

## Reimagining the self through mysticism in Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book*

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### Abstract

Mysticism is all about becoming one with the over soul. *The Black Book* projects it through the views of Sufisim. Galip takes on his doppelganger Celal and emerges as a victorious man in the spiritual, personal and professional front through the path a Sufi would take. He succeeds in knowing the real purpose of his new identity has got in store for him. It is through the path of Sufi mysticism Galip gains a new identity in taking Celal's place after which he becomes a notable figure.

**Keywords:** dichotomy, apocalypse, doppelganger, conjure, mysticism, reimaging

### 1. Introduction

Orhan Pamuk, one of the most talked about and widely read authors of Turkey became a prominent figure in the literary arena when he won the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2006. A notable writer in post modern literature, he has brought his works into fruition through the thematics of Avant Garde, mysticism and identity. His works deal with the plight of Turkey as a country and its laymen in the same magnitude. Though identity problem is the most debated topic in the third world Literature, his works portray the reality of East – West dichotomy at ground zero. Turkey being a battle ground of despotism takes another dimension in his novels.

*The Black Book* is a distinct entity to explore the manifestations of mysticism. Galip and Ruya in *The Black Book* do not have children. Ruya's ideal pastime is to read detective novels. They communicate only through their memory. Celal who has a failing memory was good at telling stories of the past. Galip initially did not have the ability to tell stories but later gains the ability when he begins to search for his wife Ruya. Galip thinks Ruya has gone to meet or stay with Celal, an established columnist. He begins his search for Ruya and Celal. Celal has various hideouts all over Istanbul and Galip expects him to be in one of it. "From now on, I really am someone else! Galip told himself, and though there was something childish in this thought, he knew he had embarked on a journey from which there would be no return" (3).

Galip enters one of the apartments and begins to probe into every minute thing he comes across. The most unexpected of all happens at this juncture. He begins to read the columns of Celal where every minuscule of it comes to him with great revelations. He begins to write in the columns of Celal and starts living like him. In one of his first columns, he writes a love letter to Ruya. There Galip's ability to say stories gets rekindled. The columns of Celal have many interesting aspects and one such happens to be the article on "hurufism", a mystical sect which existed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Galip gets absorbed by the deeper doctrines of hurufism. While reading the columns of Celal, he understands that the search for Ruya symbolizes the expedition every Sufi has to take. Ruya means 'dream' in Turkish. This dream resurfaces through his transformation on

becoming Celal. Galip dreams of becoming an established man like Celal right from his childhood and in taking on his identity his dreams get fulfilled. Galip conjures up a powerful and eminent persona through Celal.

Hurufism is grounded on a firm belief that every human born in this world has a divine code engraved on his face. The one who is able to unravel this mystery and decode its meaning will become successful in understanding Galip's high call. Galip discovers this in Celal, where he is able to emerge successful not as a lawyer but as a notable columnist Celal through which he finds his self in the other. *The Black Book* has two plots, one deals with the fate and Galip's high call' and the other on Istanbul. Galip is the stereotype of a bourgeois Turk who desires to lead a pious life whereas Celal is a representation of upper class Turkish men. Celal, a militant leftist later becomes a Westernized Turk. The East, West dichotomy takes a strong hold in the novel.

The cultural and spiritual apocalypse of Turkey runs as a parallel theme. Those who believe that religion is meant for the poor take pride in exhibiting themselves as modern and Westernized Turk rather than being outright with strong cultural and spiritual ties. As Turkey wants to be a permanent member of the European Union, it does not want to hold back its rich cultural past and spiritual roots of Sufism. This hype evolution in claiming the Western identity and the inability to understand the truths of spiritualism in Turkey have become the reminiscence of the past. A man named İkinci calls on Galip assuming him as Celal to inform that he has read all his columns and asks for his address. His wife was once the mistress of Celal. His wife too pursues him to get his address not only out of her husband's compulsion but she also assumes that Celal has a secret invitation for her in one of his columns. "İkinci" means 'second' in Turkish. Here İkinci is projected as second Galip. İkinci once for all wants to take revenge on Celal but Galip doesn't give the address. Galip holds on to his new identity and yearns to progress with it for the rest of his life.

Turkey has been under despotism for many years which has pushed it into a despondent situation. Master Bedi, the mannequin maker is a witness to it. He is not able to make a fortune as he is not able to sell his mannequins they do not

resemble the people of the West. Turkey has long been a victim of power politics. The rulers decide its destiny and their actions were not grounded on safeguarding the richness of their civilization. The distinctiveness of Turkey's spiritual legacy and heritage of the past is not valued by its citizens. The identity of Turkey has been one of the most debated topics, whether it belongs to the East or West. "It will remind me of another story in which the hero discovers that he can only become himself by first becoming someone else or by losing himself in someone else's stories" (460).

The character of Celal becomes Galip's doppelganger. Galip is able to realize his true self only through Celal. *The Black Book* finds answer to all meta detective conundrums. Galip on reading the columns of Celal undergoes a transformation, the most complex relationship of man with God. Celal means "glory" in Turkish. After realizing his destiny through Hurufism and discovering the meaning behind the divine inscription, his mystical encounters with the spiritual realm begins. He believes in the imminent coming of the Messiah. He feels one with God. Like a Sufi emissary, all these experiences take him on a long voyage into the spiritual world. "I can't bear the person they want me to be; if I had to be that insufferable person, I'd rather be nothing at all. It would be better if I didn't even exist" (181).

"Milliyet" means nationality in Turkish which sounds ironic in the context of the novel. It is one of the leading newspapers which is much often mentioned in the novel. Even if Turkey becomes a member of the West, it would be with its status and not its identity. It would bear itself as a mere replica of the West which can't be real. Turkey wants to merge with the West which it looks upon as its doppelganger. With every step towards the union with the West it results in an invisible metamorphosis of two polarized civilizations. The history of Turkey has become a long forgotten tale deserted behind the phantom of the Western travesty.

The identity of Istanbul and Galip go hand in hand in *The Black Book*. Galip gains supremacy with his new identity of Celal. He has become a top notch columnist in Turkey. As Turkey is highly impacted by the West, its identity and ethos remains veiled. The struggle to win over identity by the protagonist Galip becomes victorious, synonymous to his name. Whereas, Turkey saw the renaissance of the West keeps battling for new identity leaving its past in the lurch.

This Fundamental belief in unity leads naturally to the further belief that all things about us are but forms or manifestations of the one divine life, and that these phenomena are fleeting and impermanent, although the spirit which informs them is immortal and endures. In other words it leads to the belief that The Ideal is the Real. (3)

Mysticism is all about becoming one with God which is the ultimate spiritual experience a human being can exercise and explore. In a broader sense, even the cultural, historical consciousness and human bond connected to it is explored. In the context of *The Black Book*, it is about Islamic Mysticism and the crux of Islamic Mysticism rests on Sufism. "Those wishing to understand the meaning of existence and the sanctity of life and see God's manifestations here on earth had only to read the letters hidden in the face of men" (297).

Galip heeds to his supreme call and begins to feel one with God. After taking on the character of Celal, he becomes a mystic. He undergoes a remarkable transformation that a Sufi mystic does. First, he feels the presence of the divine while reading the

columns of Celal. Secondly, a rapturous inner cleansing takes place in his former self wherein he realizes his shortcomings along with Turkey forgoing its own culture. After which he gives up the lower self-esteem he had as Galip. Next, he overcomes the former personality of Galip and establishes his communication with the divine by decoding the divine letters. He attains supreme knowledge on the coming of Messiah through Celal. Being a mystic, he is able to attain reputation in the world and a divine relationship in the spiritual realm. Reimaging means to reinterpret a work of art imaginatively. Through mysticism the persona of Galip transforms into Celal and Turkey's aspirations of becoming a part of Europe still remains a mystery.

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