Brian Anderson   21W.765J   Assignment 4

Last Love in Constantinople by Milorad Pavic is a nonlinear novel whose structure revolves around the reading of tarot cards. There are 21 tarot cards and 21 corresponding chapters in addition to a special card and chapter. The book comes with instructions for 3 different tarot card reading methods to read a person's past present and future: The Magic Cross which focuses on the present, The Celtic Cross which focuses on the past and future, and The Great Triad which equally balances all three. The 22 cards are to be shuffled every which way, cut, and put into a layout specified by the specific reading method. Afterwards, the cards are turned over in a specified order one by one. Every card has a short meaning attached to it, and if the card comes up upside-down it means approximately the opposite of what it means right side up. After reading the description, the reader can read the corresponding chapter that provides a short story with which the reader can associate. At the same time, a story outside of the tarot reading begins to form, since the chapters are all snippets in the lives of the same few characters.

Last Love in Constantinople's structure provides an innovative way of story telling that engages the reader. Since the reader is expecting the tarot cards to reveal something about their past, present, and/or future, he looks especially hard for details of the story that he can associate with. For example, one of the main characters, Lieutenant Sofronije Opujic, is one of power and is often involved in some kind of love or relationship. When looking for something in their past present and future, these two topics are usually thought about and it is likely that the author writes about these often for that very reason.

When I read the book, I attempted to read my fortune using The Great Triad layout. It's funny how much my attitude about my fortune affected how much I would relate to the story. Often times the fortunes are vague enough that they can apply to anyone, which is one of the keys to pulling the reader into the story, however I think being aware of this fact detracted from my experience in reading the book. It was fun to think that it could reveal something about my life though, as there was no harm in trying to apply it to my past and present – however I tend to take the future cards less seriously, because it is stupid to expect things to happen.

Most of the chapters seemed to build on each other very well, however some of them seemed to be very disconnected. If the book is read the way it is supposed to be, then most readers will only get parts of the entire book, which would leave it up to the reader to extrapolate and assume things outside of the story. The order the cards are read in also adds an extra dimension to the story; are you introduced to Sofronije Opujic when he is already married?... or when he is in his fiery days of youth. It is likely that the different first impressions readers get of each character greatly affect the readers disposition to that character.

Last Love in Constantinople is a unique novel with multiple layers of story building and association in both the novel and the reader and is a more entertaining and engaging way of telling a story than most linear novels. It is a great example of the way a nonlinear narrative can engage the reader, and I had a good time experiencing this book.