The distinguishing characteristic of the novel as a genre, as Pamuk explains in his recent volume of belletristic prose, *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist*, is the way it “invites us into the landscape” and allows the reader to “see the universe from the hero’s point of view—through his sensations and, when possible, through his words” (60). Ironically, a profound ambivalence with this supposition impels *Snow*, a novel in which the question “how much can we ever know about the love and pain in another’s heart?” never resolves into the confident transparency Pamuk later claims in his lectures (259). Instead, *Snow* derives its distinctive energy from the oscillation between the ethical imperative of our being-in-common and a solipsistic wariness of intersubjectivity.

In the final lines of Orhan Pamuk’s masterful novel *Snow*, the narrator describes how he boards a train leaving the town of Kars in eastern Anatolia, looks out through its windows, and meditates on the life and death of his friend Ka, a poet murdered after his visit to Kars four years previously. The novel closes with him staring into “the thick falling snow” until “the thin and elegantly quivering ribbons of smoke rising from the broken chimneys at last seemed a smudge through [his] tears” (463). The moment is pure Pamuk: tears of melancholic longing become a lens that bends the landscape around the contours of a sadness mirrored in the broken buildings he regards.

Goethe as their contemporary avatar, art emerges as organic, natural expression; sentimental poets, by contrast, among whom Schiller counts himself, long to return to this unity but are tormented by a more reflective approach to the materiality of the text and the constitutive opacity of language. Pamuk, however, has little to add to Schiller’s fertile dichotomy; instead, he offers the anodyne assertion that readers should strive to achieve a balance between naïve and sentimental/reflective modes of reading, just as he has sought “an equilibrium between the naïve novelist and the sentimental novelist” inside himself (18).

Unlike John Gardner’s *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* or James Wood’s *How Fiction Works* (a book that shares Pamuk’s dissatisfaction with E. M. Forster’s character-driven approach in *Aspects of the Novel*), these essays on craft are never destined to become the handbook and companion of aspiring young writers, to whom Pamuk offers the sage advice to read great novels with care. Instead, the pleasures of *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist* will most likely be esteemed by sentimental/reflective readers of Pamuk’s fiction or those seeking to replenish their recommended reading lists with an eclectic transnational mélange of literary fiction.
At its best, *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist* corroborates in lyrical and erudite prose what all bibliophiles secretly maintain: the pleasure of reading a novel lies in our search for its “secret center” (20); “novels must address our main ideas about life” (28); “nurturing a love of novels…indicates a desire to escape the logic of the single-centered Cartesian world where body and mind, logic and imagination, are placed in opposition” (33); “people do not actually have as much character as we find portrayed in novels” (67); and, most importantly, “the great literary novels…are indispensable to us because they create the hope and the vivid illusion that the world has a center and a meaning, and because they give us joy by sustaining this impression as we turn their pages” (173).

It is to this concept of the novel’s “center” that Pamuk devotes the most sustained attention, suggesting that the center exists both in the writer’s shifting intuition about the meaning—the “real subject of the novel”—in the process of composition, and in the reader’s peregrinations (155–6). If “literary critics have devoted little attention to the center,” blame rests not with the vogue for “deconstructionist theory,” as Pamuk speculates, but in the necessary inadequacy of any propositional statement—which Pamuk wisely does not hazard—about the “center” of great literary novels like *Moby Dick*, *Ulysses*, or *In Search of Lost Time*. Perhaps we might say that the greatness of a novel rests precisely in the gap between any reductive statement about its center(s) and our readerly intuitions about the gravity and power it exerts.

When awarding the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature to Orhan Pamuk, the Nobel committee praised a man “who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interfacing of cultures.” It is by this measure that *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist* fails most conspicuously to achieve the potency and originality of his novels *The White Castle*, *The Black Book*, *My Name is Red*, and *Snow*. “Western writers,” Pamuk tells us, “write not to represent anyone but simply for their own satisfaction” (146). Meanwhile, “non-Western novelists,” especially those who write under conditions of political repression, “can be read allegorically” (39). Over thirty years after the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Pamuk laments the fact that scholars allegedly understand little about how “non-Western” writers “adapted the concept of fiction recognized in the West to their own reading publics and national cultures” (38), but offers only the most cursory gloss on how repressive societies or an “Islamic culture that does not get on very well with the art of figurative depiction” might affect the art of fiction (115).

Beyond the stale rhetoric of the West/rest dichotomy that afflicts much of these musings, Pamuk invokes other problematic categories to deleterious effect: grandiose claims about “the modern secular individual” and “modern man” as universal categories are not only indefensible, they belie the historically, culturally, and geographically specific varieties of secularism and modernity that novels like *Snow* labor mightily to explore and document (163).


Justin Neuman is Assistant Professor of English at Yale University.