

Laudatio to Orhan Pamuk,

On conferring him the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the University of Bucharest

Rector Magnificus,
Members of the University Senate,
Dear colleagues and guests,

Today's ceremony dedicated to a famous writer who in recent years has redesigned the world's literary map will undoubtedly remain a memorable date in the Annals of the University of Bucharest and it will equally rest in our minds as a solemn event for all participants.

On behalf of the Romanian academia we have the honour and pleasure to hereby pay homage to Mr. Orhan Pamuk, a prestigious and authentic writer of the contemporary world. This is only a token of respect and high appreciation reflecting the Romanian readership's perception of Orhan Pamouk's work and personality in our country.

Orhan Pamuk was born at Istanbul in 1952. Later in his literary creation, his native town was to become the "town" *par excellence*, the matrix of the world, the core of which to be most expressively mirrored in many pages. Orhan Pamouk graduated from one of the most reputed schools in Turkey, the Robert Kolej, which was founded in 1863. First he attended architecture courses, then he opted for the Journalism Institute of Istanbul from which he graduated in 1976. While he became aware of the risks and uncertainties of his option in life, ever since 1974, he dedicated himself exclusively to writing which was to become his supreme devotion in his entire work, though, between the age of 7 and 22, Orhan Pamuk is known to have been flirting with the idea of painting, and he even thought of truly becoming a painter.

His first book, *Karanlık ve Işık (Light and Darkness)*, brought him within the focus of literary criticism in Turkey and was awarded the debut prize of Milliyet Publishing House (1979); in 1982, the novel appeared under a new title, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları (Cevdet Bey and His Sons)* and was awarded the Orhan Kemal prize (1983); this is a family novel spanning

three generations during early modern Turkey and it generally follows the classical narrative conventions. Orhan Pamuk's second novel, *Sessiz Ev (The Silent House)*, published in 1983, was awarded the Mandaralı Prize in 1984; this is a novel which already foreshadows the new narrative experiments focusing on several characters and human typologies to be encountered as a central theme in later novels. The French version of this novel was awarded the Prix de la Découverte Européenne in 1991. The novel *Beyaz Kale (The White Castle)*, published in 1985, the English version of which was awarded the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (Great Britain, 1990), widely consolidated Orhan Pamuk's domestic and international reputation. This novel includes many of the "scholarly games" and the constant themes of his masterpieces meant to single him out as a very original voice on the literary scene of the contemporary world: identity tensions and uncertainties, discovering the alterity, identity-alterity relation, East-West complementarity, the intellectual or the writer's relation with the structures of power, the double motif, the motif of disappearance and loss.

During the same period (1985-1988), Orhan Pamuk was a *visiting scholar* at the Columbia University and the University of Iowa, where he did research and finally wrote a well-reputed book, which defines him as a unique and special writer. This is Orhan Pamuk's novel *Kara Kitap (The Black Book)*, published in 1990, which bears the imprint of the author's biographical experience also partially evoked in other volumes, such as *Öteki Renkler (Other Colors:Essays and a Story)* and *Istanbul. Hatıralar ve Şehir (Istanbul: Memories of a City)*, as well as in interviews or speeches pronounced on the occasion of important prize-awarding ceremonies. In 1991, Orhan Pamuk writes the film script of *Gizli Yüz (The Secret Face)*, directed by Ömer Kavur; its initial point is one episode of *The Black Book*. The film will be remarked in the film festivals in Antalya (the prize award for the best film and the best script) and in Montreal (the prize award for the best film). The novel *Yeni Hayat (The New Life)*, published in 1994, is written in the form of a modern, strange *Bildungsroman*, constructed in a kind of limbo in-between dream and reality; but the reader who is familiar with Turkey's cultural tradition will find in this book – beyond the poetical style or allusions to daily life – the essential themes of Sufi initiation, to be found in *The Black Book* as well. The novel *My Name is Red*, published in 1998, is maybe the most ample and emotional novel of Orhan Pamuk. The plot is located in the XVIth century Ottoman miniaturists' environments which the author reconstructs with unparalleled minute devotion and refined insight proper to the protagonists themselves. Beyond the characters, the epoch and ubiquitous Istanbul pictured as an immense ark and epitome of creation, this novel is a subtle meditation on time, on memory and the history of "East" and "West", petrified in the rigid matrix of a fearful traditional topography. The novel *My Name is Red* was translated into several languages and was awarded in 2002 *le Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger* (France) and *Il Premio Grinzane Cavour* (Italy); in 2003, it received the famous IMPAC Dublin Award (Ireland).

Orhan Pamuk's literary biography continues with his book *Öteki Renkler. Seçme Yazılar ve Bir Hikâye (Other Colors:Essays and a Story)*, dated 1999, a collection of diary excerpts, articles, literary reviews, essays, reports, and travel notes as well as a long novella entitled "To Look Out the Window", including many autobiographical notes. The novel *Kar (Snow)*, published in 2002, singled out as a "political novel" as defined by the author himself and gave rise to numerous reactions in Turkey, on account of its very sensitive religious and ethnic issues that the novelist tackles from a variety of perspectives. The French version of the novel was awarded the Prix Médicis Étranger (France, 2005). The latest book of Orhan Pamuk, *İstanbul. Hatıralar ve Şehir (Istanbul: Memories of a City)*, published in 2003, enjoyed a legitimate interest and emotional acclaim from the public both in his native country and abroad. The novel goes beyond the author's personal experiences, it illustrates a somewhat ironic detachment or a very lucid, objective view on his own family, some openly avowed spiritual affinities and legacies; it is like a dyptic where the author's personal life story is an inseparable part of the city's sentimental history.

Late in the autumn of 2005, Orhan Pamuk – whose books have now been translated into over 50 languages – was awarded the Peace Prize (*Friedenspreis*) at the International Book Fair of Frankfurt. Orhan Pamuk's work was finally acknowledged internationally on his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 2006 – an event that was amply and enthusiastically greeted by all the knowledgeable critics and those admiring his original literary creation.

Orhan Pamuk is *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the Freie Universität of Berlin (2007) and of the Boğaziçi University of Istanbul (2007). He was also awarded a variety of honorary distinctions on behalf of the Washington and Georgetown Universities (2006 and 2007 respectively).

In 2006, Orhan Pamuk was a *visiting professor* of the University of Columbia. The next year (2007-2008) he came back to teach courses in comparative literature and *creative writing*.

We can realize how multi-faceted Orhan Pamuk's identity can be, but beyond this and the customary inherent aspects of life, our distinguished guest is and will essentially continue to be a genuine writer. A writer such as Orhan Pamuk cannot devoid himself of the call for asceticism – of the power to detach himself from the world turmoil, to isolate himself in a familiar space replete with books and the traditional tools of a writer so as to toil patiently and perseverently with his stubborn manuscripts – the "agony and ecstasy" of the author. Our writer considers the act of writing to mean a sense of avowed dedication, solitude and unconditional availability.

The polyphonic novels of Orhan Pamuk, containing ample, labyrinthine sentences inducing a strange feeling of atemporality to readers, have brought a new trend in world

literature. The frequent themes of his books focus on a space which used to be briefly and schematically depicted in monochord sentences imbued with linguistic clichés and cultural stereotypes. Therefore, nothing is more unexpected or gripping for the Western reader or for those educated at the Western Novel school than the luxurious, melancholic incursion into the universe of the Ottoman miniaturists of the XVIth century and their predecessors – Turks or Iranians. If we take the rich and age-old story of Istanbul – the palimpsest city, both fascinating and frightening – haunted by the shadows of the past, and the visionaries' *spleen* by the solidarity over time of vanquishers and vanquished alike. Or the revelation of Turkey's recent history with its dramas and sacrifices, or the inevitable ambiguities and contradictions with wasted destinies and the gloomy anger of the disinherited, or the loneliness of those dreaming differently from all the rest. Or the complicated stories, laden with half-whispered mysteries and truth of past great families mutilated and lost in the hot lava of history or in their own illusions and in the eternal human frailties.

Throughout the canvas and the trama of each novel, Orhan Pamuk's work creates a vast fresco dedicated to human fragility, in a permanent struggle with ravaging time. His characters migrate from one book to another, from one epoch to another, in an attempt to define the identity, to uncover alterity and complementarity, in search of solutions for survival and accomodation, in recognition of their own incapacities, frustrations and limitations. Each book seems to be resuming the same story, each time viewed from a different angle, through a different lens, as in each and every book there persists, never confusing, always crystal-clear, the shadow of the creator with his own recollections, joys, and sorrows.

After many years of Benedictine austerity, Orhan Pamuk has now become a voice that can no longer be ignored in the context of the eternal disputes on canons, revisions, criteria and anti-criteria for their crystallization. Orhan Pamuk also has the great merit to have drawn the people's attention to a type of literature which used to be considered marginal not long ago; to have shown the would-be literary youth in Turkey and elsewhere that research, confidence in one's own destiny, authenticity and, obviously, talent can defeat prejudices, mental shut-off and adversities, irrespective of their underlying nature.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The University of Bucharest hereby confers today the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Mr. Orhan Pamuk, in full recognition of his intellectual excellence and in high appreciation both of his original contribution to the prestige and growth of literature and his firm long-standing ethical convictions.