

Chapter Four

The decadent flâneur and the Progress of History: Alienation, Flux and the Poetics of Reconciliation in *A Strangeness in My Mind*.

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting

Milan Kundera

“It was sad to see the old face of the city as he had come to know it disappear before his eyes, erased by new roads, demolitions, buildings, billboards, shops, tunnels, and flyovers...he liked old things: the feeling of walking into one of those cemeteries he discovered while selling boza in distant neighbourhoods, the sight of a mosque wall covered in moss, and the unintelligible Ottoman writing on a broken fountain with its brass taps long dried up.”

A Strangeness in My Mind

Orhan Pamuk

The bourgeoisie is committed to history; his tryst with history involves an unconditional and undisputed subjection to the sacrosanct immediacy of history. The historical within the bourgeoisie imaginary is constituted by an order of immanence and Immanuel Wallerstein rightly observes that the bourgeois is the “shaper of the present and the destroyer of the past”

("Bourgeoi(sie)" 97). It is this unproblematic disposal of the historic that exceeds the bourgeoisie that marks him as the typical protagonist who is engaged in relentless endeavors of becoming the subject of his own history. As such, the order of immanence that constitutes the historical consciousness of the bourgeoisie is not contained within the predicated symptoms of the historical occurred. The historic for the bourgeoisie is largely constituted by an empirically familiar material order, one which systematically positions the bourgeoisie within a habituated milieu of history. The historic is not unfamiliar and anything unfamiliar and beyond the explainable limits of comprehensibility do not qualify as history within the bourgeois imaginary. The systemics of the historic is thus developed as a relational truth to the immanence of the bourgeoisie; what is historically undeniable is what qualifies as history within his cognitive emulations of self-representation.

Immanuel Wallerstein highlights this ambiguously inextricable association of the bourgeoisie with history as he identifies the bourgeoisie as the finitude of history, a curious case of "anomaly and ambiguity" ("Bourgeois(ie)" 91). Wallerstein observes that the birth of the bourgeoisie was enacted in an essential arena of (historical) statelessness, "devoid of a logical place...in the hierarchical structure and value system of feudalism" (92). The bourgeoisie lacked a historical tradition of its own, not merely in terms of the temporal but also within the considerations of episteme and culture. To belong to the middle class was to inhabit a historic-cultural vacuum—a sterile country that is devoid of the discursive parameters which constitute agency. In the words of Franco Moretti, the archetypal bourgeois is "a man alone on an island, dis-embedded from the rest of mankind" (*Bourgeois* 13). Amidst these historical sterilities, the *bourgeoisie Oedipus* must seek his *paterfamilias* who will provide his agency a historical validation and in the absence of any such pre-discursive *law of the father*; he can dare to dream of a sacrilege which will identify him as the inventor of his own history (*emphasis mine*).

Michel Foucault, in his analysis of Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment" observes that the constitutive characteristic of the Enlightenment involves a validation of the present on the fundamentals of "difference" and not "the basis of a totality or a future achievement" ("Enlightenment" 34). The bourgeoisie, a principle actor in the arena of Enlightenment, writes his own history. Martin Heidegger, contemplating the possible "significations" (*Being* 430) of History observes:

... 'history' is not so much the past in the sense of that which is past, but rather derivation... from such a past. Anything that 'has a history' stands in the context of a becoming. (430)

The *becoming* (*emphasis mine*) of the bourgeoisie posits a claim to history and yet it is posed in departure from the existing repertoire of history. The substratum from which history is derived is non-existent for the bourgeoisie and in all likeness; he can rest his claim to history in difference. It is this essential difference that allocates the bourgeoisie a distinguished historicity that is dismissive of other historicalities, which are equally pertinent and present within the temporal consideration of history.

Franco Moretti hints at this systemic evolution of a homo-significant history (also insignificant, i.e. everything is haunted by the perpetual possibility of signification) in the hands of the bourgeois as he imagines the birth of the 'serious century'¹ as an inevitable outcome of the bourgeoisie's claim to history. The bourgeoisie everyday, within a modus operandi of self-representation, acquires a historical worth. Moretti is quick to observe that 'the stranded man in an island', the archetypal bourgeois subject, begins to "see a pattern in his existence, and to

¹ For Moretti's discussion on 'Serious century' and the change in cultural historiography that increasingly informs the everyday reality its historical worth, something that was simultaneous with the birth of the bourgeoisie, please refer to the essay "Serious Century: From Vermeer to Austen" anthologized in *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture* (ed. Franco Moretti)

find the right words to express it” (*Bourgeois* 13). This preoccupation with self-representation is viral and vital and, to return to Moretti, culminates into that curious climax of history where “...the bourgeois can no longer be simply ‘himself’; his power over the rest of society—his ‘hegemony’—is now on the agenda” (13). All that is validated within self-representation qualifies as history. The bourgeois arrives as the master of his history; history doesn’t precede him. It is instead reduced and nominalized within a valorized order of cognition, where to be is also to become, only and nothing but, history. Immanuel Wallerstein observes:

I know of no serious historical interpretation of this modern world of ours in which the concept of the bourgeoisie...is absent. And for good reason. It is hard to tell a story without its main protagonist.” (“Bourgeois(ie)” 98)

Modernity becomes synonymous with the birth of the bourgeoisie; the temporality and historicity of the two linger undistinguished. Wallerstein’s protagonist of modernity is Ian Watt’s precursor of modernity, “logically independent of the tradition of past thought.” (Watt, *Rise* 12) The container-contained, cause-effect, habitus-habited semblance is increasingly nuanced as the bourgeoisie evolves as the founding subject of modernity. Jerrold Seigel observes “...modernity has some of its essential roots in the efforts and activities of a category of people we call bourgeois” (*Modernity and Bourgeois* 13). The becoming of modernity (and thus its historicity) is indissociably associated with the becoming of the bourgeois and the birth of modernity and the birth of the bourgeoisie are simultaneous and historically synchronous.

Jurgen Habermas, returning to Arnold Gehlen’s understanding of modern culture, identifies modernity as a “crystalline state” (*Philosophical* 3). For Habermas (as well as for Gehlen) modernity is the essential apex of history where “the possibilities implanted in it have all been developed in their basic elements. Even the counter-possibilities and antitheses have been

uncovered and assimilated, so that henceforth changes in the premises have become increasingly unlikely” (3). The event of modernity acquires a stature of abstraction, promising a potential to contain all other historic, un-historic and trans-historic possibilities.

The *end of history* (*emphasis mine*) strain (which Gehlen identifies as *posthistoire* (cited in *Philosophical* 3)) that modernity upholds is significantly validated and substantiated in its presumptuous valorization of the present as the essential and unproblematic condition of historical significance. Habermas, underlining the undisputed priority of the present in the historical consciousness of modernity, observes:

Because the new, the modern world is distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future, the epochal new beginning is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new... Within the horizon of the modern age, the present enjoys a prominent position as contemporary history. (*Philosophical* 6)

The bourgeoisie and his promise to validate the present as the historic bears the promise of re-postulating history beyond the unproblematic notions of temporality. That is to say, history is no longer conceptualized in terms of chronology and is not undisputedly considered as that which has occurred. Instead, the occurring lays an equal claim to history which, as previously discussed, soon takes a turn towards becoming a universal truth, an emphatic narrative of progress. One can scarcely overlook the unholy tryst between the conceptions of progressive history, modernity and the bourgeois and refute the thesis that the bourgeois has been influential in historicizing modernity. What is more, this idea of history and modernity has been deeply uniform and homo-hegemonic in essence, postulating an exclusivist and constricted idea of history and modernity.

Since the historical base of modernity is the present and since modernity as a social-cultural phenomenon is intimately associated with the bourgeois spirit, it is probably worthwhile to evaluate the bourgeois and its relationship with the present. The bourgeoisie's conceptualization of the present is also a politicized enterprise. The present is an annotated presence within a constricted order of the experiential that is profoundly premised upon the material and the empirical. The bourgeoisie present, as Moretti observes, is a host of everyday; everyday that are constituted by "regularly repeated activities" ("Serious" 381) The bourgeoisie's conceptualization and recognition of presence sustains within an intimate order that is in compliance with his own material-empirical order of the lived. This obsession with the familiar is an attempted rationalization of "the novelistic universe" ("Serious") where the excess is systematically unrecognized and either discarded or appropriated.

This "teleological rhetoric", where "events acquire meaning when they led to one ending, and one only" (Moretti, *Way* 7) is a predominant component of the bourgeois sensibility and largely characterizes the bourgeoisie's engagement with history. Making sense of history for the bourgeoisie is thus correlational with explainability; the historic (even as a predated reality) must be explainable in relation with the present. The empirico-experiential reality of the present is never dubious or unreliable in disposition; it is the historic that is increasingly posited within a sensibility of apprehension. Foucault summarises and distinguishes this change in historical consciousness as the typical feature of the nineteenth century, i.e. the "golden age of the bourgeoisie" (Dejung Motadel, "Worlds of" 20). He observes:

History in this sense is not to be understood as the compilation of factual successions or sequences as they may have occurred; it is then fundamental mode of being of empiricities...History, from the nineteenth century, defines the birthplace of the empirical, that from which, prior to all established chronology, it derives its own being. It is no doubt because

of this that History becomes so soon divided, in accordance with an ambiguity that it is probably impossible to control, into an empirical science of events and that radical mode of being that prescribes their destiny to all empirical beings, to those particular beings that we are. (Foucault, *Order* 237)

Foucault's ambiguous postulation of history locates it as divided and it is this divide that in his opinion, is the typical characteristic of nineteenth century (bourgeois) history. In his opinion, the nineteenth century and the simultaneous turn of history towards empiricism suggest that history is no longer (unconditionally) "the space in which every being approached man's consciousness" (*Order* 238). Foucault identifies "a mutation of Order into History" (238) where 'metaphysics' is replaced by 'memory' and history ceases to be a "mere framework of acquired knowledge" (238). Instead, it tends to become "the mode of being of all that is given us in experience" (238) and this is essentially suggestive of a suspension of the metaphysical for the empirical.

The flâneur is profoundly contained within the empirico-experiential nature of being and becoming. He is the voyeur of modern life; his self-fashioning often involves a curious consciousness and indulgence of the exterior. This consciousness, in the words of Aime Boutin, involves a 'sensual turn' and the flâneur for Boutin, "epitomizes the ascendancy of vision" ("Rethinking" 124). Being for the flâneur involves a being with-in the intimacy of the urban atmosphere. This proximity and obsession with the empirico-material stature of the urbane outside probably compels Bruce Mazlish to assert that the flâneur is the "spectator of the modern world" ("spectator" 43).

And yet, this spectator and his ethics of spectatorship refuse to contain itself within the materialised nominal of reality. Instead, reality exterior for the flâneur is a habitation that is habitual, yet not quite. Characterised by, what Deborah L. Parsons calls "elusivity" the flâneur

“walks...into the labyrinth, myth, and fragments of the city” which constantly evade the empirico-material configuration of the city (*Streetwalking* 4). It is in this praxis of elusion that the flâneur looks beyond the empirical stature of reality. Bruce Mazlish, elucidating this problematic relationship that the flâneur shares with reality, observes:

Reality...is a shifting, historical phenomenon, laced through with an unchanging element...Reality is not something tangible, out there; it is a perception, by the painter of modern life. In the end, the flâneur’s vision of life, based on his peripatetic observations, creates reality. (“spectator” 53)

As such, the flâneur resembles the bourgeois in his obsession with the milieu of modernity and Baudelaire identifies him as the lotos eater; ever-thirsty and addicted to the dew-drops of ecstasy called modernity. In this, the flâneur is typical of the bourgeois. He intends “to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory.” (*Painter* 17-18) For Baudelaire, modernity is constituted by “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” (18) and in his incessant endeavours to sieve the *eternal* (*emphasis mine*) from the transitory, the flâneur, alike the bourgeois, engages in a valorisation of the present. Yet, flânerie also cherishes an ambiguity with bourgeois sensibility in its consistent attempts to transgress-transcend the constricted containments of empirical reality. For the bourgeois, the material-empirical manifestation of reality is an unproblematic truth. The flâneur constantly nuances the aporia of reality and its empirico-material manifestation. Reality for the flâneur is not an unproblematic validation. Instead, it becomes a phantasmagoria. Margaret Cohen, in her discussion on Walter Benjamin’s use of the concept of phantasmagoria, provides a historical account of the machinations and structure of the same as follows:

The centerpiece of the phantasmagoria was a mobile magic-lantern projector that the spectacle’s animator, the phantasmagoria, used to project ghosts ranging from the collective

heroes and villains of the Revolution to lost private loved ones reclaimed by bereaved persons in the room...it was so wildly successful that the term immediately passed into figurative use, where it described hallucinatory mental processes that were deluded yet that had an undeniable reality of their own. (“Benjamin’s Phantasmagoria” 207)

The flâneur’s engagement with reality (urban reality) as phantasmagoria removes it from the nominalised and enclosed status of the empirically validated and posits it within a fertile milieu of hypothesis and possibility. In doing so, the real and its claim to history is not conditioned and characterised by a unanimous singularity. Instead, the historicity of the real acquires a hetero-significance.

The present chapter will locate the flâneur in a curiously liminal state of the noumenal-material and the phenomenal-trans-material where the empirico-immanent and its claim to an unproblematic, apparent historicity is increasingly nuanced by an experiential recognition of *other histories (emphasis mine)* that linger un-manifested in the apparent. These *other histories* are not un-historic but rather convey the essence of an alternative historicity, which is unfolded before the flâneur in form of an unappropriated ecstasy. These nourishments of ecstasy do not surpass the everyday order of the familiar and do not necessarily refute the historical consciousness of the self (flâneur). Instead, they are revelations which conceptualise the self in the atmospherics of a re-historicised habitation, intimate and alienated from the greater design of the historic. For this purpose, the chapter will engage with *A Strangeness in My Mind*, a novel that deals with the “*Adventures and Dreams of Mevlut Karatas*” and simultaneously claims to portray “*Life in Istanbul...from Many Different Points of View*” (*emphasis mine*). Mevlut in the novel is a boza seller and it is through his perspective that the novel primarily depicts the everyday intimacies of a post-bourgeoisie urban culture and its consistent pattern of historicization of the cityscape. The historic in the novel is conceptualised not just as an

occurrence but also as an ever-consuming glide of the occurring into the schematic order of the past. The past is not a unanimous and unconditionally stable imperative in the novel. It is, instead, an experiential truth, constantly modulated, systematised and appropriated within the self-valorising enterprises of modernity. Paradoxically though, it is the interpretive and the efforts of systematisation which renders the historic in an openness of being an event. Deleuze observes that the event is “neutral to all of its temporal actualisations” (*Logic* 100) and the perpetual turn of history towards the becoming of an event problematises its claim to certainty. Paul Patton, introspecting upon the possibility of understanding history as a Deleuzian event, observes:

...pure events would be real and apparently transcendental objects only partially expressed in their spatio-temporal incarnations. At best, actual historical events would approximate the pure event, a part of which always remains not simply unactualised but ‘indifferent to actualization, since its reality does not depend upon it. The event is immaterial, incorporeal, unlivable: ‘pure reserve’.” (“Events” 38)

The ethics of modernity is characteristic of a historical re-organisation and re-stratification. Modernity accords history a homogeneity that bears the promise of a historicity which can historically contextualise the present within the design of progress. The possible excess, which surpasses the pre-determined status that the present holds in store for the past, is liable to a denial and un-recognition. Marshall Berman, in context of modernity and its relationship with history, observes that the modern man:

needs history because it is the storage closet where all the costumes are kept. He notices that none really fits him”—not primitive, not classical, not medieval, not Oriental—so he keeps trying on more and more. (*All* 22)

History lingers within the window-shopping premises of choice and the ideal modern subject is the master of his own history. He chooses rather than succumbs to the pre-ontological pertinences of the historic. He is the curiously nuanced agency of intervention and appropriation, conducting history within the contrary considerations of a fertile openness and a strategic essentialism. It is this dialectic enigma of the historic that modernity unveils which is problematised by the intervention of the flâneur. Like the modern subject, the flâneur is intimate in his intervention into the historic. The historic is essentially poised in a promise of openness before the reflective criticality of the flâneur. However, unlike the modern super-historic subject who tames and governs his own history; the flâneur doesn't claim an absolute valorisation of his own interpretations of history. In other words, the flâneur's historical consciousness is curiously poised in an atmosphere of alienation, where history is unfurled in its nuances. The historic is opened up and yet it is accorded an autonomy which is otherwise denied by modernity's rendezvous with history. While history is contained and essentialised by the imperatives of modernity, for the flâneur it acquires the status of an excess which entices and yet evades understanding. Baudelaire sums up the tryst of the flâneur with the historic in his aphorism that the flâneur sieves out the poetry that resides in the envelope of history- poetry that is essentially an irreducible excess (*Painter* 17). The historic for the flâneur is suggestive of an excess and is hence characteristic of poetry. The predominant essence of estrangement that is characteristic to the flâneur flames from a consciousness of this excess that the historic contains-an excess which is not contained within the conditional approximation of history by modernity.

Modernity and its conditional approximation of history has been epistemically conceptualised by Nietzsche and it is probably worthwhile to understand the ambiguity that Nietzsche presents in his engagement with the historic. History, for Nietzsche, is inextricably associated with the

ontic and historical consciousness is synonymous with the sense making prerogatives that are intimately associated with the validation of selfhood. Yet, the historic for Nietzsche is a consistent limit and for the *Übermensch* (super human subject), it is necessary to negotiate, and to an extent, transcend the historical consciousness that the self is vested with. The historic for the subject of modernity cannot predate consciousness; instead it is consciousness which must systematically re-formulate and reorient the constituted design of history. Nietzsche sees the need for a “borderline at which the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present” (*Use* 3) and expounds the “plastic force of a person” (3) as the moderating modus and ploy through which history becomes an appropriable category. Modernity becomes the plastic age of fluidity where history is mouldable and reduced within the imperative considerations of the age. For modernity to persist, history must be a moderated truth, appropriated and essentialised into “a motionless picture of immutable values and eternally similar meaning” (6).

The arrival of modernity in Turkey was marked by a consistent process of systematisation of the historic, where material departures from the desired eventuality of the liberal secular ordeal of modernity were systematically disenfranchised of their claim to history. Alev Cinar reflecting upon the homogenous nature of Turkish modernity observes “Modernity understood as an epoch imposes a sense of uniformity on everything that happens within a temporal frame; as a lifestyle creates a sense of monolithic culture and as an exclusively European experience asserts a sense of European homogeneity” (*Secularism* 22). This European model of a derivative order of modernity, in its imposed arrival within the Turkish *everyday* (*emphasis mine*), refuses to limit its significance within the consideration of the existing socio-economic and political structure. It also involves a moderation/ modulation of the cultural essence of the National imaginary. Cinar observes that this refurbishment of the National-cultural imaginary is a subtle

process of re (and simultaneously de)-historicisation. For Cinar, modernity is suggestive of a “reordering of space...and reordering of time” *determined* by “interventions (that) seek to transform and change an existing set of practices, patterns, and forms into something else” (*Secularism* 25).

Turkey’s tryst with modernity involves a simultaneous homogenisation and re-formulation of the lived historic. What qualifies as historic is an incessant epitomization of the contingent occurring within the hermeneutics of “advancement and progress” (*Secularism* 25). What escapes the pervasive design of progress is suspended as non-historic and all that *other lived’s* (*emphasis mine*), which depart from the recognised and qualified idea of history, melts into the abstract firmament of non-recognition as non-historic. The nuance of modernity, as Marshall Berman observes, involves “a unity of disunity” where the abstract ideal of the universal that promotes the idea of a world history is curiously juxtaposed against a “maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (*All* 15). It is the projected and conceptualised design of the historic that supersedes the more prominent historicalities of the lived and Berman, repeating Marx, observes/ sums it up as “all that is solid melts into air” (15).

This epical tension between the material and the abstract, the particular and the universal, the lived and the imagined, is fundamental to modernity as a phenomenon. Mevlut, our flâneur in question, stands in this milieu of epical tension and his engagement with the modern is characteristic of a critical co-habitation. It is not an unconditional recognition of modernity as an unproblematic phenomenon. Neither does it suggest a rejection of the empirico-material order of modernity with the gaze of “an outsider” (Pamuk, *Strangeness* 318). Rather, it involves a dialectic engagement with modernity that rejects the possibility of “absolute thinking” (Adorno, *Negative* 136). Dialectic, as Adorno conceptualises, involves a recognition of/in

difference. For Adorno, the dialectic conception invites a reconciliation (which he calls reconcilment) with the non-identical, a possibility of “the thought of the many as no longer inimical” (*Negative* 6).

While the materialised manifestation of bourgeois modernity is characteristic of a uniform and systemic history of unanimous progress, the essence of modernity is characteristic of a discontinuity. It is within a perpetual state of statelessness that modernity thrives as an essence. The very historicity of modernity is thus characteristic of a perpetual fluidity where, the contingent and the convoluted, the discontinuous and the disparate, lay their claim to history. Exceeding the ideologies of homo-hegemonisation, modernity is characteristic of an irreducible excess which evades any systematisation. The bare essence of modernity is constituted by *many modernities (emphasis mine)*, all relevant with their own claim to history.

Mevlut’s lack of a consolidated claim to agency and consciousness is significantly in resonance with the fluctuating entrapments of modernity. It is also simultaneously suggestive of flânerie which, as we have observed, is significantly characterised by the possibility of being in the liminal and the discontinuous and thus the contingent. Keith Tester observes that “the figure of the flâneur” is characterised by its essential obsession with the “flux of life” (*Flâneur* 8). The flux, thus conceptualised, is the spirit of modernity and it is in perfect resonance with the spirit of flânerie. Tester observes:

Flânerie can be understood as the observation of the fleeting and the transitory which is the other half of modernity to the permanent and central sense of the self. *Flânerie* is the *doing* through and thanks to which the *flâneur* hopes and believes he will be able to find the truth of his *being*. *Flânerie* also, then, is the way of avoiding arrival at the funeral pyre of *being*. (7)

The avoidance of the *funeral pyre of being (emphasis mine)* is significantly observable in the character of Mevlut, who constantly drifts across a facade of identities, engaging in a discontinuous state of being that is subjected to peripeteiac shifts. The very opening lines of the novel summarise this fluidity as the narrator states:

This is the story of the life and daydreams of Mevlut Karatas, a seller of boza and yoghurt...When he was twenty-five, he returned to the province of his birth, where he eloped with a village girl, a rather strange affair that determined the rest of his days: returning with her to Istanbul, he got married and had two daughters; he took a number of jobs without pause, selling his yoghurt, ice cream, and rice in the street and waiting tables. But every evening, without fail, he would wander the streets of Istanbul, selling boza and dreaming strange dreams.” (*Strangeness* 3)

In an interview organized by *Politics and Prose*, Orhan Pamuk reflected that he had originally conceptualized the novel as a short story based on the simple plot of a street vendor “losing his job because of modernization” (“Orhan Pamuk” 00:10:23-00:10:26) but later on decided to write an “epic about a man who had covered this whole distance” (00:12:17-00:12:21). The referred distance, in all probabilities, is a reference to the trajectory of modernity. The boza seller, as Pamuk remonstrates, was “mysterious...a poor man who had just come from rural poor Anatolia, selling things to secular upper middle class Istanbul” (00:12:45-00:12:58). Premised and inhabiting the overlap of the modern and non-modern and hence two historical timelines/ epochs, the boza seller becomes the perfect face of the other of modernity, or *other modernities*. His being is conceptually premised within a liminal order of discontinuity, he is *neither and both (emphasis mine)* here and there. Much like the flâneur, he belongs in the perpetual verge of unbelonging.

The authentic historicization of modernity and its fluctuating disposition of a heterotopic order demands an (un)belonging within the perilous liminality where the subject is both within and without the evoked climate of transition. To be (Being) in modernity is almost indissociably associated with an immediate consciousness of the *now* (*emphasis mine*); an engrossment within the material order of immanence. However, any uncritical assumption that is complacent with the material manifestation of modernity, fails to decipher its bare/ authentic essence. Modernity, as argued before, is characteristic of an essential discontinuity, nuancing its own premises of enclosure. *What is* (*emphasis mine*) is increasingly perforated/ breached by other orders that are consistent within an openness. The material validity of the *now* is only a possible and never a final claim of existence; it is always already open to refurbishments. Marshall Berman observes that “...no mode of modernism can ever be definitive” (*All* 6). Modernity refutes closure and the limits of the apparent-material are increasingly exposed by the flâneur for whom, the apparent is not an enclosed reality. It is increasingly poised within an openness, in an intimation of apprehension.

The historic of modernity, which is otherwise premised upon the contingent milieu of material manifestation, is increasingly nuanced by the flâneur. His consciousness of the historic is not an essential valorisation of the systematic and the concrete, which the bourgeoisie order of forms is obsessed with. Instead, it is speculative and engaged in a perpetual evocation of the abstract; an abstraction that is not suggestive of an indulgence of a wistful fantasy. Rather, the abstract is constituted by the intimate experiential interventions of the flâneur into the nominalised/ materialised validation of modernity.

Mevlut, our precarious boza seller, is consistently premised within the limits of experience where contemplation, conceptualisation and experience of reality (modernity) and the gross perpetuations of reality are suggestive of a discord. As such, his being is constantly marked by

an ethics of reconstitution and is essentially discontinuous in essence. This discontinuity is anticipated at the very opening of the novel as Mevlut's elopement with his lover Rahiya turns out to be a dystopia. Mevlut realises that the woman for whom he has grown an interest is in reality Samiha and that Rahiya, in reality, is the sister of Samiha. This essential reconciliation significantly posits Mevlut's fantasies of growing old with his lady love as unhistoric. The pangs of a tender love waiting to bloom, those exhaustive endeavours undertaken to ensure the birth of the "first letter" (*Strangeness* 173), the elaborate discussions involving the "most meaningful gift" (177) and the "poetic flights" (196) contained within those letters are now liable to be discarded by the materialised present as non-synchronous and hence inept in validating the present or the contemporaneous's claim to history. They contain the traces of a conceptualised present which has no resemblance with the materialised *now*. The present has estranged Mevlut; his lived now stands in the threshold of being dismissed as irrelevant and unhistoric. The present emerges as discontinuous, within a historical lineage that the self is eager to un-recognise and unburden.

One can thus hardly refute Gulnur Demirci's claim that Mevlut is "the decentered epic hero" (Demirci, "Decentered" 31) but can interrogate it further to illustrate Mevlut's nuance with the historic. For Mevlut, history appears as a ploy of disenfranchisement. Instead of procuring for the hero the promise of an unvanquishable agency, it burdens and alienates the protagonist. The great design, which accords every determinable development of the epic hero as historic (very much in synchrony with a tradition/ trajectory) and not unprecedented, is essentially reverted in case of Mevlut. Mevlut, like Galip in our previous chapter, is faced with an unprecedented present. The undeniably prominent and real material order of reality threatens the rejection of the past as non-historic. Will Mevlut reject the past as non-historic and consume himself within the apparently undisputed authenticity of the materialised order of the present? Or will he, like Galip (the previously discussed protagonist of *The Black Book*), attempt a validation of the lived

by positing the lived within an interpretive paradigm, if only to discover the alternative possibilities that have so long been unexposed by the tyranny of the apparent, and thereby restore the lived its historicity?

At this point, it is probably necessary to reflect upon the allegorical implications that Mevlut's state of estrangement by history carries within the broader context of history of modernity in a non-modern habitation. It will probably not be too far-fetched to read Mevlut's estrangement as the perpetual estrangement that modernity posits; whose unveiled materialisation is never in synchrony with its conceptualisation. Modernity arrives as a derivative discourse in the non-European cultural imaginary. The promise of modernity and its manifestation is often signified by a rupture, not just in terms of the temporal or the material-cultural but also in its materialisation. The expectation from modernity is profound and Habermas points out that the promise of modernity is essentially a promise of novelty, which "lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative" ("Modernity" 5). This departure anticipates the foreknowledge that modernity is synonymous with progress.

However, the materialisation of modernity, in the words of Habermas, involves a "cultural rationalization" where the "everyday praxis"/ "the life-world" remains stranded within a perpetual essence/ sense of deprivation ("Modernity" 9). Habermas observes that the arrival of modernity suggests that "the traditional substance has already been devalued" (9) and the claim to a valorised order that is avant-garde is constituted within a hierarchical structure of "the culture of expertise" (9). The mundane and the commonplace manifestations of reality linger in a perpetual limbo, deprived of any historically *recognised (emphasis mine)* lineage that can provide it any substantial traces of agency.

In the third world culture of non-modernity, the valorised ideal of modern arrives as a derivative discourse, bearing little or no resemblance with the generic intimacies of everyday. The mass

is engaged in a process of *becoming* (*emphasis mine*) modern and any possible endeavour to reconcile with modernity is suggestive of a disenfranchisement (and in a way de-historicization) of the self. The sense of disenfranchisement is not merely constituted by the haunting sense of the unfamiliar that the modern poses before the non-modern consciousness. It is also suggested by the dominance of a homogenic and predetermined methodology of reconciliation with modernity. Any possibilities of a third-space engagement with modernity (beyond the binary design of an unconditional acceptance or an absolute rejection and subsequent turn towards nativism) seem to be bleak and rather unlikely. Dipesh Chakrabarty observes that the derivative order of modernity is characteristic of an aporia and poses pertinent marks of interrogation concerning the ethics and poetics of belonging within the fundamentally non-nativist habitus of modernity:

How do we think about the global legacy of the European Enlightenment in lands far away from Europe in geography or history? How do we envision or document ways of being modern that will speak to that which is shared across the world as well as to that which belongs to human cultural diversity? (*Habitations* xxi)

The non-modern is likely to be stranded within a predicament that is essentially binary and holistic in design. It involves either an unconditional acceptance of the modern as the valid and reject the lived as un-historic or linger in an inescapable anxiety of being out of time. Modernity and its arrival involves an estrangement: it becomes an almost impossible co-habitant with the traces of the non-modern.

Tracing the lineage of modernity in Turkey increasingly substantiates a transition from an epistemic order of abstraction to the foundation of more comprehensive structures which increasingly manifest a more prominent culture of material forms. The grand ideologue of progress, which the founder of modernity in Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, identified as the

“universal norm of civilisation” (*Secularism* 5), increasingly valorised the ideal of a “mentality...oriented towards the West” (Ataturk cited in 5). The fundamental premise of Ataturk’s understanding of modernity was characteristic of a split between the material and the spiritual, the immediate world of form and the phenomenological order of the spirit. Undeniably influenced by the Hegelian notion of the *geist* (absolute spirit), Ataturk presumed consciousness as the preliminary agency that can induce the arrival of modernity. In other words, modernity became co-terminus with consciousness, with an abstract turning outwards into the greater purview/design of World-Spirit.

While the phenomenological movement towards modernity was characteristic of a re-configuration of cultural epistemes; the materialisation of modernity increasingly relied upon a significant manifestation of progress in the empirico-material world. The revision of politico-economic structures like State and market marked the genesis of high capitalism where progress was a material truth. This materialisation of modernity nuanced the traditional structure of the intimate and the familiar; the manifestations of reality had to be in absolute synchrony with the spirit of novelty. Modernity arrived with a sense of estrangement, increasingly positing the traits of tradition within an economy of un-recognition.

Hence, its arrival is synonymous with a de-historicisation of the self, which has so long been nourished within a familiar and intimate climate. The change that modernity invites and which is increasingly manifested in the material order of the world, problematise the intimate historical consciousness of the self. The estrangement of modernity is not constituted by the possibility of change, which otherwise, is its exclusive characteristic. The nuance instead lies in the unpredicted and the unanticipated character of change, i.e., the design that the new is likely to take. This ungoverned nature of modernity is the probable underlying reason of its perennial

essence of estrangement. Let us now return to Mevlut for whom modernity has arrived and now awaits in the van in which he has eloped with his love.

As Mevlut closes the door of the van in which he has escaped with his lover and whom he has so long believed to be Rahiya, “for a moment, the sky, the mountains, the rocks, the trees—everything around him—lit up like a distant memory” (*Strangeness* 7). Mevlut realises that the woman for whom he had developed an immediate attraction at the wedding of Korkut and Vediha is not the woman who was now sitting next to him in the van. As events unveil, Mevlut reconciles with the fact that all this while he had been labouring his love for Rahiya, while the woman who had kindled the flames of love in his heart was her sister, Samiha.

The speculated and the materialised are disparate and the contemporaneous emerges as unprecedented. Yet, the validity of this unprecedented is unquestionable, i.e., since it is a materialised occurrence, it has an undisputed claim to reality. Hence, it is not the present whose claim to history can be disavowed. Instead, it is the speculation of the present that is likely to be denied a historical validity. Hence, those lived realities, which Mevlut has so long indulged in speculating the possible shape/essence of the present, now appear susceptible to a denial by history. The only historical truth that is likely to persist from henceforth is Rahiya, and not Samiha, is his wife:

This was not the girl he had seen at the wedding of his uncle’s elder son Korkut in Istanbul. This was her older sister. They had shown him the pretty sister at the wedding, and then given him the ugly sister instead. Mevlut realized he’d been tricked. He was ashamed and couldn’t even look at the girl whose name may well not have been Rayiha. (*Strangeness* 9)

Interestingly, Mevlut’s conceptualisation of this present (which has now estranged him) has been marked by a sharp departure from the regulative restrictions of tradition. The fantasies of

love and desire for Mevlut that have significantly contributed to this climactic venture of elopement has largely been subversive to the *law of the Father* (*emphasis mine*), both at a literal level and in context of a symbolic order. While the chance encounter with Samiha is materialised after Mevlut has disobeyed his Father and has attended the wedding ceremony of his cousin Korkut; Mevlut's fantasies of love and desire has so long been enthralled in passionate contemplations of the forbidden and the repressed:

...he was twenty-one years old and he had never slept with a woman. A pretty girl with a headscarf and good morals, the kind he would like for a wife, would never sleep with him before they got married...His priority wasn't marriage anyway, but finding a kind woman he could hold and kiss, a woman he could have sex with. In his mind, he saw all these things as being separate from marriage, but apart from marriage, he found himself unable to obtain sexual contact. (*Strangeness* 152)

It is thus that Mevlut arrives at the threshold of securing an agency that is essentially transgressive and not congenial with history. The *law of the Father* and its regulative constrictions have been increasingly abandoned by Mevlut for his desire to depart. He is not the Mevlut who finishes his high school first and then does his military service; a perfect enactment of a historicised future that the *law of the Father* has conceptualised and kept in store for him. Yet, the materialisation of departure posits him before an epiphanic juncture of estrangement. Mevlut fails to materialise his own history of transgression; the present that arrives before him is irregular, consuming his so long lived and cherished ecstasies as invalidated and denying them the sanctity of becoming a synchronous premonition of the present. As Mevlut boards the train to Istanbul from Akeshir railway station, he realises that "he had no clear understanding of how he had been tricked, no memory of how he'd arrived at this moment" (*Strangeness* 10). The strangeness in his mind (estrangement) is suggestive of his

consistent failure to locate the discontinuity that the unfolding present has posed before him and which has been in absolute departure from the lived and the habited. His encounter with the historic tree located “next to the station building”, under whose shade “THE FOUNDER OF OUR REPUBLIC MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATURK DRANK COFFEE”, only intensifies his alienation further (10). The prophet of modernity in secular Turkey (Ataturk) and his consistent claims to vitalise a history that is in absolute synchrony with the ideal of development and progress is juxtaposed against the growing disillusionment of the modern self who has attempted a historical validation of his own agency in departure from tradition, and now stands estranged by a deceptive modernity. Modernity, in sharp departure from its conceptualised notion, arrives as unfamiliar. The valorised vision of modernity framed in contemplations fail; the materialisation of the moment of modernity is characterised by a perilous rupture. Negotiating the rupture demands a reorientation and re-conceptualisation of the self.

Mevlut’s reorientation of selfhood begins with his endeavours to accept the estrangements that the unprecedented has posed before him. Unlike Galip in *The Black Book*, he is not obsessed with the urge to re-interpret the lived and trace the unearthed anomalies constituting the lived which is likely to resolve and reconcile the present in an alternative order of history. The estrangement of the present does not inspire Mevlut to live outside time and within the familiar and empathic intimacies of the past. Instead, he habits the contemporaneous, even when it appears to be estranging. This urge to habit the occurring temporal with its anomalies formulates an objectivity and a third space ethics of belonging within modernity. Mevlut does not reject the modern and yet his engagement with modernity is not without nuance. Mevlut’s consciousness thus formulated is not apprehensive of alienation as an experience. Instead, it is able to cherish an irreducible sense of being even in an impending sense and verge of un-being. The growing self of Mevlut, which has promised to grow with-in modernity doesn’t abandon

the promise of vitality, even when disinherited by the unprecedented order of the modern. The possible disinheritance does not overpower him and as Mevlut returns to Istanbul with his *unmatched* (*emphasis mine*) wife, there are little ecstasies which Mevlut invents, adoring the world which has incidentally been born in deception and predestined with a lack:

Mevlut saw light pouring into the room from Rahiya's milk-white skin. He briefly considered that he might be responsible for those pink and light purple marks on her body. Once they were back under the covers, they embraced in the comfort of knowing that everything was fine. Tender words tumbled unrehearsed from Mevlut's mouth.

"My darling," he told her. "My sweetheart, you're so lovely..." (*Strangeness* 219)

This agility of the self to belong to a discoherent world order, to *embrace in the comfort of knowing that all is fine* (*emphasis mine*) is suggestive of a vitality which is typical to the protagonist a bildungsroman, a prototyped genre that charts the historicization of the self, within an assimilative economy of absorption into the greater temporal constitution of the exterior climate of modernity. The "'great narrative' of the Bildungsroman", in the words of Franco Moretti, "comes into being because Europe has to attach a meaning...to modernity" (*Way* 5). The characteristic bildungsroman involves an unconditional valorisation of modernity, where youth and age are absorbed into an ever existing "boundless dynamism" (6). The static society and its enclosed politico-epistemic order which cherishes wisdom and age as the ideal of heroism is substituted by the transitive youth, mobile and fluid, contingent with the evolving epoch of time. The history of modernity is likely to find its embodiment in the youth; it is the contingent order of the lived of youth that becomes an embodiment of the contingent historicity of modernity.

Yet, Moretti observes that the experiential reality of youth in a bildungsroman is not an unproblematic history of an unconditional accentuation and convergence into the greater temporal structure that constitutes the historicity called world. Instead, the essence of a bildungsroman is also constituted in divergence, in its ability to contain within its greater schema, the possibility of not just assimilation but also rupture. The self is not necessarily accorded and governed “to a stable and ‘final’ identity” (Way 8). Instead, the totality of the exterior is also an indeterminate category, where the self is perilously poised in the threshold of alienation. The ideologue of progress that constitutes the historical essence of modernity is inevitably haunted by the peril of being subjected to a history of estrangement.

This estrangement, significantly for Mevlut, isn’t a denouement within the narrative design of the novel. Instead, Pamuk begins his novel with an essential dystopia where the bildungsroman protagonist has been informed about the discordant ways of the world—in the very denial of his claim to a contemporaneous that is in consistency with his lived. The disillusionment that is otherwise characteristic of the bildungsroman and its subsequent genesis of a selfhood on the “predisposition to compromise” (Way 10) is an essential component of the strategic denouement of the narrative. Moretti observes that the bildungsroman “attempts to build the ego” and “make it the indisputable structure of its own centre” (11). Hence, the denouement of compromise in the bildungsroman doesn’t aim to disenfranchise the self. It is rather suggestive of a harmony with the normative, a *becoming* (*emphasis mine*) which is an inevitability for agency formulation.

Mevlut’s condition problematises the easy consideration of the novel as a bildungsroman, for his compromise does not suggest a self-validation/ affirmation. Instead, the act of compromise has sufficiently derided him of his agency and hence historicity to an extent. As he marries Rahiya, Mevlut cannot refrain from being overtly conscious of the deceit that modernity has

embraced him with. His reconciliation with Rahiya is a simultaneous and synonymous reconciliation with this materiality of deceit. Unfollowing the modalities of a bildungsroman, Mevlut's angst is not characterised by the salient motif to claim his historicity within the greater order of the historical that formulates and constitutes the social. Instead, it involves a persistent urge to formulate his agency in denial, a possibility to lay a claim to history that is in departure from the historical disposition of modernity. Mevlut doesn't necessarily reject modernity but rather exhibits an apprehension about the contemporaneous and its unproblematic claim to history. It is this apprehensive consciousness, that frames history as not unanimous but heterotopic, which contextualises the flâneur in Mevlut. The realisation of *many histories* opens up the poise of presence into an ecstatic order of interpretive experience, removed from the striations of essentialism and pre-determination.

In his tireless wanderings across the city with boza, Mevlut is constantly haunted by his awareness of reality as non-essentialised and bearing a secret that is undisclosed in its immanent-material manifestation. For Mevlut, the urban cityscape of Istanbul and its apparent milieu is "hollow and meaningless" (*Strangeness* 134). The ecstasy, paradoxically, is contained within the un-real(ised) aspect of the urbane. The un-real is not in split from the material considerations of modernity but only exists as a non-apparent presence, unveiled only within the economy of experiential:

He'd walk for kilometres every night with all kinds of beautiful images and strange thoughts crossing his mind. During these walks, he discovered that the shadows of the trees in some neighbourhoods moved even when there was no breeze at all, stray dogs got braver and cockier where street lamps were broken or switched off, and the flyers for circumcision ceremonies and cram schools pasted on utility poles and in doorways were all written in rhyming couplets.

Hearing the things the city told him at night and reading the language of the streets filled Mevlut with pride. (241)

This intervention of the experiential is suggestive of caesura/ interruption which Walter Benjamin identifies as the determinant feature of modernity. The caesura in Benjamin, as Andrew Benjamin observes, is suggestive of the “staging of an opening that can only ever be maintained as this opening” (“Benjamin’s Modernity” 99). The opening up of the climate of progressive modernity by Mevlut does not merely suggest a suspension of the material manifestation of modernity. Instead, it is also an attempted problematisation of the essence of modernity. Mevlut’s realisation of other immediacies that are discontinuous yet hidden within the material manifestation of modernity is a significant attempt that reclaims the true essence of modernity.

The flâneur, in his own way, is conscious of the discontinuities of the contingent and is often involved in perception and exposition of other immediacies that are contained yet unrevealed in the immediate. The habited contingencies of the real are not a limit to experience; they are aporias which promise the possibility of nurturing an excess. In this anticipation of an excess, the flâneur is able to preserve his consciousness from a possible tyranny of reality and instead speculate an alternative dynamics of reality. This alternative is not in absolute split from reality, yet it is not reliant within an appropriate and unconditionally faithful rendering of reality. Baudelaire, harping on this nuance that reality occupies for the flâneur, observes that the flâneur is “a solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination.” (Baudelaire, *The Painter* 17) This *active imagination (emphasis mine)*, as Baudelaire observes, is influential in uncovering and extracting the secret of (apparent) reality and it is this secret which Baudelaire understands as modernity.

Resembling the flâneur, Mevlut's engagement with the city is polyphonic and non-uniform in nature. His experience of the urban is problematically poised in the interstices of incoherent categories like memory and the contingent, tradition and progress, faith and reason, history and the forthcoming. As he ferries his boza in winter nights around Istanbul, Mevlut reconciles with the heterogeneous disposition of the urban experience. This heterogeneous is marked by discontinuities where the perceptions of presence are constantly intervened by Mevlut's awareness of the excess that has been subsumed by the material manifestations of modernity:

A place like Beyoglu, for example! The most populous neighborhood and the one closest to his house. Fifteen years ago, toward the end of the 1970s, when the area's ramshackle cabaret bars and night-clubs and half-hidden brothels were still in business, Mevlut was able to make sales in the backstreets until as late as midnight...But in the last decade or so, the demon of change had cast its spell over the neighborhood as it had over the whole city, and the fabric of the past had been torn asunder, causing those denizens to leave and the clubs playing Ottoman and European-style Turkish and continental music to shut down, giving way to noisy new establishments serving Adana and shish kebabs cooked over an open grill and washed down with *raki*. (*Strangeness* 20)

The residual remains of the past constitute the excess that infringe upon the present; the materially substantiated order of the present cannot consume the impressions of the past which are discontinuities, revealed within an experience of the contemporary. Mevlut re-members the de-materialised past and nuances the validations of presence by his consistent awareness of the contemporary as transient. Baudelaire's flâneur reclaims the eternal from the material by going beyond the perceptive finitudes of the empirical-exterior. The eternal thus conceptualised, is not a transcendental signified that is singular and unproblematically stable. Instead, it is suggestive of an ecstasy that is intensely personal and is contextualised and formulated within

an interpretive consciousness of the observant. For Mevlut, this ecstasy is conditioned by a persistent awareness of an irreducible historical consciousness.

Mevlut's relationship with history is assumable and subjected to easy essentialism, owing to his active professional identity of being the boza seller. Boza, an authentic Turkish drink in the novel, is increasingly portrayed as an endangered cultural motif, thereby signifying the plight of tradition in a National culture obsessed with modernity. As Mevlut steps into the upper middle class Istanbulite households with his boza for sale, he cannot help "feeling poor and out of place" (*Strangeness* 23). For the modernity obsessed upper class society, he is easily nominalised as "a living relic of the past that has now fallen out of fashion" (23). However, Mevlut's engagement with the past does not involve a nominalisation where the historic is commodified and subsequently reduced to a fetishized relic that is susceptible to comfortable consumption. Instead, his engagement with the historic involves a constant perception of the persistence of the past as a referential matrix through which the self engages with the occurring:

When he shouted "Boo-zaa" into half-lit streets, he wasn't just calling out to a pair of closed curtains that concealed families going about their lives, or to some bare, unplastered wall, or to the demonic gods whose invisible presence he could sense on darkened street corners; he was also reaching into the world inside his mind...He sensed, now, that the streets on which he sold boza in the night and the universe in his mind were one and the same. (*Strangeness* 363)

The world within, resembling Badiou's idea of the "world...of contingency" (*Adventure* 62), is the familiar that locates the experiential within a conceivable and irreducible continuity of comprehension. Mevlut's consistent awareness of the world within and its evocation in every nominal interaction with the exterior presupposes a valorisation of the intimate over the exterior. This is not to suggest an attempted reclamation of memory and Mevlut's passive and reflective agency do not fetishize the past as an absolute truth, thereby prompting notions of

resistance in a country haunted/ appropriated by the ideologues of modernity. Instead, Mevlut is in complacency with time, hospitable and open to the fluctuating order of the flowing temporal. His being in the world is undivided and synonymously invokes a characteristic poise between “the source of sense...” and “...a simple logical figure for appearance” (63) i.e. the haunting order of sense making and the exterior formal world of empirical order. The constant nourishments of past that entice his senses are curiously juxtaposed with his systematic endorsement of modernity- his evolving techne and trade to sustain within the discontinuities of the post-capital consumerist economic whimsies, his absolute rejection of the dogmatic tendencies that celebrate a valorised vision of a fundamentalist Nation State. History and the anomalies of the past for him are not revivable sensibilities or eventualities that can be retraced by an alternative cultural or epistemic order. Instead, the past to/for him is contained within the present, in form and potency of an irreducible lived; un-reclaimable: for it is devoid of the necessary distance that can facilitate any possibilities of reclamation. The past and the historic for him is a residual sensibility that personalises the temporal in a lingering intimacy.

It is this simultaneous belonging within the distinct temporal paradigms of the past and the present with equally faithful responses which locate Mevlut as an alternative historiographer. His engagement with history is an irreducible reality, so much so, that the historical refuses to limit its essence as that which has occurred and is in removal from the temporal *now* (*emphasis mine*) of the present. Instead, it becomes a consistent presence that is indissociable from his being there in the world, where “walking around the city at night made him feel as if he were wandering around inside his own head” (*Strangeness* 579). This prominence of the historical, however, doesn't hinder his being in the temporal considerations of modernity and its characteristic flux. While the consistent fluidity and formlessness of modernity perplexes the historical consciousness of the collective that is apprehensive of the unhistorical nature of the

unprecedented now; Mevlut's engagement with the habitations of modernity is founded on an ethics of intimacy. The haunting exterior is not estranging, instead it is the arena where the irreducible historical reconciliation is likely to happen. The discontinuous constituents of the exterior, the "advertisements, posters, newspapers displayed in grocery stores, and messages painted in the walls" (581) are not agencies of immanence which contain and confine the self within a transient order of meaning. Instead, in perfect synchrony with the poetics of *flânerie*, they are traces, "symbols and signs" which make him reconcile with "another realm" where the irreducible essence of the historic persists (581). This altered world is a world in which Mevlut finds that his love of life has been Rahiya, the woman with whom his marriage has been nothing but an unprecedented accident. The discontinuous emerges as an irreducible historical essence and it is in this epiphanic realisation of the discontinuous as the most primordial and intimate of all histories that Mevlut, the boza seller, becomes an alternate historiographer.

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