

DOPPELGANGER AS THE KEYNOTE IN ORHAN PAMUK'S THE BLACK BOOK

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Abstract

Orhan Pamuk is a Turkish author of more than ten novels. He received Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006. One of his prominent themes is identity. This study proposes to deal with the theme of doppelganger in his novel *The Black Book*. It is also identified in this work that the conflict of East-West serves as one of the important reasons behind this doppelganger theme.

Key Words: Identity, Conflict, Doppelganger, The East-West

The Problem of identity in postmodern literature is a prominent theme. As a postmodern novelist, in his novels, Pamuk dexterously handles the issue of identity. The question of identity is a recurrent theme in Pamuk's novels. Identity distinguishes people from one another in respect to who and what they are. Generally speaking, identity is known as the personality or personal that is linked to a person's idiosyncrasies. The sense of identity makes the person secure and relaxed while the lack of identity pushes the individual into a crisis or self confusion. According to Lichtenstein, "Loss of identity is a specifically human danger, and maintenance of identity a specifically human necessity" (77). Gardiner states

that: “The person with a successfully achieved sense of individual identity feels unique, whole and coherent. . .” (348).

Pamuk uses the doppelganger theme in most of his novels by creating two characters that might resemble each other as twins. Pamuk comments on why he uses the doppelganger theme in *Other Colors*: “It is the theme of the doppelganger . . . this serves to underscore a perennial identity problem rather than make reference to a current issue” (135).

According to John Herdman, doppelganger is “a second self, or alter ego, which appears as a distinct and separate being apprehensible by the physical senses (or at least, by some of them), but exists in a dependent relation to the original” (14). Herdman suggests that the double or the second self is not subordinated to the original. On the contrary, mostly, “the double comes to dominate, control, and usurp the functions of the subject” (14). Other than this, Herdman also claims:

. . . the subject and his double are physically similar, often to the point of absolute identity. Brothers... and especially twins, may be doubles, but where this is the case there is always an element, whether overtly supernatural, numinous or otherwise extraordinary, which goes beyond the merely natural relationship. (14)

Herdman thus draws attention, in his definition, to the conflict between the original and his double, the physical similitude between the original and the double, and the exceptional relationship between the original and the double. The conflict between the East and the West is found to be the most important factor behind the doppelganger theme, which is the major theme in Pamuk’s novels. In spite of the wide range of themes and narrative

techniques, Orhan Pamuk's work often touches on the deep rooted tensions between the East and the West and tradition and modernism or secularism.

The East-West conflict is quite a common picture in the real life of a transcontinental like Turkey, and this is expressed in Orhan Pamuk's works. Pamuk's books are characterised by a confusion or loss of identity brought on by the conflict between the Eastern and the Western values. Pamuk himself says thus in an interview with Jeffrey Brown:

My books are made from the tensions between high generalizations about East, West, humanity, the meaning of life, and damningly realistic observations about daily life. I like the ironies of people with radical thoughts or with grand generalizations but who are then refuted by the simple facts of daily life. (9)

Most of Pamuk's novels reveal the tension between the East and the West and reveal how modernity, represented by Western art, culture, science, and technology, challenges the tradition, culture, art, and identity of Turkey. Ulker Gokberk in his "Beyond Secularism: Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* and the Contestation of Turkish Identity in the Borderland" says:

Pamuk's oeuvre is dedicated to themes such as Turkey's stance between the East and the West; its Ottoman past and Western-oriented present; conflicts arising from old and new definitions of the artist, of faith and non-religious lifestyle. Even though these themes seem to imply binary oppositions, Pamuk complicates dualities through various strategies, most notably the doubling of his fictional characters and their switching of identities. (6)

While nearly all of Orhan Pamuk's works deal with the tension between the East and the West, this research paper focuses on the prevailing tension in *The Black Book*. This novel

also dwells on one of Pamuk's favourites, which is the doppelganger issue, along with the East-West theme. When Galip wanders through the Istanbul streets, one gets to know many of the different neighborhoods of the city, all with their distinct atmosphere. This is a city where there are people of the East and the West, ancient and modern, Islam and secular, rich and poor, pashas and peasants. The question remains: what is this city's true identity? Or Is it a modern metropolis, or a dying legacy of Constantinople that once was great?

In *The Black Book*, the West appears as a paradigm of productivity and modernity, but at the same time, conflicts between the East and the West are often evoked. The Western characters are portrayed as rich and elegant, but they are portrayed as sexually deprived in some passages. They also excel in science and art, but they have stolen some of their skills from Eastern cultures. The notion that the East could not produce anything original is conveyed by a few characters in the book, and this is interpreted as an insult to Turkey by the other characters. The protagonist of the novel, Galip ends up in a shop that produces mannequins on an outing with some British journalists, who want to see the 'real' Turkey. The owner of mannequins is able to sell Western looking mannequins. No one ever buys the Turkish looking mannequins. So such mannequins are stored in a network of underground tunnels and caves. The Westernized mannequins are considered beautiful. The Turkish ones are referred to be ugly. This is one way the author reveals the Turkish people's split personalities.

Galip is one of such characters, who reveals his split personality. As he is searching for Ruya and Celal, he meets one old columnist or journalist in order to get some news about Ruya and Celal. This old columnist points out what has changed in Galip, though Galip is not interested to listen to what the columnist says:

Because Galip Bey—my son—you’ve changed so much since I last saw you. Your face is pale and your eyes have sunk way back in your skull; you’ve become someone else. Istanbul nights are endless; a ghost with a guilty conscience cannot sleep. What did you just say?” “May I please have my glasses, sir, so I can leave?” (TBB333)

Changes in Galip clearly exhibit his desire to take Celal’s place, because, to him, Celal represents the West: “. . . the world he longed for was the one Celal had conjured out of words” (218). Celal too has revealed his association with the West. Chapter Seventeen says: “. . . Celal had loved this raincoat because he thought it made him look like the sleuth in an English detective novel. . .” (190). During the conversation between Galip and the old columnist, the old columnist explains the state of Celal: “Do you see what I’m driving at? It’s not just his memory Celal Bey has lost, it’s his past – and this was his last link with his country. It’s no accident he can no longer write” (332). The old columnist further talks about Celal and his association with the West in Chapter Twenty Eight: “If that English television crew had asked to speak to me and not Celal, I could have told them about the really important secret – how the East will continue to be the East for tens of happy thousands of years to come” (331).

In the view of the old columnist, Celal has mislead the people of Turkey by encouraging them to follow the West through his writing. More is said about Celal by the old columnist:

I share only one sentiment with your Uncle Celal: I pity those poor film stars of ours who can be neither themselves nor someone else. I feel even greater pity for those compatriots of ours who see themselves in those film stars.

These people could have been saved—the entire East could have been saved—had not this Uncle Celal of yours, this cousin, sold us out for his own gain. But now he’s running in fear from his own creation, running away from the entire nation, taking his wardrobe of tricks and strange disguises with him. Tell me, what is he hiding from? (332)

It is also clear that Celal has always looked down the identity of being Asian:

By the time he returned to the street, Galip had eliminated some clues and emphasized others: they could not be outside the city, because Celal could not write anywhere else. They couldn’t be on the Asian side of the city, because he’d always looked down on it; there wasn’t enough “history” there”. (220)

Galip continues to look for clues in the columnist’s articles to find their location. In this process, Galip also begins to wear Celal’s clothes, answer his phone, and write articles under his name. As the plot continues, Galip is subjected to a kind of metamorphosis in which he assumes Celal’s identity: he becomes the other. The novel ends with a mystery: the dead bodies of Celal and Ruya are identified, but the assassin’s identity remains unknown. In telling this story, Galip becomes a writer; therefore, although he could not find his wife Ruya, his dream (Ruya in Turkish) comes true.

Anecdotes such as Master Bedii’s Children and The Story of the Prince individually touch on the East-West theme. In addition, the novel speaks of the East in postmodern techniques: ancient Eastern tales are told in the sense of a postmodern novel based on the Western style. What Pamuk does can therefore be represented as a fusion between the East and the West in *The Black Book*.

Thus the characters in the novel clearly exhibit their desire to take someone else's place. And this study makes it clear that the conflict between the East and the West makes the characters develop desire in themselves to take someone else's identity and supplies enough for the doppelganger theme.

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