

Postmodern Approach in *The New Life, The Black Book* and *My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk

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Abstract: Orhan Pamuk's *The New Life, The Black book* and *My Name is Red* gives a detailed history of the changes Turkey underwent. The city Istanbul is set as the backdrop of the novels. The Ottoman legacy is romanticized. It makes him go nostalgic, he is seized by a frenzy to capture and preserve his dreamscape and write about it. Pamuk has emerged out as a self defined rationalist. He appears skeptical postmodernist and relativist writer. The works have epistemological perspective that is individuality acts as the fountain head. Modern values such as intellectual skepticism, political liberty and social progress flow from it. Pamuk inculcates postmodern techniques those are familiar to the West. This paper will focus on the metaphysical binaries of a post-modern text including dichotomy of self/other and East/West tension and its effects on an individual and city at large. The paper shall tell us how the western culture, studies and art challenge Turkey's tradition and culture.

Index Terms: Huzun, Oscillation, Postmodernism, East/West, Self/ Other, Bildungsroman literary genre, Doppleganger

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Orhan Pamuk is a well known contemporary literary figure who is a Turkish and Nobel Laureate as well. He was born on 7 June 1952 in an affluent Islamic Muslim family but a declining one which has shaped his personality as a writer and has influenced his works quite a lot. He spent his childhood at apartment in Nisantasi, the references are given in *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and *The Black Book* too. His works are in Turkish and Maureen Freely, Victoria Holbrook, Guneli Gun, Robert Finn, Ekin Oklap and Erdag M. Goknar are his translators for the English language. His works are also based on the dilemma he has faced, his heroes' like him are on the quest of love (its failure in human life), identity crisis and "to be or not to be" dilemma. These themes being universal in nature bind his readers and make him a celebrated Global postmodernist author. His works depict modern society and the impact of religion, politics, society and culture on individual and nation at large. The present research explores these postmodernist techniques in selected works by Pamuk and they are *The New Life, The Black Book* and *My Name is Red*.

The New Life is a post modern text and can be analyzed in classical and modernist paradigms, utilizing the concepts of melancholy, nostalgia and individuation. The quest motif can be observed at various incidences. The protagonist is a problematic, neurotic and melancholic hero, "Idle men, chasing after fairy tales". The narrator is a young university student living an ordinary life who chances reading upon a dangerous book and wanders in the light of the book only to find himself landed in a new world.

The protagonist of the novel, Osman first has a glimpse of the book in the hands of an architecture student in the canteen. The book promises its readers a new life; hence it acts as a key for salvation for them. They read it reread it and interpret it. In search of that new world of desire they take several long bus journeys and turn themselves into neurotic persons.

The book sounds enchanted and the world it creates bewitching. It teaches the narrator to dream. Now, in the pursuit of an elusive dream, he is lost. Like, any postmodern protagonist "love" becomes "devastating" to him (Pamuk 16). It becomes utmost important for him to "find others" of the "same predicament" as himself to save him from "the unbearable loneliness" (Pamuk 16) that beset him in the new world created because of the book. Yes, escapism- a chief characteristic of a postmodern text is evident here. We all get bored of mundane lives, not only this, we create world of our own, fantasize the unreal and wish to escape to our dreamland. Then, we want people to associate with us and if we don't find them we're left lonely in our own created world too.

Now, the tension created is manifold. He has lost his (real) world, landed in the virtual world without any companion and thus he doesn't find peace in his dreamland as well. Everything gets chaotic, psychologically he feels challenged. Loss of faith takes birth here now. The narrator in the novel witnesses a murder confirms it with all present on the spot but everyone denies having witnessed the same. He runs to the nearby hospitals, enquires there if a student shot has been brought the same day but gets no clue again. He is surrounded with people yet feels the silence of snow and indifference of trees as if nothing at all has happened. Like any confused and lost postmodern hero he has to make extra painstaking efforts to trust in the normal flow of life.

Osman and Janan begun the quest journey and reach the town Güzül, they meet Doctor Fine there, who is Mehmet's father. Later on, we learn that Doctor Fine is a mysterious man and his son was originally named Nahit. Güzül is also the town where Osman loses Janan forever and decides that he should kill Mehmet/Osman/Nahit. Janan gets married to another man and lives in Germany. After killing Mehmet/Osman/Nahit, Osman he returns to his hometown, gets married and has a daughter. Years later, with the inspiration of New Life brand caramels, he restarts his bus trips around Anatolia to capture the meaning of whatever he has experienced by then and dies due to a bus accident on his way back home.

Everyone who read this bewitching, enchanted and dangerous book in the novel has lost connection with the present. Also, has gone through terrible things and has lost faith. *The New Life* is a fantastic odyssey which takes the reader on a restless ride.

The Black Book is called a post modern "quest novel". It is a modern day detective story which has multiple voices and weaves multiple stories and has a backdrop of Istanbul. Istanbul is vividly described in the novel. The novel opens up depicting two important characters or protagonists Ruya and Galip. The book gives deep insight into the psyche of two important protagonists Ruya and Galip. Galip is a lawyer by profession.

"The more Galip's tired and inflamed eyes read on, the more he knew that he would penetrate into the ocean's secrets" (*BB* 262).

Ruya is an escapist and a dreamy lady who is always lost in "garden of memory". She is fond of reading detective novels. The quest in this book is to know the truth, reality and learn the mysterious identity. The author talks about Bosphorus and how the nature has affected it adversely. In the consecutive chapters in the book the supporting characters are introduced gradually.

"Perfectly Childish" (48) is important as it tells us about "the nineteen words goodbye letter" by Ruya. Galip's anguish is depicted vividly in this chapter; as if he questions in pain and vain that people separate for a reason. They will tell you their reason. They give you a chance to reply. They do not run away like that. No, it is perfectly childish. That's how Galip feels after Ruya disappears suddenly. Galip's quest for his wife and friend begins here onwards. Galip begins looking for Ruya's whereabouts with the help of Saim and the letters in mount Kaf. Galip constantly feels that someone is watching him and he names it "Eye". He further explains it in eponymous chapter that this eye is devised by Galip himself and that the eye is he himself; it is Galip's objective and subjective viewpoints and no third person watching him.

The anguished husband doesn't disclose Ruya's departure to anyone. He begins his private investigation or quest for Ruya's leaving and her possible whereabouts. The story of Ruya and Galip turns into a mystery story like the ones Ruya kept reading. The mystery becomes metaphysical than being empirical. Random photos in the newspaper, images on billboards and plastic bags all become a clue.

The novel offers no clue of what would happen the next throughout the narration, conclusion cannot be predicted. Ruya had an opinion that "every detail in a detective novel served a purpose." Galip has his own array of clues, but lacks coherence and the long quest to find Ruya then Celal leads to a frustrating dead end. The novel develops further and Galip gets to know Ruya's disappearance is connected with Celal. Celal is a bohemian journalist who has connections with underworld. Celal has a failing memory and is Ruya's half brother and Galip's cousin. Celal has also disappeared like Ruya without leaving a trace behind of his whereabouts. He has left a handful of final columns. Over time Galip somehow is convinced that if he can locate Celal he would reach Ruya as well. The parallel is drawn between Galip's lost wife Ruya and Celal, who in a strange way is (absently) dominating the novel. Celal loves codes, puzzles and word games and his readers search for hidden meanings and decode them through his columns.

Pamuk gives the novel a postmodern twist, and inculcates text with in text technique which further adds to the dark mood of the novel. *The Black Book* offers another interlude including the three journalists presenting their views on how to write a newspaper column. Pamuk uses Celal as a foil to emphasize the quest of how people can be

themselves and not just the limitations of other people. Pamuk, again draws a parallel here between Galip's search for individuality and nation's identity. Turkey was also getting torn apart between East/West binary polar.

The Black Book is a text with in text novel; another story is sketched in which a barber is seeking Celal so that he can get his quest resolved by exchanging words with him, another interlude which tells the story of a prince in line for the throne. He is also, like other characters on quest of personal identity. The master mannequin maker is depicted to fail to attract customers because his models were not an imitation of models from other western countries. Galip, on his quest journey loses his sense of self and begins to act like the missing journalist he is pursuing. Almost all of the characters on quest are suffering from self inflicted identity theft. The reasons behind Ruya and Celal's disappearance remain unexplained and open for interpretations. Galip follows every clue but the nature of mystery keeps changing. Galip gets a death threat and he begins to fear. Galip finishes the Prince's story and he then becomes certain of "Yes I am myself" and returned to the city of Hearts Apartments. Galip finds Celal murdered and dead there. He felt that the bullet was not aimed at Celal but at democracy. He found Ruya dead inside Alladin's shop amongst the dolls. The last chapter and last scene gives a consolation to Galip and he admits writing is the only consolation to him.

Galip's taking Celal's identity is partly a criticism of westernization in Turkey by the author. The *Black Book* explores the mysticism and its manifestations. Galip and Ruya have no children and they communicate through memory. Galip earlier had no skill to tell stories but later learns it on his quest for Ruya, their cousin Celal who is a journalist with failing memory has also a good skill to narrate the stories of the past; and that's the reason why Galip thinks that Ruya has probably eloped with Celal.

The mysterious nature, the allusions and symbolic references are paramount in *The Black Book*. Galip who is a lawyer symbolizes victorious searches for his missing wife Ruya which means dream. Celal is a reference to Sufi poet Jaleleddin Rumi. Throughout the novel investigation is going on and the chapters are preceded by quotations from Sufi poets to Lewis Carroll. The two assassinations and Galip taking Celal's identity create a mystery for the readers. Mysticism is all about becoming one with the over soul. Sufism view adds to the mystic behavior. Doppleganger Celal emerged out as a victorious man as he is depicted following the Sufi path.

The two identities of Istanbul and Galip run hand in hand simultaneously. Galip takes on Celal's identity and has become a renowned columnist Of Turkey. The impact of West on Turkey is clearly evident. The struggle to find ones identity in this chaos is the Quest journey. Galip, like the meaning of his name keeps battling for his identity which is same as Turkey being torn between its rich heritage and present ruined Turkey after the decline of the Ottoman Empire with the impact of westernization. The idea is that we are all forms of one divine life and Mysticism is all about becoming one with the God. In another review, Eder explores this concept of personal and national identity in *The Black Book*. In the ancient times the Ottoman Empire was Greek Byzantium and after that it evolved in the Byzantine and then Constantinople.

In his review by Adams, he lauds *The Black Book* and calls it an exciting, imaginative and intelligent novel. There are multiple stories and characters in the novel but the underlying question in all the situations is of identity.

My Name is Red (Turkish: *Benim Adım Kırmızı*) is a historical crime novel, a contemporary Turkish fiction and historical thriller set in Istanbul, during the reign of the Ottoman Empire, 1591. *My Name Is Red* revisits Turkey's rich and complex Ottoman past in a fascinating tale about the impact of Western art and aesthetics on an Islamic society that stifled individual creativity and strictly prohibited the creation of representational paintings.

It unravels the themes of representation in art, authorship, East vs. West and religion. It is one of the best novels in modern Turkish literature. It is narrated from the perspective of twelve different characters and has the backdrop of 16th century during the reign of Sultan Murad III, the then leader who is also a character in the novel. Sultan Murat was a patron of miniature painting and he employed many painters to write books. He employed the artists in his service to illustrate a text which leaves a stamp on the western rulers. They are ordered to paint the illustrations in the western style, implying that it should be realistic. However one of them is against this project as he believes that this style is against the precepts of Islam. His identity is kept concealed from the readers and he murders one of his fellow illustrators.

My Name is Red is quite often compared to the work of Italian author Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*. They are fictional narratives and do have historical context and philosophical themes. The writing style is a little difficult to understand and readers keep exploring whether it is a postmodern writing or not as certain salient features like the use of intertextuality and the use of twelve different first-person narrative voices hint at it being a post modern writing. James Joyce's *Ulysses* uses different narrative voices too hence is considered to inspire Pamuk in some way. The work is influenced by the historical fiction Italo Calvino,

Thomas Mann and Marguerite Yourcenar's novel *The Memoirs of Hadrian*. The sinister plots are in resonance with the work of Franz Kafka.

The novel opens up introducing Elegant who has been murdered and corpse thrown in a well so that no one can find him. He speaks from his afterlife and wants somebody to avenge his murder. Black the protagonist of the novel comes back to Istanbul after twelve years at his uncle's place Enishte because his uncle wants him to work on a secret book commissioned by Sultan. Black was once in love with his daughter Shekure but he denied then and now he seems pleased with his personality on his return as a matured man and skilled artist. The murderer on the other hand finds it difficult to come to terms with the fact that he has taken a life. He starts frequenting coffee houses and entertaining people by acting as various characters. He also admits his crime of murdering Elegant. Black is introduced to Shekure's son and Enishte tells him about Elegant's murder, while he plans to leave a clothier Esther hands him over a letter by Shekure. In the letter she admires his handsomeness and tells him about her husband who is a soldier and has never returned from the war, and shares information about Hasan, her husband's brother who tried to rape her.

The next chapter is narrated by an illustration of a lonely tree. The tree calls itself lonely as it was supposed to be a part of a book but it fell out and was thus left alone. Black starts to meet people there; he begins with Master Osman, the head Illuminator. He takes a tour to the Royal Workshop with the master. Black makes individual visits to three master miniaturists

Butterfly, Stork, and Olive commissioned by the Sultan on the same book who each tells Black three different parables about style and signature.

Black responds to Shekure's letter by writing one for her and hands it over to Esther. Esther before giving it to Shekure makes Hasan read the letter in which she confesses that she is confused who to marry. The second narrative voice is that of a gold counterfeit coin. The coin believes that all Istanbulis are obsessed with money. Enishte is with Black discussing the details of the book, wherein he mentions that he is facing difficulty finishing the final illustration in the secret book. The murderer sees Black with Enishte and is jealous imagining Shekure and Black together.

Hasan on the other hand writes a letter threatening Shekure to return and marry him. Shekure goes out with Black to vacant house of a Jewish man who was hanged there. They kiss there and begin to have sex but Shekure stops him and put forth a list of demands in front of Black to marry her, to which Black agrees. While the two are out the murderer goes to Enishte's house, they exchange conversations and ideas on art, religion, sin and the secret book they are working on. The conversation makes it clear to Enishte that it was he who killed Elegant and now wants to kill Enishte as well. He smashes a Mongolian inkpot over his head and Enishte is also thus killed by the murderer. Shekure returns home, finds the dead body of her father but doesn't disclose it on anyone. She mentions instead he is merely sick. The next morning Shekure meets Black, makes a plan to authorize her widowhood in order to marry Black. Black bribes an Imam and gets the work done to authenticate their wedding by issuing a widowhood certificate to Shekure and arranging for their marriage as well. The wedding is organized in the presence of Enishte's dead body pretending him to be alive and giving consent for the marriage. Hasan comes that night to threaten Shekure to return. Next morning Shekure discloses the truth on children saying Enishte just died but Shevket the eldest son doesn't believe her. Black gives the news to Sultan, who is sad to learn the sudden demise. Black also tells him that the final illustration of the book is stolen by the murderer and that Elegant and Enishte's murderer is likely the same person.

Enishte witnesses his funeral from the afterlife and conveys the message of Allah who reassured him about the use of European style, stating "East and West belong to me". Kabilye, the widow of Elegant shows a drawing of horses which she found on Elegant's body and insisted that it wasn't created by Elegant.

Sultan summons Black to the palace and he is suspected to kill Enishte and to make him admit the same, the torture begins but Master Osman interrupts. Sultan gives them both three days to find out the murderer. Black and Osman begin to discuss the salient characteristics of each of the miniaturists. Osman holds Stork being the murderer. A palace official shows them the horse illustration which was found near Elegant's body. A competition is conducted in order to find out the murderer. Olive, Butterfly and Stork are made to participate and draw the horses. Unfortunately, they don't get any clue and thus Osman and Black seek permission to look through the Royal Treasury for clues. Osman and Black look for clues through various books with occasional conversation in between about the future of miniaturist tradition, Black gets tired and falls sleep. Osman meanwhile find a needle that Bihzad used both to paint and eventually blind himself. Osman too pierces his own eyes with the same needle.

Black returns to home and is shocked to learn that Shekure and boys are not at home. He learns that Hasan has taken them away; Black with some people of neighborhood goes to Hasan's place and after some drama and confusion brings them back ultimately.

This work has epistemological perspective that is individuality acts as the fountain head. The story teller at the coffee house recites a poem wherein he sings about conflicted identity. The Erzurumis raid the coffeehouse and kills him. Black then goes to Butterfly's house to get some clue of the murderer. Butterfly tells him that he suspects Stork and thus Black leave for Stork's house. Stork tells Black that the horse illustration found on Enishte's dead body was made by Olive. He also shares Olive's whereabouts. Black and Stork reach at the dervish lodge but Olive denies having drawn the horse illustration. They search for the final illustration but could not locate it and it becomes evident that Olive is the murderer. Black puts a knife on his throat and asks him of the last illustration. The murderer is blinded in the scuffle and he confesses of both the murders. The escape to the death of miniaturist tradition is shared by the ending which suggests them to move to India as the Sultan of Hindustan was hiring the best miniaturists for his royal workshop. Olive attempts to kill Black and escapes through the city of Istanbul. Hasan catches him on street mistakes him to be one of Black's allies and murders him. The final chapter tells the reader that Shekure discloses the letters by Black and Hasan to Orhan in service of creating "a delightful and convincing story."

Modern values such as intellectual skepticism, political liberty and social progress flow from the incidences in the text. Pamuk inculcates postmodern techniques those are familiar to the West. Pamuk's novels are appealing to the masses and that's why they have become the best sellers. He became the first author from Turkey to break through the famous "village novel" pattern. Pamuk instead employed postmodern literary techniques. He has used a characteristic narrative voice and his knowledge of Turkey's hybrid cultural heritage of East and West has given a deep insight to its readers about the well known East-West clash or interlacing of two cultures. The secular and fundamentalist groups though have had an issue with his writing but with the international support he managed to win high accolades. His works meet the West on its own terms, resonating with philosophic and aesthetic concerns that go beyond national boundaries. The theme of Hope and Suffering like in the works of Kazuo Ishiguro's works is also evident in his works. Realism is evident here which captures qualities of real people and events from the city Istanbul in his novels.

The study helps us understand the texts using the lenses of postmodernist techniques used by Pamuk. The discourse helps us understand the post modern metaphysical binaries like self/other and East/West divide. The eventual emphasis by the novelist is moving away of the protagonist from nostalgia via a feeling of alienation towards a sense of discovery, as reflected in his stories.

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