process of advancement as a sequence of structural failures and further traumatic fixations on them, the new ideology established through the Oedipal guilt of the son.

Pamuk's Project: Personal Anguish as Structural Requirement

This discussion expounds the project that Pamuk is engaged in, which is exploring the crisis of identity. Using the VM model, we demonstrate that personal anguish is a structure requirement verifying tragic historical needs. Individual suffering (guilt) of Cem is not an incident but is the psychological cost that history imposes on ideological transformation.

Pamuk is not therefore just writing of the emotional wringing of a particular person, but is using the context of intimacy and relationship to make a national allegory. The emotional life of the protagonist turns out to be a proxy of the geopolitical struggle of Turkey where the macro-historical change is physically inscribed in the micro-level of the psyche of the subject through trauma.

4.2 The Unique Function of Trauma and Absence

Guilt and absence are the two inevitable working forces which help to make the required ideological change, which validates the strong causation between failing relationships and national fate.

Guilt as the Psychological Force that is Compulsory.

The research sees guilt not only as an implication of individual failure, but a required agent of the psyche that drives the protagonists to ideological transformation. This is essential as it takes the analysis out of free and compulsion. The guilt complex formed due to the Oedipal transgression is the reason behind Cem giving up the past and strictly following the new materialist reality. Guilt is the driving force of change, imposing the structural need in the Vanishing Mediator.

The Oedipal trauma, therefore, serves to eliminate the ideological contradiction which had earlier crippled Cem. The pain is not a deterrent, but a push that demands the direct and direct all-out investment into the capitalist direction that serves as some sort of expiation of the crime committed against the VM.

Trauma as Engine: The Dialectic of Absence.

The "Dialectic of Absence" provides that a micro-level, traumatic relational sacrifice is necessary to change ideology at the macro-level. The loss of Master Mahmut is some bitter sacrifice that should take place to enable the transition to be done. This structural lack is the source of trauma.

This notion explicitly opposes any sociological reading which tries to isolate the individual and the political. The article suggests that the relational sphere is the main location where political and historical pressures are turned into intimate and transformative experiences. The structural necessity of the macro-historical shift is the intimate failure, the accidental action of Cem.

The Relational Crucible: Proving Traumatic Histories.

The synthesis supports the main idea of the dissertation, which says that the relational sphere is the most important place, where political and historical pressures are converted into intimate and transformative experiences. The individual suffering, it is, then the structural need which legitimizes the required, tragic, historical transition to new secular capitalistic reality.

The Relational Crucible concept takes the analysis to the next level because it states that intimate failure and ideological necessity are much correlated. The person in the Pamuk world is unable to transform or gain some stability without such a traumatic sacrifice, and this is what makes the Turkish subject of the modern world one who has always been born out of the relational violence and structural necessity.

5. CONCLUSION

The above discussion of *The Red-Haired Woman*, which has been done through the amalgamation of theoretical perspective of Vanishing Mediator (VM) and the Oedipal Guilt Complex, gives a strict account of the structural origin of the capitalist subject in the fiction of Pamuk.

The paper finds that the structural precondition of ideological transition in the novel is relational trauma (paternal absence and sacrifice). Master Mahmut plays the role of the VM, whose required disappearance is mediated by the resulting complex of guilt felt by Cem which compels the rejection of an unsuccessful idealism as a material, practical reality. This proves the macro-historical need to transform the socio-economic orientation of Turkey is achieved by an obligatory, traumatic micro-level relational sacrifice.

The peculiar input made in this study is that the VM framework was applied to Pamuk studies providing a stern, uncompromising interpretation to the painful, although unavoidable, socio-economic shift that characterizes the hybrid Turkish subject. The analysis transcends the thematic description by establishing that guilt is the motor of compulsion and the relational sphere is the structural crucible in the cause and effect relationship between intimate failure and ideological adoption.

This inability to succeed in both directions always characterizes the melancholic state of the hybrid Turkish subject--the failure of the traditional past (idealism/socialism) and the

trauma-induced necessity to transform to the materialist present (secular capitalism). The relational sacrifice that must occur to enable this shift is permanent and the transformed subject is forever characterized as one who must suffer compulsory anguish and not out of choice.

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