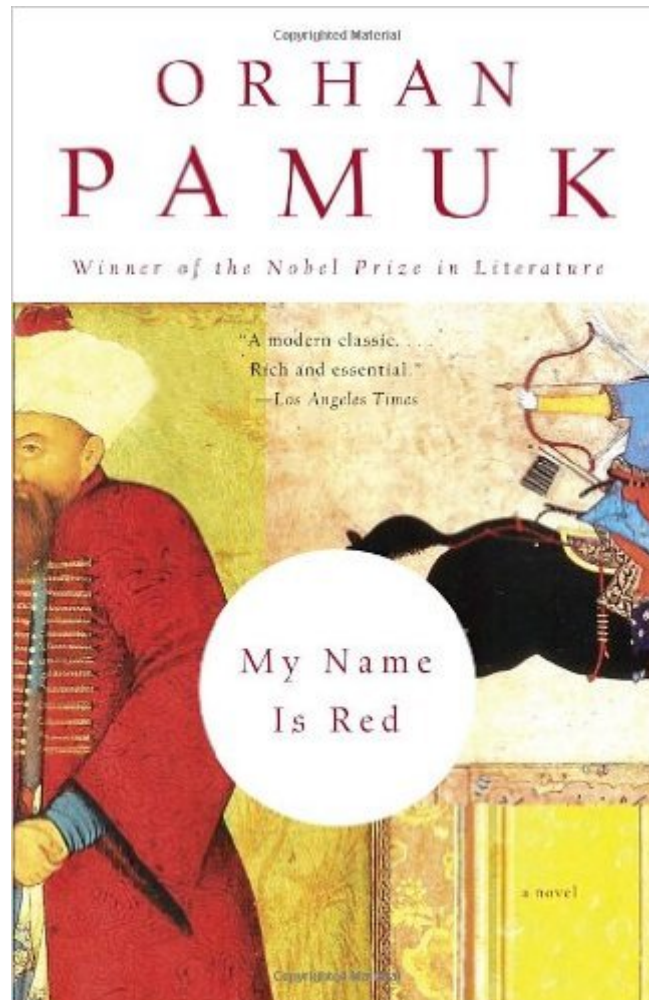


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My Name Is Red



Synopsis

At once a fiendishly devious mystery, a beguiling love story, and a brilliant symposium on the power of art, *My Name Is Red* is a transporting tale set amid the splendor and religious intrigue of sixteenth-century Istanbul, from one of the most prominent contemporary Turkish writers. The Sultan has commissioned a cadre of the most acclaimed artists in the land to create a great book celebrating the glories of his realm. Their task: to illuminate the work in the European style. But because figurative art can be deemed an affront to Islam, this commission is a dangerous proposition indeed. The ruling elite therefore mustn't know the full scope or nature of the project, and panic erupts when one of the chosen miniaturists disappears. The only clue to the mysteryâor crime? âlies in the half-finished illuminations themselves. Part fantasy and part philosophical puzzle, *My Name is Red* is a kaleidoscopic journey to the intersection of art, religion, love, sex and power. Translated from the Turkish by Erda M GÃ¶kner

Book Information

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (August 27, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375706852

ISBN-13: 978-0375706851

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂÂ See all reviewsÂ (261 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #34,214 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Middle Eastern #527 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Mysteries #1726 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary

Customer Reviews

Early in the novel, a miniaturist named Olive says "Through our colors, paints, art and love, we remember that Allah had commanded us to "See"!". I found myself thinking about that line repeatedly later throughout this wonderful book. First, be warned, this is not a quick read by any means. There is no omniscient narrative voice to smooth the path for the reader. Instead, the reader is presented with multiple voices and perspectives-- some from the characters themselves, some from the illustrations in the books, one memorable passage is even told from the point of view of ink itself. And while there is a story and the story is important (the commissioning of the religiously

dubious book by the Sultan, the subsequent murderer of Elegant Effendi, Black's efforts to find the killer, save the book and win the hand of his cousin Shekure), it is not as though the story were the book and it only orders the flow of the multiple perspectives rather than really making the reading of the book easier. Pamuk has been much cited in the press lately, not only for his views as a novelist, but also for his views on what he calls the "absurd" conflict between east and west. Through using the medium of the narrow world of the miniaturists in the 16th century, Pamuk gently addresses the issue of heresy and pollution by stressing the continual influence of other cultures on the classical miniature form and by making clear through debates on individuality, blindness, and style where many of the differences between east and west are located. And also, of course, the similarities are revealed in the same manner. I found *_My Name Is Red_* to be by turns funny, thought-provoking and moving.

Of Miniatures and Murder One of these days, Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk will be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. As is usually the case with this prize, it will be given for all the wrong reasons: a Muslim may be needed that year or the clash of East and West may demand a winner who is from both cultures. That said, it will be an honour long overdue and richly deserved. For 20 years, Pamuk has been spinning his postmodern yarns in Istanbul and getting better with every book. In Turkey, he is a publishing sensation (after his latest book his publisher successfully sued a newspaper which refused to believe the sales figures) and his books have been translated into 20 languages. His latest effort *My Name is Red* is a magnificent historical mystery, which manages to be a thrilling page-turner as well as a dense novel of ideas. The book is set in Istanbul in 1591. The Ottoman Empire is a major superpower, perhaps the most powerful in the world, and the sultan has commissioned a new book of paintings. These are not just any paintings. They are to be rendered in the 'new' Venetian manner, a style that flies in the face of all the rules of Islamic miniature art. The book is so secret that even the miniaturists working on it are unaware of the whole picture. Only Enishte Effendi, the official supervising the book, knows how all the pieces will fit. But rumours of heresy and blasphemy swirl around the project and an extremist preacher, incensed at the new western influences, is preaching murder. When one of the miniaturists working on the book is killed, anyone could be the killer. Was he killed because he was committing heresy? Or because he had discovered heresy and was about to unmask the heretic?

Seldom do we find in literature a work with so many well-elaborated facets. This is the case with *"My Name is Red,"* a novel which not only has a murder plot and a love story, but is also richly adorned

with history, art, politics, while addressing deep philosophical/religious issues. The novel has an architectural structure made up of 59 chapters, each one representing the perspective of every character involved in the plot, besides inanimate objects (a corpse, a coin, the color red, death), figurative characters such as a dog, a horse, and Satan. The result is a cubistic outlook in which each piece has its own autonomy and at the same time remains dependent upon each other. Although "Black" is the main figure, none of the characters is fully developed; they serve as means to painstakingly and repeatedly address the central issues of the novel: the political allegories and the philosophy of art. The plot evolves around the story of an art book requested by the Sultan (back in the 16th century) in order to glorify the life and deeds of the monarch. The miniaturists (Butterfly, Stork, Elegant, and Olive) commissioned to perform the paintings have to struggle between adherence to conservative techniques of a two-dimensional painting versus the introduction of the new western approach to art, using perspective (three-dimensional) and portraiture. This clash eventually brings a disruption of the old stability and results in the murder of two miniaturists. The author is a progressive Muslim intellect who opposes the conflict between East and West (East and West being relative terms and as the Koran rightly states "To God belongs the East and West"), and holds to the principle that "all good art comes from mixing things from different roots and cultures."

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