



Resurfacing the Envisioned Identity in Orhan Pamuk's "My Name is Red" & "Snow"

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ABSTRACT

Orhan Pamuk a great literati and fictional chronicler whose works are transfused with the rudiments of the Turkish history. He has dealt with the theme of identity employing the nuances of post modernism with which the aspect of identity gains significance and finally incarnates in his works. The protagonist Black in " My Name is Red" and Ka in "Snow" desire to be spiritual men with secular views on life which is their envisioned identity they wait upon. Black is able to exercise his identity in the illustration commissioned by the Sultan and Ka in composing poems. It is here their envisioned identity resurfaces. Both the protagonist finally emerge with their envisioned identity and begin to live a new life. Black is fortunate to continue with his new life whereas for Ka it is short lived who returns to Germany where he is killed.

Orhan Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 2006, who brought his literary vision a reality through mesmerizing narratives. His works have been translated in to more than 60 languages. His writings came as a wakeup call to the Turkish Literary realm which has dawn in a great awakening to the writers of today. His experiments in the context of post modernism speak volumes about the efficacy of his avant garde style writing. Pamuk has been vociferous in enunciating his views which runs through every minute aspect of his writing which is highly evocative in the context of identity. In today's civilization of digital natives men look at everything from techno centric point of view. A writer like Pamuk has tried his best in experimenting with change to retain the fervor rather than getting precipitated in to the dense sooth of nothingness in the age of cutting edge technology.

Language decked with the pictorial blend of weight characterization, satire anchored with hidden themes, layers of meanings deeply seeped in the inscape of the characters, all add more flamboyance to his writings. Each reading through his serpentine sentences sheds light on different perspective which fuels the search for better understanding. The tonality of his writing reverberates through every micro aspect of fiction. Its effect on the readers insinuates high octane while analyzing his great contributions. It is because of these attributes Pamuk's work have sustained longevity in the era of modernism.

'My Name is Red' is a magnum opus of Pamuk which won him the significant IMPAC Dublin Award in the year 2003 for a single work. With multiple characters, murder, mystery, narratives and love. Every subtle nuances of writing has been employed with due consideration which produces a rippling effect that could be felt throughout the novel. Black, the protagonist returns to Istanbul after twelve years of banishment from Persia after his proposal to Shekure , his cousin. On his return he finds Shekure widowed with two sons, Shekret and Orhan. Black contemplates on getting married to Shekure.

Uncle Enishte is on a secret mission in creating an illustration for Sultan Murat III. The Sultan has ordered to create illustrations based on Venetian style through which he

wants to flaunt with his nation's military might and plethora of wealth to his Western counterparts. Uncle Enishte who has been to Venice has mastery over the Western Art. Black is one among the miniaturists who has been commissioned along with Elegant Effendi, Butterfly, Olive and Stork under the guidance of Master Osman. The other illustrators consider this as a blasphemy against God as its substance signifies human emotions rather than revering God's magnificence. One of the illustrators who uphold this view murders Elegent Effendi who is pushed in to a well. Non -human things like corpse, gold coin, tree, dog , Satan and the colour Red are given voices in the novel.

The search is on for Elegant Effendi. Black is called in to action to find the murderer. Black tries to find out the truth from a story teller at a coffee shop who could interpret the drawings of the miniaturists who too in turn gets murdered. Shekure and Black get married after which another shocking discovery is made that uncle Enishte is murdered. The plot gets murkier as the death toll due to murder keeps mounting day by day. Shekure puts forth a demand that their marriage will not be consummated until Black finds the murderer.

Finally, Hasan Shekure's brother in -law murders Olive who is the real murderer when he tried to flee with Hasan's ruby handled dagger. Shekure and Black reunite and start living together with love after the mystery behind the murders get solved. Black's banishment in Persia for twelve long years as an outcast is a period wherein, he realizes how he has been desperate for Shekure and his homeland. It is the invitation from his uncle which transforms everything in his life. It is over the long haul in Persia that makes him to love Shekure and his country more than ever. The longing for his homeland, his love, and people has made him a wanderer on the alien land. On his return he becomes a passive spectator prompted to watch political secularism and religious fundamentalism at war which has resulted in cultural degeneration. Few miniaturists speculate that to illustrate anything beyond what is mentioned in the Holy Quran is blasphemy where as Uncle Enishte and others are progressive in pleasing the Sultan. Black is the representation of Turkish layman who lives with the same problem even today. The country has

become the boiling pot of secular and religious upheavals. Black wants to be spiritual with secular ideologies because he treasures both as a part of his identity. Pamuk here presents the pandemonium in Istanbul through Black who is victimized. The city of old Byzantine glory longing for the spiritual and cultural restoration of the past laments for the long forgotten identity of Byzantium.

" Unlike the Venetians, my work would not merely depict material objects, but naturally the inner riches, the joys and fears of the realm over which Our Sultan rules."(29)

Identity is the most significant asset which no one would ever like to part with. The Oxford dictionary defines identification: "identity is the fact of being who or what a person or thing is". In *"My Name is Red"* the protagonist and the city Istanbul are tossed between their cultural and spiritual Vs religious identities where majority of the Turks want themselves to be branded as spiritual people with secular views on life. Istanbul's agony still echoes to retain the former Byzantine cult which is still in the docks.

Similarly in *"Snow"*, another outstanding novel by Pamuk which deals with identity quest in the same magnitude presents the life of Ka whose full name is Kerim Alakusoglu who returns to 'Kars' which means snow in Turkish after a long political exile in Germany. He returns for his mother's funeral who is assigned with the task of preparing an article on the sudden mass suicide among the head scarf girls. Ka being a loner in Germany is able to compose poems after his return to Kars where his poetic muse revives her strength like a phoenix coming back from the ashes. It is at Kars even his spiritual ties with God is strengthened. He experiences the Omnipresence of God in the tiny flakes of snow which reinforces his understanding on the hidden geometry of life. It is at Kars his journey towards his Creator gains preeminence.

Ka begins his interview with people of all strata's of the society. He becomes friendly with everyone right from a religious extremist named Blue to an atheist. Though he differs from both of them personally he maintains a good friendship with both. Ka too is pulled in to the ebb of political and religious extremism in the process of interviewing many. He witnesses many coups. Though he tries to be good to everyone his deeds are manipulated for political treachery. His love for Ipek, their company together and God's presence in the snow are the few things which brings him solace. Ka gets to know that many young headscarf girls commit suicide because of their family oppression and it hasn't got anything to do with religion. Ka again leaves to Germany alone where he is killed. Ka's battle in being a spiritual man with secular views on life and a hope for a new identity and a new social order is not liked by many who see it as a threat for religious fundamentalism. Ka's character is an embodiment of youth today who don't want to be marginalized by any extremist views.

Black's identity in *"My Name is Red"* runs parallel with his society's identity. Black is unprejudiced and respects the Turkish and Western culture in the same accord. Black tries to bring in an alchemy in the illustration with the fusion of Eastern and Western techniques while few of the illuminators consider it as blasphemy. There are people who think coffee as devil's ruse and Black is against such ultra – traditional and conservative mindset. His experience and craftsmanship which he acquired abroad has thought him to respect all art forms, it enables him to work on the illustration diligently. Black's call is to infill the essence of Renais-

sance with the concoction of Eastern expertise. The protagonist Black desires to exercise his identity as secular man with a spiritual bent of mind as a Turkish citizen in his homeland through which he attains his envisioned identity.

"The free societies are closer to the prophets than the totalitarian ones."(103)

Ka enters Kars during the reign of sacred terror. He is caught in the social and political metamorphosis which keeps webbing swiftly wherein secularism, spiritualism and freedom of speech are caught which leads to identity crisis in Kars. Ka is isolated by his own kinsmen whose society is falling apart. Amidst all political turmoil Ka stops by the dilapidated Armenian Church to pay his respect to the perished souls which brings to picture the empathy he has for those who suffer. He is able to reconnect his spiritual ties with God, compose poems and show great regard for his countrymen on his return to Turkey. Like Black, the protagonist in *"My Name is Red"*, Ka likes to be identified as a man with strong secular and spiritual roots in his homeland which is his envisioned identity. Though he is able to exercise it for a short time he does it to his heart's content after which he is murdered. He dies as a lonely man abroad after attaining his envisioned identity which is short lived.

The word resurfacing means to bring back things to surface. Apart from Ka and Black, it is Turkey whose identity is hid behind the curtains of volatile Western influence. Ignoring the rich history and civilization of the past, Turkey is preparing on full swing like a bride soon to be wedded to become a part of the West, to become a permanent member of the European Union. This has become the silent quintessential theme in Pamuk's works which he exploits with great zeal of an artist and agony of a citizen. Turkey's envisioned identity is yet to resurface as its Byzantine glory simmers down day by day with a rigid hope to attain greener pastures in the West. For both Ka and Black their envisioned identity resurfaces only in their homeland. On Ka's return to Turkey he offers poems to God with strong devotion where he embraces his faith with a secular mindset. Black's identity resurfaces when he is able to express his secular ideologies without fundamental overtones in art. Hence, their envisioned identity resurfaces strongly with an exodus that speaks about the success of their eccentric selfdom.