

## Invitation to World Literature: My Name Is Red Video Transcript

Barry:

This novel is a murder mystery set in sixteenth century Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

Yelavich:

It's really about the tension between Eastern values and Western values.

Andrews:

A culture clash.

Lydon:

It's about a war among painters. Tradition against the Renaissance.

Kivrak:

A wonderful and heartbreaking love story.

Bukiet:

Four miniaturists are creating a rare and special manuscript.

Barry:

Their rivalry in art, in love, in position at court, in vying for favor, finally pushes one of them over the edge, into murder.

Pamuk:

Don't explain everything, you know!

Sikander:

The book revolves around this idea that the power of art is able to drive somebody to murder.

## GRAPHIC: CHAPTER 1 I AM A CORPSE

Damrosch:

[Reading]: "Chapter One: I Am a Corpse. I am nothing but a corpse now, a body at the bottom of a well. Though I drew my last breath long ago and my heart has stopped beating, no one, apart from that vile murderer knows what's happened to me. As for that wretch, he felt for my pulse and listened for my breath to be sure I was dead, then he kicked me in the midriff, carried me to the edge of the well, raised me up and dropped me below. As I fell, my head, which he'd smashed with a stone, broke apart. My face, my forehead and cheeks were crushed, my bones shattered, and my mouth filled with blood."

Göknar:

It's very graphic. I mean it's maybe some of the most graphic phrases and words in the novel appear here. And it immediately draws the reader in. "I am nothing but a corpse now, a body at the bottom of a well." And we want to know why.

Damrosch:

The whole story revolves around a group of four artists. And it quickly becomes apparent that the murderer is one of the other three artists. And it takes the rest of the novel to figure out who did it.

GRAPHIC: MY NAME IS ORHAN

Pamuk:

I am Orhan Pamuk the writer of My Name Is Red. (Chuckles). Okay. I wrote the book between '92, giving a break for writing New Life and also continued between 1994 to 1998, more or less four years I think. My first attempt set in a contemporary Istanbul failed. In fact my second attempt, set in sixteenth century. Then again I made a false start focusing on one single painter. Then later I realized that I should focus on a workshop because workshops in Islamic painting produced a distinct style rather than singular hands or artists.

GRAPHIC: ISLAMIC PAINTING STYLE VS. EUROPEAN PAINTING STYLE

Yelavich:

A miniature painting in 16th-century Istanbul is more than a casual reader in the West would ever know.

Barry:

Every one of those wonderfully illuminated pages would take one or two years of work. When you see gold you are seeing real gold leaf, every princess, every king, every hero depicted in these pictures is pointing to a divine archetype. An idea in the mind of God. That is what that art means, and Orhan Pamuk comes to the very heart of the matter. He is dramatizing the moment, when these artists who have been trained to regard themselves as Muslim artists, are seeing works that are coming from the European West. And they're troubled, they feel a disquiet.

Lydon:

There's this explosion of painting genius in Venice, right at this time. This giant, giant breakthrough in humanizing the figure. Learning how to paint skin. Learning faces in a way that's never been done before. In the Islamic tradition, figures in the painting are anonymous. They look at these Venetian painters, they say wait a second; you could pick that man out on the street.

GRAPHIC: THE SULTAN OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Damrosch:

The sultan is the absolute ruler of the Ottoman Empire, one of the great empires of the world which stretches from Eastern Europe at this time through the Middle East and as far as Persia. The whole story revolves around these artists and a secret illustrated book that they're working on for the Sultan.

Kivrak:

But this book raises a lot of controversial issues at that time because the Sultan wants it to be made according to Western artistic styles and conventions.

Damrosch:

This is in turn what outrages the more traditionalist who think this is blasphemous, that the artists are trying to do what Allah alone can do, create an actual person.

GRAPHIC: MY NAME IS BLACK

Kivrak:

[Reading in Turkish]: "Chapter Two, My Name is Black."

Andrews:

Who is Black? Well, Black is, he is the nephew of the producer of the mysterious and dangerous album of paintings. He's the thread that binds all of these many stories together.

Gökmar:

The story takes place over nine days. And upon his return after a twelve-year exile, is when the story begins in the novel; it begins to unfold.

Kivrak:

[Reading:] "After an absence of twelve years I entered Istanbul like a sleepwalker. The earth called to him they say of men who are about to die. And in my case it was death that drew me back to the city where I'd been born and raised. When I first returned I thought there was only death. Later I would also encounter love."

Gökmar:

So Shekure is the object of Black's affections. He's never forgotten about her, and he wants to win her love.

Andrews:

It's a love story. It's the story of artists caught in a time of cultural change. There are many, many plot lines.

GRAPHIC: I AM A TABLE OF CONTENTS

Gökmar:

Since the chapters in the novel are fairly short, the table of contents goes over three pages. But it's interesting because the titles themselves, in shorthand tell a story. "I will be called a murderer. I am your beloved uncle. I am Orhan, I am Esther. I, Shekure."

Damrosch:

All these short chapters; each one a little gem in itself. As you go through you can gradually unravel the plot but in the meantime you can just enjoy each chapter on its own. Each one is a little sunburst that you can just experience in itself.

Andrews:

Every character narrates his own story.

Pamuk:

First person singular voices is not my invention. So many authors did. William Faulkner is the beginner. In Japan, Akutagawa did it his novel which later then made a popular film, Rashomon.

Bukiet:

But then he goes further. One chapter is from the point of view of a dog.

Kivrak:

[Reading in Turkish]: "Chapter Ten: I am a Tree".

Yelavich:

[Reading]: "Behold, I am a twenty-two carat Ottoman Sultani gold coin."

Bukiet:

And also rather bafflingly, there's also from the point of view of the color red.

[Reading]: "Part of me, the serious half, calls out to your vision while the mirthful half soars through the air with your glances. I'm so fortunate to be red. I'm fiery. I'm strong. I know men take notice of me and that I cannot be resisted."

GRAPHIC: ORHAN PAMUK

Andrews:

When Orhan's brother came to the University of Washington to give a lecture, he said to me, "Orhan remembers you; Orhan was one of your basketball players". In 1967-68, when I was there to do my dissertation work, I coached these kids; at the time Orhan was just another one of these fourteen, fifteen-year-old basketball players. The next time that I heard his name or saw him he was a famous author. Had I nurtured Orhan's impressive skills a little better, he might of become a noted basketball player and we would have lost a world famous novelist.

Damrosch:

Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul, in Turkey in 1952.

Lydon:

Orhan Pamuk has been writing novels in Turkish at a great rate since the eighties and hugely popular in Turkey, too. But then something different happened with *My Name Is Red*. It not only won prizes, it won big reviews. It was immediately recognized as huge triumph.

Damrosch:

His works have sold millions of copies around the world in fifty-six different languages and is also being taught in colleges and universities around the world now. As long ago as 2001 when *My Name Is Red* first came out in English one prescient reviewer predicted that he would win the Nobel Prize for it. Another reviewer says, "He's not an ideologue or a politician or a journalist. He is a novelist and a great one. Nobody other than a small committee of Swedes could rule out a Nobel."

Lydon:

The critical line in the Nobel citation was roughly that he had created a new symbolic demonstration of not just the clash but the interlacing of world cultures. There was a recognition I think not only of great skill as a novelist but of the world's need for a more complex conversation between Islam and the West.

The center of his world is Istanbul. The old capitol of the Ottoman Empire. It's his place the way Paris was Proust's place, or London was Dickens' place. It is a complete world.

Bukiet:

Turkey existing at the border between Europe and Asia. It embodies two dramatically different modes of perception.

Kivrak:

As a Turkish citizen and as a Turkish student living outside of Turkey, when I read *My Name Is Red*, I think it's a book about identity and defining who really one is, which, which was an important question back then in Ottoman Empire and which is still an important question for Turkish people. It was a city of confusion, I think, at that point.

Barry:

The sixteenth century is the century when the Muslims, so long dominant, seem to have just attained world mastery in military terms, but in fact they're already beginning to lose it. The Western artists (and Western civilization) is actually drawing abreast of Islamic civilization. The Turkish artists as representatives of their whole civilization, their whole tradition, their whole culture are beginning to feel very real fear, disquiet.

Damrosch:

At one point Black's Uncle, Enishte, describes the sense of wonder at encountering the new painting style he's discovering as an ambassador to Venice.

[Reading]: "Over a period of days we're told he stood before thousands of portraits. He saw thousands of framed faces depicted on stretched canvas or wood or painted

directly onto walls. Each one was different from the rest. They were distinctive unique human faces he said. He was intoxicated by their variety, their colors, the pleasantness, even severity of the soft light that seemed to fall on them and the meaning emanating from their eyes as if a virulent plague had struck. Everyone was having his portrait made."

People are both attracted and a little bit wary of these influences coming almost like a plague, almost like a disease, influenced like an influenza.

Lydon:

The fact that individual painters have signed their work. Sometimes with bravado. And that people are kind of coming out, coming forward, coming expressively to the fore, into your face from those canvasses. That's not the way those Islamic miniatures work.

Damrosch:

Is it going to make their world new? Is it going to destroy the world, as they know it?

GRAPHIC: I WANT TO BE ITS MEANING

Yelavich:

The chapter I use all the time for my students is "I am a Tree".

[Reading]: "A great European master miniaturist and another great master artist are walking through a Frank meadow discussing virtuosity in art. The more expert of the two says to the other, painting in the new style demands such talent that if you depicted one of the trees in this forest, a man who looked upon that painting would come here and if he so desired, correctly select that tree from the others.

Pamuk:

[Reading]: "I thank Allah that I, the humble tree before you have not been drawn with such intent. I don't want to be a tree. I want to be its meaning."

Yelavich:

This ambivalence really speaks to the ambivalence about seeing the world in two different ways.

Kivrak:

"I don't want to be a tree. I want to be its meaning." This sentence gives you a lot of clues about how to read this book, at least for me it helped a lot. For example Shekure, like the tree, she is, she is really self-conscious about like what she has and what she has not.

Damrosch:

Shekure is one of the most interesting characters in the novel. It's a very sympathetic portrait of a complicated woman who is trying to negotiate her position within the traditional confines of a patriarchal society of her time. Here she is in one passage

speaking directly to us. She says, "Don't be surprised that I'm talking to you. For years I've combed through the pictures in my father's books looking for images of women and great beauties. They do exist if few and far between and always look shy, embarrassed, gazing only at one another as if apologetically. Never did they raise their heads."

Kivrak:

[Reading]: "Perhaps one day someone from a distant land will listen to this story of mine. Isn't this what lies behind the desire to be inscribed in the pages of a book? Isn't it just for the sake of this delight that sultans and viziers proffer bags of gold to have their histories written? I'm an attractive and intelligent woman and it pleases me that I'm being watched. And if I happen to tell a lie or two from time to time, it's so you don't come to any false conclusions about me."

Kidd:

Interestingly, today, since he's won the Nobel Prize, I'd probably...I definitely would not be able to get away with his name being so small on the front. I have designed probably over eleven hundred covers.

And so I didn't want to present one of these paintings in a straightforward manner because that's not what the book is. The book is a puzzle and a mystery and it's a love story and there's a murder. And so I wanted to... get a sense of a fragmented narrative instantly when you look at it. I felt that there should be red on the cover but not in the title because that seems to go with the sensibility of the book that it's not what you're expecting. The book jacket is not going to sell the book. It's going to introduce the book to the reader. You don't marry someone just because they have a nice face (chuckles)—hopefully. Uh, I know some people do, but um, you know that's, that's sort of it.

GRAPHIC: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

Damrosch:

As Black attempts to unravel the mystery of the original murder he seeks to find traces of the murderer in the style of the different miniatures that have been painted by the different members of the workshop. This search for the trace of the murderer in his own style becomes a way for Pamuk to give us magnificent portraits of the joy of art, of the process of artistic creation, of the painterly process itself.

Sikander:

I thought throughout the book that there were large passages and there were lots of details which really were coming almost as if a painter was writing it. My take is obviously a very personal take. Here is an example of a very old work of mine, done while I was learning miniature painting. He really allows as a painter for me to really engage with his literature from this perspective and obviously from the perspective where he explores how a painter may feel while making the painting.

[Reading]: "Without lifting my brush I came down from the cheek, reaching the powerful mouth which I'd left open after a moment's thought..."

Pamuk:

[Reading]: "I entered the mouth. This is how it's going to be then. Open your mouth wider now, horsey. And I brought out its tongue. I slowly turned out the nose, no room for indecision. Angling up steadily I looked momentarily at the whole image. And when I saw that I had made my line exactly as I had imagined it I forgot entirely what I was drawing and the ears and the magnificent curve of the spectacular neck were rendered by my hand alone."

Barry:

After publishing the book, with all its intuition, brilliant insight, he came to see us at the Metropolitan Museum and I took him into the manuscript laboratory where under powerful magnification, and often raking light Orhan Pamuk saw the extraordinary details revealed in relief, just as the sultan would have seen 500 years ago, using a candle. And if one can use that very hackneyed phrase, it blew his mind.

Andrews:

You know he is a painter and you can see that clearly in his novels because he sees so many things.

Lydon:

His parents expected him to be an engineer. He thought he'd settle for being an architect, he dreamed of being a painter. (snaps) And then he discovered in his early twenties—No, I want to be a novelist; I'm going to write my paintings.

Pamuk:

The sensual joy of making a painting. This is the beginning. All through my childhood, starting from almost six and seven years old I wanted to be a painter. Then at the age of twenty-three I failed. I just simply dropped painting and begin writing novels. Some fifteen years later now I want to write a book about the joys of painting.

Novels are about describing visual words. We enjoy the world through our eyes and being a novelist is converting what we see with our eyes or what we see with our imagination through words. It's a joy to do that.

GRAPHIC: IT IS I, MASTER OSMAN

Damrosch:

As the story progresses tension builds on all the levels of the plot. The murder mystery is getting more and more troublesome. There are more murders happening. The love story is getting more and more fraught with Black and Shekure. There are social tensions building. The whole structure of society seems to be in the balance.

Lydon:

The novel takes you, toward the end, into the sultan's treasury of paintings. One thing it's sort of the greatest museum you can imagine. The characters enter it as detectives really, they're looking for the least indication about who done it. Imagine you were in Rembrandt's basement, hundreds of masterpieces all over.

Barry:

[Reading]: "It was as if light were gushing from the painting, to my face. Again I praised God for showing me such spectacular beauty before I went blind."

Lydon:

They're overwhelmed by the beauty and the perfection of the work and of the tradition, but one of the key people in that scene, decides that the greatest master of them all had blinded himself to force himself to see the world, out of darkness into Allah's view of the world.

Barry:

Why cannot an accomplished Master finally join this abstract world beyond the material world?

Sikander:

He is particularly taken in by Behzad's work to such a degree that he goes ahead and does something.

Gökmar:

They're about to discover the identity of the murderer, when Master Osman does this.

Barry:

[Reading]: "I looked at the needle for a long time. I tried to imagine how Behzad could have done it. I had heard that one doesn't go blind immediately. The velvety darkness descends..."

Sikander:

[Reading]: "I sat down again and gazed at my own eyes. How beautifully the flame of the candle danced in my pupils, which had witnessed my hand paint for sixty years."

Barry:

[Reading]: "How had Master Behzad done it? I asked myself once more."

Gökmar:

[Reading]: "Never once taking my eyes off the mirror, with the practiced movements of a woman applying coal to her eyelids. My hand found the needle on its own, without hesitation. As if making a hole at the end of an ostrich egg, soon to be embellished, I bravely, calmly, and firmly pressed the needle into the pupil of my right eye."

Sikander:

[Reading]: "My innards sank not because I felt what I was doing, but because I saw what I was doing. I pushed the needle into my eye, to the depth of a quarter, the length of a finger. Then removed it."

Barry:

[Reading]: "Smiling I did the same to my other eye."

The character who is called upon to solve the murder by seeing the visual clues, by recognizing them, has derived such intense pleasure up to a spiritual level, from looking at the art that he always wanted to see, that he puts out his own eyes so as never to have to look at anything else on this earth again. Thereby leaving the murder unsolved, for the time being.

GRAPHIC: MY NAME IS CONCLUSION

Yelavich:

I read to travel. I read to go somewhere; to get outside of my world, to get outside of my head, and Pamuk allows you to literally inhabit someone else's head for a while. It can feel when you're walking through these streets of Istanbul in the fifteenth century with Pamuk; you'll recognize the issues. They're relevant today. Not just in Istanbul as it's trying to enter the EU, but in the world at large.

Pamuk:

Historical novels are, I think, are about the age they were written. History is an excuse for talking about today in a disguised form and to see the problems differently.

Gökner:

If you want to talk about some kind of a legacy from the Pamuk novel, I think it clearly rests in this ability of taking the reader into another place, and actually enabling that reader to understand these "others."

Andrews:

He can inhabit a character, in a way, and be that character. He's doing that in a time and a place, that's so distant, and culturally so different. You know? He's able to do that with these characters, and it rings true. It's the kind of thing scholars can't do, because people always ask us for evidence. But a novelist, you know, a brilliant novelist can make those things come alive.

GRAPHIC: MY NAME IS RED